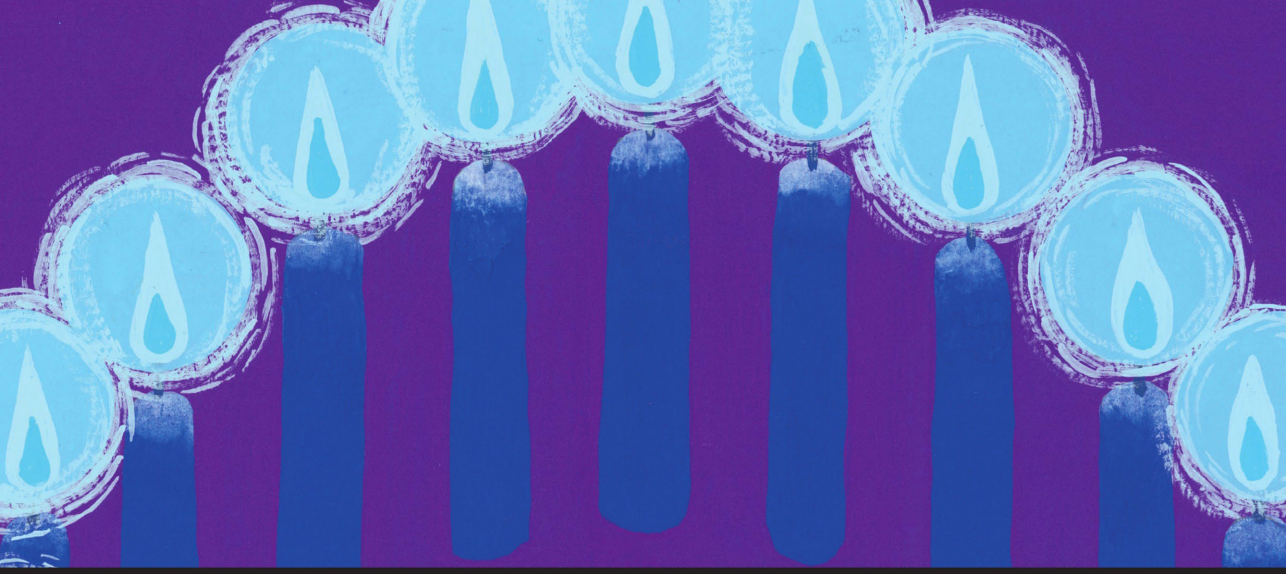

SOCIOCULTURAL INTERVENTIONS

THE PERFORMATIVE AUGMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY

Laurens van Esch

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Quaestiones Infinitae

Publications of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Utrecht University

Volume 140

ISBN: 978-94-93253-06-3

Cover image: *Vigil*, by Ali Rouleau
Printed by Ipskamp Printing B.V.

Sociocultural Interventions

The Performative Augmentation of the Social Imaginary

Socioculturele Interventies

De Performatieve Uitbreiding van de Sociale Verbeelding

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de
graad van doctor aan de

Universiteit Utrecht

op gezag van de rector magnificus, prof. dr. H.R.B.M. Kummeling,
ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties
in het openbaar te verdedigen op
vrijdag 26 mei 2023 des middags te 12.15 uur

door

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geboren op 8 juni 1983
te Vlagtwedde

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Many people supported me as I wrote this thesis, and it is my pleasure to finally thank them with the written acknowledgement that they deserve.

To start, I want to thank my first supervisor, Bert van den Brink. I initially met Bert in 2005, when he taught the first undergraduate course in political philosophy that I ever took. I was immediately inspired by his contagious, almost gleeful enthusiasm for the discipline, but at the time I could not possibly anticipate just how much I would continue to benefit from his guidance, insights and interpersonal wisdom over the following eighteen years. His influence is palpable throughout the pages that follow. As I worked on this thesis, I experienced ups and downs of a professional as well as of a more personal nature, and throughout all of these, I could not have wished for a more skillful, insightful and supportive mentor.

I also want to thank my second supervisor, Christoph Baumgartner. This dissertation would not be the same without his ideas and expertise. His extensive comments on a general as well as on a more detailed level, and all the useful literature that he brought to my attention, opened up many important and fruitful avenues of thought. He thus enabled me to develop my argument further, with greater clarity and in much more detail than would otherwise have been the case. Consequently, his touch can also be discerned throughout the pages that follow.

For much of the time that I worked on this thesis, I had the immense pleasure of teaching at St. Stephen's University, located in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, Canada, on the homeland of the Peskotomuhkati nation. I am grateful to my colleagues (staff as well as faculty) and their families for welcoming me into their midst, for their support and for their friendship. I am also grateful to my students, who time and time again inspired me with their creativity, curiosity, community spirit and, not least, with their resilience as they diligently continued their studies throughout the challenges of the COVID pandemic.

I am indebted to my friends at the Netherlands Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), at Community Peacemaker Teams, and at Hope Mennonite

Church for their fellowship and for their example. Over the years, each of these groups has inspired and sustained me by demonstrating in concrete ways what faith communities that seek to truly devote themselves to peace and social justice can accomplish.

I enjoyed support from many other friends as well. My close friend Sander Funcke, who unexpectedly passed away in 2020, was a gentle, funny and erudite theologian and poet with a deep devotion to his friends. Our many nightly conversations played an important role in my intellectual and spiritual development. My paranymphs, Daan Kruijs and Tim de Visser, have been treasured friends ever since the three of us were undergraduate students at Utrecht University. I thank them for all their support and friendship, and am delighted to celebrate the completion of this thesis with them.

I started this dissertation not long after moving to Canada, where I was quite fortunate to find myself surrounded by people who helped me to find my footing. In particular, I want to thank Vic Thiessen and Kathy Moorhead Thiessen, my parents-in-law, who graciously made me feel at home after my move across the ocean, and who also became close friends. Sadly, Kathy died of cancer in 2021; I wish she would have been able to witness the completion of this dissertation.

To my parents, Willem and Ellen, I owe more than words can express. Thank you so much for your enduring love, encouragement and support over the years. I know you are as delighted as I am to finally celebrate this long-awaited moment together.

Finally, Janelle, my love: thank you for everything. As we said during our wedding ceremony, twelve years ago, '*Welke avonturen ook op ons pad komen, we zullen ze samen tegemoet treden*.' Finishing this dissertation took a lot of time and effort, and you have felt that burden acutely as you patiently and lovingly supported me through all of it. This dissertation is dedicated to you. Five years ago, we became the parents of an amazing son, Willem, who is eager to get much more 'papa time' now that this project is finished. I am very much looking forward to the next stage of our family's journey together.

Introduction

In this dissertation, I aim to contribute towards the development of an interpretive model to approach political actors' public expressions of their core existential commitments within the political sphere that does not take a reductive view of these commitments as discursively rendered creeds and of politics as a rational exchange of stated opinions. Developing such a model is useful in light of the great influence of theories of the public sphere that almost exclusively focus on the public justification of political positions by means of rational argument.[1] Without wanting to deny the importance of debate, justification and argument, I will argue that the public sphere is *also* a site where political actors performatively augment the authoritative existential foundations by which they orient themselves in the world that surrounds them and by which they come to experience their own existence as meaningful. Consequently, and importantly, they relate to these foundations not exclusively in terms of conscious cognitive assent but also in terms of affective investment. For political actors, the engagement in such activities of performative augmentation can be an inherently satisfying endeavour that is potentially generative of empowering subjectivities. I argue that understanding this is important if we are to make sense of what motivates much of the political life in contemporary constitutional democracies, including the political action undertaken by emancipatory social movements.

My use of the phrase 'authoritative existential foundations' above builds upon Hannah Arendt's thought on the interrelated concepts 'authority,' 'augmentation' and 'foundations,'[2] and refers to something close to what Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* termed 'frameworks.'[3] For Taylor, these frameworks denote the 'background pictures' that

1 William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 19-46; William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 10, 17, 21.

2 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963); Hannah Arendt, 'What is Authority?' in Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (1961; repr. New York: Viking Press, 1969).

3 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3-24.

underlie any given individual's moral intuitions, including their sense of what is just, what is worthy of respect, and of what gives their own existence purpose and meaning.[4] Thus defined, Taylor's frameworks are quite similar to what John Rawls called 'comprehensive doctrines:' the citizens' overarching religious, philosophical and moral views regarding the good and what is of value in human life.[5] Taylor and Rawls both note that contemporary societies are characterized by a great diversity of such frameworks or conceptions, that many of these are mutually incompatible, that some of them take the form of religious traditions whereas others do not, and that, as no single framework or conception is shared by everyone, none of these can be taken for granted by their adherents as '*the* framework tout court.'[6] Taylor develops his concept as part of a larger project aimed at providing an account of how contemporary individuals seek to make sense of their own purpose in life,[7] whereas Rawls employs his term in order to identify how citizens adhering to a plurality of mutually irreconcilable belief systems can interact fairly and productively in the public sphere.[8] But neither of these thinkers, in my view, gives a satisfactory account of how the citizens' fundamental existential commitments (to which I, for brevity's sake, will refer as 'existential commitments' or 'existential foundations' from here on) *interface* with the citizens' public, political action – including, importantly, those common but all-too-frequently ignored political activities that can not be readily understood as the reasoned exchange of discursively rendered arguments. Taking my cue from Arendt's work, I will argue that these latter activities can be usefully understood as instances of performative augmentation of the citizens' existential foundations within the public sphere.

To see what I have in mind when speaking of political activities that publicly manifest political actors' existential foundations but that cannot be readily interpreted as instances of deliberative argument, consider the following quotation from a group of activists who, in the Spring of 2017, walked six hundred kilometres from Kitchener, Ontario to Parliament Hill in Ottawa in support of Indigenous rights in Canada.[9]

4 Ibid., 3-4; 14-19.

5 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (1993; repr. with a new introduction and the "Reply to Habermas," New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 13. References are to the 1996 edition.

6 The quotation is from Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 17; see also Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* xlii, 36, 63-65.

7 Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* ix-xi.

8 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xx.

9 The group consisted of around thirty Indigenous and Settler Canadians, predominantly but not exclusively identifying as Christians. Along the way, the 'pilgrims' met with churches and

> The Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights is both a spiritual and a political endeavour. For people of faith, these are not easily separated. In the great quest for justice and right relations, our faith, our values, and our laws – natural and legal - are inextricably bound together. As we walk we pray and sing and praise our Maker; we walk in and through God's wonderful creation; we share what we have to share; we honour and accept what is offered to us. All these things represent our hope; all are fundamental parts of living in right relationship with our God and one another. We will also seek from our Canadian government the full adoption and implementation of the United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) when we end our pilgrimage in Ottawa.[10]

The most salient aspect of this statement is that it articulates an awareness that, although in the political culture of contemporary democracies, one's public political action on the one hand and one's religious views (or in my terms, one's existential foundations) on the other are frequently understood to belong to rightfully separate domains of life, for political actors the two can be almost impossible to neatly separate. This is a difficulty of which contemporary political philosophers are well-aware, as since the turn of the twenty-first century, it gave rise to a veritable outpour of literature on the role of religion in the public sphere, much of it in critical response to John Rawls' aforementioned effort to establish how citizens who subscribe to a multitude of mutually incompatible views can coexist in a stable and just manner[11] – an attempt that led Jürgen Habermas to famously describe our contemporary predicament as a 'post-secular' one.[12] In recent decades, this

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other local communities on the way in order to advocate for a parliament bill that would enshrine the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into Canadian law. This endeavour was co-sponsored by churches and religious NGOs. Waubgeshig Rice, "600-km Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights Concludes in Ottawa," *CBC,* May 3, 2017, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/pilgrimage-indigenous-rights-kitchener-ottawa-1.4112717; Joanne Laucius, "Walkers End 600-kilometre 'Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights' in Ottawa," *Ottawa Citizen*, May 14, 2017, https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/walkers-end-600-kilometre-pilgrimage-for-indigenous-rights-in-ottawa/.

10 "The Basics," Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights (discontinued website), archived on October 23, 2018 and retrieved from the Internet Archive on June 17, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20210514104856/https://pfir.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/PFiR-FAQ2.pdf.

11 Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* xx.

12 Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," trans. Jeremy Gaines, *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, No. 1 (2006): 1-25. This article will hereafter be referenced as 'Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006]' to distinguish it from the version that was later published - Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the "Public Use of Reason" by Secular and Religious Citizens," in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

debate formed the most prominent and sustained engagement by political philosophers with public, political manifestations of the citizens' existential foundations.[13] This was due in no small part to the fact that it was in the context of this discussion that Rawls and Habermas developed the most recent and sophisticated versions of their own seminal theories of the public sphere.

These efforts to think through the consequences of pluralism – the circumstance that citizens of contemporary democracies tend to subscribe to a wide variety of deeply held, mutually incompatible views regarding what is good and what makes human life meaningful, and that these views seemingly inevitably manifest themselves in the political realm – have almost exclusively focused on rational argument, and concomitantly, on those cognitive aspects of politics and religious or existential commitments that can serve as discursively rendered arguments in deliberation. However, as is also illustrated by the example of the Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights, many instances of public political activity can *not* be readily interpreted in terms of deliberation: vigils, prayer circles, ritual fasts, processions and ceremonies, all examples of people expressing their existential commitments, regularly occur in public settings as more or less explicit interventions in ongoing political controversies. Yet political actions such as these remain virtually absent from some of the most influential political philosophical theories of the public sphere. The focus has been on the translatability of the citizens' particular creeds (discursively rendered statements of faith) into more generally accessible arguments, rather than on the examination of interventions in the public sphere that engage with existential commitments in a performative rather than a discursive manner.

This relative neglect of non-discursive political action is explained in part by the influence of strongly deliberative conceptualizations of political life itself. [14] The debate format is so salient a feature of political life – in parliament, in television talk shows, and

13 Jérôme Gosselin-Tapp attests to the remarkable influence of this debate when he critically writes that '[t]he whole question of the place of religion in public space has been bogged down in the question of translation since the debate between Habermas and Rawls.' Jérôme Gosselin-Tapp, "Lost in Translation: Religion in The Public Sphere," *Philosophia* 46 (2018), 874.

14 See Bert van den Brink, "Pictures of Politics: Deliberative and *Other* Aspects of Democracy," *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 98, no. 3 (2012). Here, Van den Brink draws on Wittgenstein to argue that political philosophical literature on deliberative democracy is prone to an 'aspectival captivity to an overly narrow picture of politics as an in essence deliberative practice' (407), and that this 'captivity is broken as soon as one no longer thinks of deliberation as the essence or core of democratic cooperation, but rather as one valuable practice within it' (410).

in print and online media – that it makes sense for citizens to almost naturally view the public sphere itself *as* a series of ongoing debates. Moreover, to political philosophers, for whom argument, deliberation, and debate are at the core of their own discipline, the conception of public life as a series of dialogues guided by a shared ideal of an exchange of reasoned, justificatory argument can be particularly attractive. However, a great deal more goes on in the public sphere than an exchange of arguments, such as protest marches, politically motivated art, as well as the various public political activities listed above. These phenomena are politically important in that they can affect power relations between political agents and the outcomes of political decision-making processes. Nevertheless, possibly because they do not easily square with strongly discursive models of political life, they receive less philosophical attention than they deserve.

This leaves us with the following questions: what important aspects of the interaction between the citizens' existential commitments and their political activity are obfuscated by received theories of the public sphere? How exactly is this a problem from the standpoint of a commitment to democratic equality? What could an alternative model look like, and what benefits could such a model have to offer towards a fuller understanding of the ways in which the citizens' fundamental existential commitments interface with their political action, including, importantly, those common but all-too-frequently ignored political activities that can not be readily understood as the reasoned exchange of discursively rendered arguments? These are the questions that this dissertation aims to answer.

In recent decades, authors such as James Tully and Robin Celikates have argued that political philosophers, instead of adopting a 'legislative stance' by aiming to spell out universal norms to guide the political interactions that go on between citizens, need to take seriously the experiences of 'ordinary' political actors who, while they engage in a multitude of concrete political practices, simultaneously and *through* this very engagement, alter the norms by which these practices are structured.[15] There are various aspects of this approach that I find quite helpful. These include its focus on political actors' concrete experience and its explicit attention for practices of political agency beyond voting and deliberation (such as protests, boycotts, non-co-operation and civil disobedience). I am also inspired by their emphasis on the inherent open-endedness of politics: politics,

15 James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, two volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Robin Celikates, "Civil Disobedience as a Practice of Civic Freedom" in *On Global Citizenship: James Tully in Dialogue*, edited by David Owen (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 207-228; Robin Celikates, *Transformations of Democracy: Crisis, Protest and Legitimation*, edited by Robin Celikates, et al., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015.

in Tully's and Celikates' approach, is 'the type of game in which the framework – the rules of the game – can come up for deliberation and amendment in the course of the game.'[16] Although my project is more specifically focused on the role of political actors' existential foundations in the public sphere, in what follows, like them I will pay attention to citizenship practices beyond deliberation and voting alone,[17] emphasize the open-endedness of politics,[18] and discuss the concrete experiences underlying political action at length.[19] In each of these three respects, I see my project as quite compatible and in line with their approach.

In chapter 1, I begin my argument with a reconstruction of the 'post-secular' debate on religion in the public sphere, examining Rawls' and Habermas' seminal contributions as well as some of the criticisms that have been leveled at them. Importantly, my goal in doing so is *not* to further develop their theories on the role of religious argument in public, political deliberation, but rather to make clear how prominent models of the public sphere obfuscate a variety of important aspects of the interaction between the citizens' existential commitments and their political activity, and to clarify why exactly this is a problem.

There are various reasons to choose a reconstruction of this debate as an avenue to make these two points. First, Rawls' and Habermas' theories remain at the root of much contemporary liberal and deliberative democratic discourse on the public sphere.[20] As it was in the context of the debate on religion in the public sphere that their influential conceptions received their most recent and sophisticated form, their contributions continue to generate a great deal of contemporary political and theoretical conversation on the public sphere. Despite objections by authors such as William Connolly, the 'neo-Kantian,' highly cognitivist mode of thinking about the public sphere that is exemplified by Rawls and Habermas continues to enjoy an almost paradigmatic status within political philosophy.[21] To clarify the advantages of my alternative, additional perspective

16 Tully, *Public Philosophy* I, 70; Celikates, 'Civil Disobedience as a Practice of Civic Freedom,' 207.

17 Especially in chapter 2.

18 For instance, in section 1.4.

19 For instance, in section 2.4.

20 See, for instance, Cécile Laborde, *Liberalism's Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Talal Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); James G. Finlayson, "No Proviso: Habermas on Rawls, Religion and Public Reason," *European Journal of Political Theory* 20, No. 3 (2021); Gosselin-Tapp, "Lost in Translation."

21 William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist,* 19-46.

on the citizen's existential commitments, on the citizens' political interactions, and on the interaction between the two, these theories mark a useful point of contrast.

Moreover, the criticisms that have been articulated against these theories serve as helpful indicators of what more is needed if political theorists are to adequately appreciate how the manifestation of political actors' existential commitments in the public sphere relates to principles of democratic equality. As I will discuss, authors such as John Tomasi, William Connolly, Iris Marion Young and Paul Weithman have convincingly demonstrated that the criteria by which contributions to public debate are (consciously and unconsciously) evaluated cannot be neatly isolated from the citizen's engagement in other collective cultural practices; moreover, they have drawn helpful attention to the fact that informal power differences within contemporary democracies continue to co-determine which collective cultural practices and views any given citizen is likely to be exposed to and thus participate in.[22] Taken together, these findings underscore that the great variety of citizens' perspectives within contemporary democratic societies is causally connected to the continued presence of unequal power relations within formally democratic societies. If we are to determine how citizens subscribing to a multitude of mutually incompatible views can coexist in a stable and just manner, as Rawls and Habermas hope to achieve,[23] taking into consideration how public, political manifestations of political actors' existential commitments interface with persisting forms of political inequality is a crucial step. It is essential to understand that such power differences are not exclusively situated on a conscious level, but are also implicitly carried in stories, images, collective cultural practices, and so on, and that for that reason, it is to be expected that the citizens' efforts to tackle these differences do not exclusively take the shape of deliberate argument but also of various other activities, including the aforementioned vigils, prayer circles, marches, etc., by which elements of the social imaginary can be performatively challenged and/or affirmed. Such instances of political action frequently build upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making in their efforts to render society more just and inclusive.

I start the second chapter with a discussion of democratic citizenship because this concept forms the normative bedrock for much contemporary political theory, including

22 Ibid.; John Tomasi, *Liberalism beyond Justice: Citizens, Society, and the Boundaries of Political Theory* (Princeton 2001); Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Paul J. Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

23 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xx; Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 12.

the theories discussed in the first chapter as well as my own contribution. Moreover, explicitly grounding my proposed theoretical vocabulary in a discussion of the shared commitments entailed by the central concept of democratic citizenship enables me to explain (in chapter 4) one of the benefits of my proposed alternative perspective on political action; namely that it facilitates reflection on the continued existence of power differentials amongst citizens in ways that more cognitivist lenses do not.

One central dimension of citizenship is political agency: a citizen is someone who is entitled to real opportunities to participate in the bringing about of political outcomes that affect the conditions under which they live. I argue that in contemporary democracies, non-discursive forms of political action that innovatively draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making form a key avenue by which citizens in practice exercise political agency and avail themselves of the requisite resources to continue doing so – especially in those all-too-common social conditions where culturally entrenched, widely shared preconceptions regarding authority and respectability make justification by means of rational argument unlikely or impossible to occur on an equitable footing.

Then, in order to facilitate reflection on a range of public manifestations of existential orientations that is largely absent from influential accounts of the public sphere, I introduce the central concept of 'sociocultural interventions.' With this term, I will refer to acts of public, political expression other than deliberative argument, such as rallies, public fasts, street art and vigils, that performatively alter elements of the social imaginary that structure political life. Because their effects are brought about performatively rather than through the explicit statement of antecedent cognitive content, these acts cannot readily be interpreted in terms of deliberative argument; however, they play a crucial role in the public life of contemporary liberal democracies as they frequently form the means by which many citizens in practice actualize (that is, lay claim to, exercise and redefine) their own membership of the political community. Moreover, because the category of sociocultural interventions encompasses many public actions that draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making, normative theories of the role of religion in the public sphere ignore it at their peril.

In order to show how sociocultural interventions form the means for citizens to actualize their citizenship, chapter two will also include discussion of two concrete examples of sociocultural interventions, drawn from contemporary political life. Doing so will enable me simultaneously to bring out a range of important features of sociocultural interventions

and to demonstrate how sociocultural interventions and democratic citizenship are closely intertwined in the practice of contemporary democracies.

The first example I introduce is Shepard Fairey's poster *We the People - are greater than fear*, distributed and displayed during the protests surrounding the inauguration of Donald Trump as president of the United States in January 2017.[24] I choose this particular example because it quite ostensibly draws upon a mix of symbols, images and narratives that are familiar to a general public (an American general public, in the case of this example) that helps to draw attention to the poster. This mix can be expected to evoke strong associations and evaluations in terms of identification, authority and respect. It encourages the audience to accept the intervention as worthy of their attention, consideration, agreement and/or active endorsement. Because the poster incorporates cultural elements that are familiar and culturally resonant to a *general audience*, it perfectly enables me to illustrate how political actors can employ sociocultural interventions to affect how social reality is perceived, understood and evaluated by a *wider public* – an ability to which I will refer as the 'external effects' of sociocultural interventions.

Choosing Fairey's poster as an example also enables me to demonstrate a distinction between two types of external effects: first, sociocultural interventions can be employed to alter who is and who is not widely perceived as someone who has the requisite authority to legitimately participate in public life as an equal contributor. Second, sociocultural interventions also advance particular perspectives on and interpretations of the authoritative cultural elements that they incorporate in their messages. In both senses, sociocultural interventions can affect which future contributions may find a more generous hearing with a wider public and which future contributions will be more likely to get discarded out of hand. These represent two reasons why the external effects of sociocultural interventions are of direct relevance for the realization of the citizens' political agency.

As the example of Fairey's poster demonstrates, some sociocultural interventions incorporate cultural elements that are widely familiar and culturally resonant to a general public in order to advance perspectives that are not (yet) widely shared. Alternatively, sociocultural interventions may also draw upon cultural elements that only have a limited appeal to a general audience, but that much more strongly resonate with particular constituencies within that larger population – typically though not necessarily the constituency of which the authors of the sociocultural intervention themselves are

24 Fairey's website displays the use of this poster in these demonstrations. "We the People across the World," ObeyGiant.com (Shepard Fairey's official website), 27 January 2017, https://obeygiant.com/people-across-world/ (retrieved 9 June 2022).

members. For instance, as the example of the aforementioned Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights indicates, adherents of particular historical traditions of existential meaning-making can employ the symbols and practices of these traditions in ways that motivate their fellow adherents to take political action, even if these symbols and practices may not be particularly resonant to non-adherents. This is an example of what I call the 'internal effects' of sociocultural interventions: the phenomenon that political actors belonging to particular subgroups within society can employ sociocultural interventions that incorporate particular cultural elements in order to inspire, encourage and sustain political action among those who already substantially share their vantage point.

So where 'external effects' denote sociocultural interventions' ability to bring about shifts in perception among the general audience, 'internal effects' denote the ability to bring about shifts within a more specific social group. In so far as this project is aimed at elucidating the meaning of the public manifestation of group-specific existential commitments in a post-secular society, and in particular at elucidating how such manifestations may interface with entrenched power inequalities, the internal effects of sociocultural interventions are also of great interest for my purposes.

In order to clarify the relation between the internal effects of sociocultural interventions on the one hand and democratic citizenship on the other, I introduce a second example, namely the emergence of the Idle No More movement in Canada during the winter of 2012-2013.[25] The emergence of this movement was marked by prominent sociocultural interventions, including round-dances, spiritual fasts and rallies, that very explicitly and intentionally manifested Indigenous spiritual traditions in a massive effort to address ongoing injustices in Canadian society. Therefore, Idle No More forms a great example to demonstrate how historically disenfranchised groups can engage in sociocultural interventions that performatively draw upon group-specific authoritative existential foundations in order to challenge entrenched forms of inequality and injustice in contemporary democracies.

My discussion of Idle No More will demonstrate how in their sociocultural interventions, political actors can creatively incorporate resonant symbols and narratives that are drawn from particular historical traditions of existential meaning-making, thus

25 The Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2014); Ken Coates, *#IdleNoMore and the Remaking of Canada* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2015). Also see Allison Weir, "Collective Love as Public Freedom: Dancing Resistance. Ehrenreich, Arendt, Kristeva, and Idle No More," *Hypatia* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2017); this article draws insightful connections between Idle No More and Hannah Arendt's notions of 'public happiness' and 'public freedom,' which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 4.

bringing about, in themselves as well as in those who substantially share their vantage point, powerful emotional states which in turn encourage them to continue to participate in political action even under challenging conditions of political marginalization. This argument proceeds from the view that political action can be usefully understood as (among other things) a collective endeavour of meaning-construction, and that political actors can be usefully understood as meaning-craving and meaning-making beings. Cultural elements that are closely associated with people's view of themselves and their purposes in life are likely to elicit a strong evaluation, and therefore are likely to be referenced in sociocultural interventions; consequently, it is to be expected that many sociocultural interventions will include references to historical traditions of existential meaning-making. While there are of course many important motives that draw citizens into political activity, such as the need to defend one's rights, status and material well-being, my account of sociocultural interventions highlights that political activity *additionally* provides participants with an avenue to fulfill a need for and capacity to creatively connect to shared cultural meanings and frames of reference.

By the end of the second chapter, having identified and defined sociocultural interventions as well as their external and internal effects, I aim to have laid a foundation for a theoretical vocabulary that enables reflection on and discussion of non-discursive expressions of the political actor's existential commitments in the public sphere. This is an important step towards the development of an interpretive model for the public manifestation of political actors' core existential commitments within the political sphere that, unlike the models discussed in the first chapter, is not premised upon a reductively cognitivist and discursive view of what shape such manifestations may take in practice. I also hope to have further demonstrated why conditions of persisting inequality render it especially important for political theorists who are committed to democratic equality to pay focused attention to sociocultural interventions. This is the case, first, because sociocultural interventions directly engage frequently unspoken preconceptions that sustain inequalities in power even when equal citizenship on a formal level has been enshrined in the law, and second, because sociocultural interventions enable political actors to encourage further political engagement despite often difficult conditions caused by historical and ongoing disenfranchisement.

In order to further flesh out my alternative model, in the third chapter I turn to the political thought of Hannah Arendt. I see Arendt's thought as particularly promising for my purpose because her conceptualisation of action as appearance (and of the public sphere itself as the 'space of appearance') as well as her reflections on the public sphere, on authority

and on augmentation foreground precisely those performative, aesthetic and existential aspects that, in my view, are crucial to understanding how sociocultural interventions function and that more deliberatively focused accounts of politics tend to neglect. Arendt's method has been convincingly described as a form of phenomenological-hermeneutical analysis that seeks to recover and re-interpret aspects of human experience that have been obfuscated by inherited categories of thought.[26] Correspondingly, my application of her theory of political action to the interpretation of sociocultural interventions aims to highlight and articulate (and thus facilitate constructive reflection on) the politically important experiences of political actors who, by means of their sociocultural interventions, make their own existential commitments manifest within the public sphere.

Because my approach to Arendt is rather different from existing interpretations of her work, I will first need to explicitly situate my understanding and use of her thought in relation to that of others. Several of Arendt's interpreters, such as Seyla Benhabib and Habermas, have criticized her 'aestheticizing' view of politics, presenting it as an anti-rationalist tendency that threatens the relevance of her theory to contemporary political theory.[27] Interpreters such as Bonnie Honig, William Connolly, and Linda Zerilli, by contrast, laud this aspect of her thought, viewing it as a very helpful starting point for an 'agonistic' alternative view of politics that, rather than reductively viewing legitimate political action as efforts to establish a consensus, presents the public sphere as a site of (potentially emancipatory) struggle.[28] My own use of Arendt draws upon but is distinct

26 Marieke Borren, "Amor Mundi: Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology of the world" (PhD dissertation, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2009), 15-54. Also see Jim Josefson, who aptly writes that 'Arendt should be understood as having switched the basis of political theory from epistemology to phenomenology.' Jim Josefson, *Hannah Arendt's Aesthetic Politics: Freedom and the Beautiful* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 249.

27 Jürgen Habermas, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power" in *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*, ed. Lewis Hinchman and Sandra Hinchman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996); also Albrecht Wellmer, "Hannah Arendt on Judgment: The Unwritten Doctrine of Reason" in *Judgment, Imagination and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (Lanham, Boulder etc.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001). For a recent response to Habermas' and Benhabib's criticisms to Arendt, see D. N. Rodowick, *An Education in Judgment: Hannah Arendt and the Humanities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

28 Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*; Linda M.G. Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). For a critique of Arendt's agonistic elements as well as her agonistic interpreters, see Monique Deveaux, "Agonism and Pluralism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25, no. 4 (July 1999).

from both of these approaches: I am primarily interested in demonstrating that her conceptualization of action and the public sphere provides us with a very useful theoretical model for the interpretation of political acts by which citizens non-discursively alter elements of the social imaginary – and in particular, of sociocultural interventions that draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making. Whether these acts are consensus- or struggle-oriented is not of primary importance to my project.

My selection of Arendt's political thought as a resource for a project that is motivated by a commitment to democratic equality may seem a peculiar choice in light of her well-known stance that social questions do not belong in the political realm, properly conceived, as well as in light of her insensitivity towards the role of asymmetrical power relations in political conflict, as notoriously manifested by her response to the events surrounding the Little Rock Seven during the Civil Rights Movement.[29] In combination, these tendencies may well be seen to cast doubt on the suitability of her work for the development of a theoretical model that seeks to facilitate the interpretation of political action taking place in the context of emancipatory social movements.

However, as Hanna Pitkin and Bonnie Honig have convincingly argued, Arendt's reflections on the private, the social, labour and work are most usefully interpreted, not as referring to particular *issues* or *social groups* that ought to be excluded from politics, but rather as denoting particular *dispositions* that Arendt saw as a threat to the concern with freedom and the taste for novelty and self-disclosure that she took to be central to action.[30] Moreover, as I will show, her resistance to the manifestation of these dispositions within politics was neither absolute nor unqualified. My usage of Arendt in this regard represents a form of what Seyla Benhabib described as 'to think with Arendt against Arendt'[31] in the sense that it proceeds from the view that while Arendt's theory indeed encompasses conflicting impulses, it is precisely the reflection upon the tension between these impulses that may yield fruitful insights for political theory. Beyond contributing to the development of a theoretical vocabulary to think through the manifestation of political

29 For discussions of these concerns, see Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," *Political Theory* 9, No. 3 (1981); Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*; Allen, *Talking to Strangers*. For an alternative account of Arendt's failure to appreciate the perspectives and experiences of African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement, see Michael D. Burroughs, "Hannah Arendt, 'Reflections on Little Rock,' and White Ignorance" *Critical Philosophy of Race* 3, No. 1 (2015).

30 Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," 342; Honig, *Political Theory,* 81-82.

31 Seyla Benhabib, "Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt's Thought," *Political Theory* 16, No. 1 (February 1988), 31.

actors' core existential commitments in the public sphere, this part of my argument, then, also contributes to several long-standing debates within Arendt scholarship. These debates concern the relevance of her work to contemporary politics, the relation of her work to issues of political exclusion, as well as the question what to make of Arendt's oft-repeated characterization of action as radically new and unpredictable in face of the fact that all political acts are inevitably embedded in, emerge from and are structured by antecedent sociocultural contexts. [32]

Subsequently, I lay out in greater detail why it is helpful to interpret sociocultural interventions as a form of action as theorized by Arendt. The three important characteristics of action that Arendt highlights - its performative, aesthetic and existential aspects - can be identified in many acts of political communication, including instances of deliberative argument. However, I see them as especially relevant for the interpretation of sociocultural interventions because the latter performatively bring about shifts in the social imaginary which involve visceral responses that go beyond intellectual assent alone. By disclosing new perspectives on social reality, sociocultural interventions enable new beginnings and power relations and open up possibilities for previously unanticipated courses of action. Moreover, for political actors, the engagement in sociocultural interventions frequently involves empowering experiences that go quite some way in explaining the pathos and appeal of social movements to those who participate in them. One of the advantages of applying Arendt's theory to sociocultural interventions, then, is that it provides us with a phenomenologically rich vocabulary that enables us to appreciate some of the experiences of those who engage in them.

This is especially true for that subset of sociocultural interventions that I am particularly interested in, namely those that incorporate cultural elements drawn from historical traditions of existential meaning-making. My examination of Arendt's reflections on augmentation will enable me to interpret these interventions as instances of the performative augmentation of the authoritative cultural elements that are carried in these traditions. The great advantage of such a perspective is that it illuminates the political actors' relation to the cultural elements that their actions draw upon. On this interpretation, authoritative cultural elements are a source of inspiration that enables political action; simultaneously, political action always performatively adds meaning to the very cultural elements that it draws upon. Thus conceived, cultural elements enable

32 Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public;" Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*; Allen, *Talking to Strangers.*

political actors to experience themselves, on the one hand, as grounded in a larger, highly meaningful transhistorical community and tradition or process, and on the other, as having a creative agency of their own. Such a view enables us to understand sociocultural interventions, not necessarily as attempts by political actors to convince those who disagree with them (the role typically attributed to deliberative argument) but as intrinsically rewarding forms of action that performatively affect the political actor's own, largely implicit grasp of reality.

The view of sociocultural interventions as performative augmentation of the social imaginary illuminates both the internal and the external effects of sociocultural interventions. Regarding the first, the view of political action as intrinsically rewarding goes some way in explaining what can motivate relatively disenfranchised political actors towards political action despite serious obstacles. Regarding the latter, the view of sociocultural interventions as performative augmentation of the social imaginary helps us understand why some sociocultural interventions are successful: they give convincing new interpretations of the authoritative self-narratives of the political community.

By the end of chapter three, I aim to have further elucidated what sociocultural interventions are and why it is important for political theorists to pay explicit theoretical attention to them, rather than focusing almost exclusively on deliberative argument. I also aim to have demonstrated that sociocultural interventions are likely to draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making, and that through these interventions, these traditions can facilitate the bringing about of democratic equality.

However, two important questions remain to be resolved, namely: first, how sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument relate to each other; and second, what this relation implies for our overall conception of politics and the public sphere. These are the questions I examine in the fourth and final chapter, in which I draw the threads of my argument together.

In order to understand how sociocultural interventions and deliberative interventions relate to each other, one good place to start is my earlier point (from chapter 2) that political theorists need to take sociocultural interventions into account because among the internal and the external effects of these interventions, we find perspective shifts, brought about by means other than deliberative argument, that can be crucial in order to address the obstacles that prevent deliberative argument from occurring under conditions of equality. I examine how these perspective shifts might be accommodated within Rawls' and Habermas' theories. Both thinkers recognize the kinds of shifts that I have associated

with sociocultural interventions as helpful from the vantage point of a commitment to democratic equality, and identify a range of social settings and situations to accommodate such shifts – the 'informal' public sphere in Habermas,[33] and non-public social settings in Rawls.[34] These findings point to the possibility that deliberative argument and sociocultural interventions constitute two distinct classes of political expression, each with its own set of criteria, rules and social settings. However, such accommodations depend on spatial and situational thresholds which may be hard to justify in absence of a consensus on whether or not the requisite conditions for deliberative argument are already in place. Moreover, in light of how political thinkers have argued against a neat separation between rhetoric and rational argument or between performative and constative speech acts, it seems uncertain that sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument can be sufficiently distinguished from each other in practice to relegate each activity to its own setting.

I then explore the alternative possibility that deliberative argument itself can be understood as a form of performative augmentation, suggesting that sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument are best thought of as ideal-typical forms that performative augmentation can take. I note that the internal and external effects that I identified as aspects of sociocultural interventions can also be located in deliberative argument. Moreover, the dual orientation of a grounding reverence and of innovative empowerment towards authoritative cultural elements which I observed in the authors of various religiously motivated sociocultural interventions, can also be observed in some form in the authors of deliberative argument. This suggests that political action, not only in the form of sociocultural interventions, but also in the form of deliberative argument, can be understood as a practice of performative augmentation. The implication is not that the normative expectations and ideals associated with deliberative argument are unimportant. Rather, it is that there are inevitably other expectations and ideals at play in politics, and that this is the case not *only* in the peripheral public sphere, but *also* at the centre. Consequently, the criterion of accessibility on its own is not sufficient to evaluate whether any given act of political communication represents a step towards more justice and equality.

I end the fourth chapter with a consideration of the advantages of a performative augmentation perspective over approaches that focus on the collaborative task of 'translation.' Here, I argue that my proposed perspective is better suited to bring into

33 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 9-10.
34 Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* 14; Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 768.

view the phenomenology of political action, that it more adequately enables reflection on lasting power differentials between citizens, and that it discloses fruitful avenues of collaboration between political actors adhering to a variety of religious and philosophical outlooks that strictly cognitivist perspectives are likely to ignore or occlude.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will take stock by listing the concepts that constitute my proposed interpretive model as well as their definitions; in each case, I will also lay out what features of the public manifestation of political actors' existential commitments they alert us to. Doing so will clarify why this model is a useful additional perspective to the accounts of the public sphere that I seek to supplement.

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1

Post-secularism and the public sphere

1.0. Introduction

This dissertation is meant to develop a theoretical model by means of which we can approach political actors' public expressions of their core existential commitments within the political life of contemporary democratic societies. It aims to provide an alternative perspective to the prominent one that is offered by liberal and deliberative democratic political philosophers such as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, whose models of the public sphere, in my view, do not adequately equip us to do so. In this chapter, I will start by providing an outline of the theories that I seek to supplement.

Before I proceed, however, I should make a precautionary clarification. My inclusion of this chapter may give my reader the impression that this dissertation is offered as yet another contribution to the already very extensive literature on the debate on the proper place of religious justifications in public, political deliberation. Consequently, it may lead them to the expectation that like Rawls, Habermas and other contributors to that debate, I will aim to show by what principles the public exchange of deliberative argument ought to be guided. In order to avoid such misunderstandings, let me reiterate the point, previously made in the introduction, that my project is distinct from these authors in topic as well as in purpose: I am primarily interested in the many forms that political action can take *beyond* deliberative argument, such as vigils, street art, pilgrimages, rallies and fasts. It is my overall goal to facilitate philosophical reflection upon the ways by which political actors employ such actions to performatively transform the social imaginary, and I particularly want to examine how these actions interface with the political actors' existential commitments.[35]

35 Which, of course, is a very different thing from suggesting that deliberative argument is not important. I will have more to say on the relation between deliberative argument and other forms of forms of political expression in chapter 4.

This difference in topic and purpose notwithstanding, a reconstruction of this debate is still a useful starting point for my own project. This is the case for several reasons which I previously outlined in the introduction. To briefly reiterate, the first of these reasons concerns the fact that Rawls' and Habermas' theories remain at the root of much contemporary liberal and deliberative democratic discourse on the public sphere, and that as such, they represent very prominent alternatives to Arendt's account of the public sphere that will be important to my own project.[36] More specifically, by revising their theories of the public sphere in order to create more room for religious perspectives, both authors have provided seminal contributions to philosophical reflection on the relation between the public manifestation of political actors' existential commitments on the one hand and democratic equality on the other. These efforts, as well as the criticisms that have been raised against these efforts, serve as helpful indicators of what more is needed if political theorists are to appreciate this relation more fully. Starting with a discussion of their theories on public justification, then, will enable me to clarify the advantages of my alternative, additional perspective on the citizens' existential commitments, on the citizens' political interactions, and on the interaction between the two.

Both Rawls and Habermas propose an ethics of citizenship that is determined by a specific conception of the public sphere.[37] As I will discuss in what follows, in their proposals, the public sphere performs several important and closely interrelated functions: it simultaneously guarantees that all citizens are included in decision-making processes, that the decisions are reasonably acceptable to all, and that the decisions thus reached are not only legally binding but also legitimate. It is in order to guarantee that the public sphere can properly perform these functions that citizens are required to behave in a certain way. In order for the decision-making process to be truly inclusive, the decisions need to be justified by an appeal to reasons that all citizens can be reasonably expected to reasonably accept. Religious reasons, for instance, do not suffice, as these are by definition tied to particular faith communities. Instead, decisions that are legally binding for all citizens are to be justified by appeal to secular reasons that are accessible to all citizens, no matter what their more comprehensive existential commitments happen to be. Yet in

36 For an early comparison between these three competing accounts of the public sphere, see Seyla Benhabib, "The Embattled Public Sphere: Hannah Arendt, Juergen Habermas and Beyond," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 90 (December 1997). I will take up the matter of Arendt's thought on the public sphere in the third chapter.

37 Rawls, *Political Liberalism;* Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited;" Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere."

a pluralist society, religious perspectives are unlikely to disappear from public debate. It was in light of this that, in their later work, both Rawls and Habermas have sought to accommodate these perspectives while maintaining the secular character of the public sphere (or in Habermas' case: of the 'formal' public sphere).[38]

Many objections have been brought to bear against these revisions. Some of these objections relate to the highly cognitive approach to religion and to public life that Rawls and Habermas have in common: both emphasize the role of rational argument in each of these domains. Authors like Talal Asad, Craig Calhoun, William Connolly and others have pointed out that this focus entails a neglect of other dimensions of public life (for example, those dimensions that are connected to concrete experience and participation in collective cultural practices) and that this neglect has exclusionary implications.[39] As Iris Young has pointed out, marginalized groups are particularly likely to be excluded from public discussion in this way. [40]

While I do not doubt that rational argument is central to justification within the public sphere, I also think that these critics have a point when they maintain that a one-sided focus on rational argument in the public sphere renders Rawls' and Habermas' accounts of the public sphere less helpful for determining what obligations citizens have towards one another when they engage in political activities, and that for the development of an ethics of citizenship, a fuller account of citizens' agency within the public sphere is needed. In the present chapter, I want to bring out the abovementioned insights regarding the requirements of an account of the public sphere that emerged out of contemporary debates on post-secularism and the public

38 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere [2006]," 9-10. I will elaborate on Habermas' distinction between the 'informal' and the 'formal' public sphere in section 1.2.1.

39 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of religion: discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Asad, *Secular Translations;* Craig Calhoun, "Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere" in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford, New York etc.: Oxford University Press, 2011); Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*.

40 One of the arguments made by Young is that a strong emphasis on rational argument tends to entail a preference for styles of expression that are perceived to be relatively dispassionate, formal and disembodied, and which are more typical of highly educated people, over styles of expression that are perceived to be more emotional and figurative, which are associated with 'women, racialized or ethnicized minorities, and working-class people' (Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 39-40). She also argues that rational argument tends to presume the availability of shared premises, which may well be especially lacking in situations of profound social inequality, and which may require other forms of communication (Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 37-38). I will discuss these points by Young in 1.1.4.

sphere. I will do this by discussing the contributions made to the debate by Rawls (1.1.1) and Habermas (1.2.1) as well as the objections that were brought to bear against their contributions by their critics.

One of the main objections against Rawls' proposal is the so-called 'integrity objection,' which holds that the requirements of public reason represent an unreasonable, asymmetrical burden for religious citizens. After introducing this objection (1.1.2), I will work out Paul Weithman's version of it in more detail (1.1.3). I concentrate on Weithman's version because it demonstrates two of the insights from the debate on public religion that I mentioned above. First, he shows that justificatory standards cannot be isolated from the citizen's participation in collective cultural practices. Second, he draws helpful attention to causal connections between the existence of unequal power relations amongst citizens in contemporary democratic societies and the plurality of perspectives that they subscribe to. After that, I turn to another objection against Rawls' proposal: that he privileges a culturally specific idealized style of expression (the style he associates with the U.S. Supreme Court) at the risk of ignoring or invalidating other types of discourse, like storytelling, which may be a central form of communication in the culture of marginalized groups, or rhetoric, which may be an indispensable element of the emancipatory action undertaken by these groups. (1.1.4).

After my discussion of Rawls, I will turn to Jürgen Habermas. His contribution can be interpreted as an effort to meet some of the objections just listed while also remaining true to important principles that motivate Rawls' project. While Habermas maintains a version of Rawls' 'translation proviso', insisting that citizens acknowledge that in the 'formal' public sphere, only secular reasons count, he simultaneously accepts that in the 'informal' sphere, such restraint is not feasible. After an initial discussion of his contribution (1.2.1), I will discuss how Habermas' proposal relates to the objections that have been raised against Rawls. It is not clear that the institutional proviso actually solves the problems it is meant to solve. Although Habermas recognizes that faith and religion encompass more than believed doctrine, his ideal of deliberation nevertheless remains close to the type of culturally specific discourse that is also privileged by Rawls, and his account of religion remains 'epistemically oriented,' retaining a somewhat parochial, Western-protestant flavour while ignoring non-cognitive aspects of religion. For that reason, a fuller account of the manifestation of existential commitments within the public sphere is still needed (1.2.2). I conclude the chapter with a summary of my findings (1.3).

1.1. John Rawls

1.1.1. Comprehensive doctrines and public reason

In this subsection, I will give an overview of how Rawls envisioned the relation between comprehensive doctrines on the one hand and the public sphere on the other in *Political Liberalism* as well as in his 1997 essay 'The Idea of Public Reason revisited.'[41] Objections against Rawls' perspective that were raised by his critics will be discussed in later subsections.

In his earlier *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls, working from the central premise that in a liberal democracy, the exercise of political power is legitimate only if it is guided by principles that all citizens can be reasonably expected to endorse, sought to identify the principles of justice that 'free and rational persons'[42] would accept as a basis for their mutual co-operation; on the basis of those principles, he then expounded a theory of justice (termed 'justice as fairness') which he argued could serve as an appropriate theoretical basis for democratic societies because it met this standard of general acceptability.[43] In *Political Liberalism,* however, he aimed to correct what he by then had come to see as a 'serious problem' in this earlier work.[44] This problem, as well as the distinction between these two stages in his thought, turns on the concept of 'comprehensive doctrines,' by which he refers to individuals' overarching religious, philosophical and moral views regarding the good and what is of value in human life.[45]

41 John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64, No. 3 (Summer 1997).

42 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 11. In this context, being 'rational' entails that these persons are able to choose between principles to advance their own interest; ibid. 142. This is not to be confused with his characterization of persons as being 'reasonable,' which I will discuss below, which in *Political Liberalism* entails 'that they are ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so.' Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 49. For the distinction between these terms, also see Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 48-54.

43 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; Bert van den Brink, *The Tragedy of Liberalism: An Alternative Defense of a Political Tradition* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2000), 41-49.

44 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xviiff.

45 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 13. For Rawls, a doctrine is 'comprehensive when it includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct, and in the limit to our life as a whole.' (Ibid.)

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls emphasizes that whereas his earlier account problematically presumed that the citizens would endorse the conception of justice on the basis of a philosophical comprehensive doctrine, contemporary constitutional and democratic societies are in fact characterized by 'the fact of reasonable pluralism,' that is, the presence of a multitude of reasonable yet mutually irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines.[46] This is a structural feature of modern society, he argues, because it is 'the normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional democratic regime.'[47] The main corollary of this new emphasis on the inevitable presence of a variety of mutually irreconcilable ideas about the good is that problems regarding the justification of collectively binding law appear in a new light. For Rawls, it remains of central importance that the imposition of the law upon citizens is justified – this is why his brand of liberalism has been categorized as 'justificatory liberalism.'[48] But given the variety of the citizens' perspectives, it is not clear how they could collectively consider the same justification as acceptable. There is no evident reason why citizens who adhere to a great variety of outlooks should feel obliged to obey a law that is not based on principles they share, and without citizens feeling obliged to obey the law, no society can be stable. This brings Rawls to the following central problem:

> The problem of political liberalism is: How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines? Put another way: How is it possible that deeply opposed though reasonable comprehensive doctrines may live together and all affirm the political conception of a constitutional regime?[49]

46 Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* xlii, 36, 63-65.

47 Ibid., xviii. Interestingly for the purposes of my project, this move seems to have been motivated in part by his hope to make room for the type of activism that the Civil Rights Movement engaged in; see Patrick Neal, "Is Public Reason Innocuous?" *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 11, No. 2 (2008): 133; Timothy P. Jackson, "The Return of the Prodigal? Liberal Theory and Religious Pluralism" in *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism,* ed. Paul J. Weithman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 214. I will have more to say on the relation between Rawls' theory and the Civil Rights Movement in Chapter 4.

48 Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11-13; Gerald F. Gaus and Kevin Valier, "The roles of religious conviction in a publicly justified polity: the implications of convergence, asymmetry and political institutions," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 35, Nos 1-2 (2009).

49 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xx.

Central to Rawls' answer to these questions is his assumption that citizens are fundamentally reasonable. He sees it as a basic feature of reasonable persons that they are prepared 'to propose principles and standards as fair terms of co-operation and to abide by them willingly, provided others will likewise do so.'[50] Reasonable citizens understand that others can and will reasonably arrive at different conceptions of the good than they themselves have reached. In Rawls' terms, they accept the 'burdens of judgment' – they understand that there are sources of disagreement on ultimate questions that are 'compatible with everyone being fully reasonable.'[51] They therefore acknowledge that it is unreasonable to impose their particular conceptions of the good on their fellow citizens.

Rawls further assumes that reasonable people will only affirm reasonable comprehensive doctrines.[52] He defines reasonable comprehensive doctrines as internally consistent and well-organized; furthermore, they ascribe a relative weight to various values in such a way that these values can be balanced when they conflict, and are typically connected to or drawing on traditions that may gradually change.[53] Finally and importantly, they do 'not reject the essentials of a constitutional democratic regime.'[54] Comprehensive doctrines are reasonable to the extent to which they are able to support reasonable conclusions when faced with political and moral dilemmas.[55] A reasonable comprehensive doctrine, in sum, allows its adherents, when they are considering political problems in a public political setting, to reach conclusions that all citizens alike can see as reasonable, rather than conclusions that only they themselves are able to approve. According to Rawls, in modern, constitutional societies, citizens tend to embrace reasonable doctrines rather than unreasonable ones; in other words, these societies are characterized by the fact of 'reasonable' rather than of 'mere' pluralism.

Citizens need to establish fair principles and standards for their co-operation that all of them, their different perspectives on the good notwithstanding, can accept. These principles and standards are spelled out by what Rawls terms 'a political conception of justice:' a conception that is worked out for the specific subject of the political, social, and economic institutions of a modern, democratic and constitutional democracy.[56]

50 Ibid., 49.
51 Ibid., 58.
52 Ibid., 59.
53 Ibid., 59.
54 Ibid., xvi.
55 Ibid., 243-244n.
56 Ibid., 11.

Such a conception needs to be 'presented as a freestanding view.'[57] That is to say, even though the political conception is seen by each of the citizens as somehow related to their comprehensive doctrine, which for them serves as a background to this conception, it can and is nevertheless 'expounded apart from, or without reference to, any such wider background.'[58] The political conception is to be 'political and not metaphysical.'[59]

Rawls assumes this political conception to 'be broadly liberal in character;' that is to say, it will specify the basic rights commonly associated with constitutional democratic regimes, assign a priority to them and specify measures that provide citizens with the adequate means to exercise those rights.[60] The ability to justify political positions by reference to the shared political conception is a characteristic of reasonable citizens, and a comprehensive doctrine is reasonable if it can support such a conception. The content of the political conception of justice cannot be publicly expressed in terms derived from any specific comprehensive doctrine, because that would render it unacceptable to citizens adhering to different doctrines. Justification among citizens can only proceed 'from what is, or can be, held in common.'[61] What reasonable citizens do hold in common, according to Rawls, are the 'shared ideas and principles' that are implicitly present in 'the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation (including the judiciary) as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge.'[62] Traditions, ideas and practices that are particular to any single comprehensive doctrine cannot be a basis for public reasoning because they cannot be acceptable to all citizens. Public culture forms an alternative to these traditions because it forms a 'shared fund of implicitly recognized basic ideas and principles' that is or can be held in common, in the sense that it is 'at least familiar and intelligible to the educated common sense of citizens generally.'[63]

The political conception of justice is, however, never entirely unrelated to the comprehensive doctrines that citizens adhere to.[64] Although they subscribe to different reasonable comprehensive doctrines, citizens are all able to 'view the political conception as derived from, or congruent with, or at least not in conflict with, their other values.'[65]

57 Ibid., 12.
58 Ibid., 12.
59 Ibid., 10.
60 Ibid., 223.
61 Ibid., 100.
62 Ibid., 13-14.
63 Ibid., 14.
64 Ibid., xxi.
65 Ibid., 11.

It is 'a module, an essential constituent part that fits into and can be supported by the various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it.'[66] How precisely this module fits into the more encompassing comprehensive doctrine 'is left to citizens individually – as part of the liberty of conscience.'[67]

Citizens are required to distinguish between the public and the non-public aspects of their existence because public reason – 'citizen's reasoning in the public forum about constitutional essentials and basic questions of justice' – is to be 'guided by a political conception the principles and values of which all citizens can endorse.'[68] According to political liberalism, citizens are under a moral (not a legal) duty 'to be able to explain to one another how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason.' Rather than referring to values and principles which are specific to their comprehensive doctrines when supporting their arguments, politically liberal citizens are to refer to the values and principles that are implicitly or explicitly present in public culture instead. This is what Rawls calls the 'moral duty of civility.'[69]

The duty of civility, which entails the requirement that citizens abstain from relying exclusively on comprehensive doctrines when voting or engaging in political advocacy, represents one of the most debated elements in Rawls' account. In the following section, I will discuss one of the arguments most commonly raised against it by Rawls' critics, namely that it unduly burdens religious citizens.

1.1.2. The duty of restraint and the integrity objection

With the account of public reason outlined above, Rawls intended to show how citizens who disagree on fundamental matters can nonetheless live with one another on fair terms. His account is closely connected to his commitment to the ideal of democratic equality.[70] An important reason why the duty of civility constitutes a *duty* for citizens is that if they do not comply with it, they fail to treat one another as free and equal citizens. By refraining from introducing non-public reasons in discussions of fundamental questions in the public forum, they demonstrate to their fellow citizens that, rather than seeking to

66 Ibid., 12.
67 Ibid., 140.
68 Ibid., 10.
69 Ibid., 217.
70 For an examination of this relation, including of how it featured in Rawls' work before it found a more explicit expression in *Political Liberalism*, see Charles Larmore, "Public Reason" in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

impose their own comprehensive doctrines upon them, they are willing to live under terms of co-operation that all, 'as free and equal citizens and not as dominated or manipulated, or under the pressure of an inferior political or unjust position,'[71] can reasonably accept as fair. In this sense, public reason gives expression to the 'spirit of reciprocity' that is fundamental to Rawls' political thought.[72]

The importance of equality and reciprocity in Rawls' account of the public sphere renders one common objection against this account all the more salient; namely that it discriminates. Nicholas Wolterstorff, for example, argues that Rawls' 'duty of civility' places religious citizens under an unequal psychological burden:

> It belongs to the *religious convictions* of a good many religious people in our society that *they ought to base* their decisions concerning fundamental issues of justice *on* their religious convictions. They do not view it as an option whether or not to do so. It is their conviction that they ought to strive for wholeness, integrity, integration, in their lives (…). Their religion is not, for them, about *something other* than their social and political existence; it is *also* about their social and political existence.[73]

This 'integrity objection' has been voiced by many critics who argue that the requirements of public justification are incompatible with commitments that many religious citizens experience as constitutive for their identity.[74] This burden is asymmetrical in the sense that secular citizens are not faced with a similar demand. Therefore, Rawls' duty of civility is argued to be counterproductive: rather than guaranteeing individual autonomy as

71 Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 770.

72 Larmore, "Public Reason," 368-369.

73 Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues" in: Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 105; the emphasis is Wolterstorff's.

74 Michael J. Perry, *Morality, Politics and Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Michael J. Perry, *Love and Power: The Role of Religion and Morality in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Kenneth Greenawalt, *Private Consciences and Public Reasons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Philip Quinn, "Political Liberalisms and Their Exclusions of the Religious" in Weithman, *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism*; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us about Speaking and Acting in Public for Religious Reasons" in Weithman, *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism*; Eberle, *Religious Conviction and Liberal Politics*, 143-147; Christopher J. Eberle, "Religion, Pacifism, and the Doctrine of Restraint," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 34, No. 2. (June 2006) 211-212; also see Catherine Audard, who states this critique clearly and concisely while not necessarily affirming it herself: Catherine Audard, *John Rawls* (Stocksfield: Routledge, 2007) 226-227.

well as relations of equality and reciprocity amongst citizens, for some of the citizens its consequences would be heteronomy, inequality and domination.[75]

Note that in *Political Liberalism*, Rawls sought to define public reason in such a way that its requirements would *not* constitute an integrity violation – at least not for reasonable citizens. As seen in the previous section, Rawls sees it as characteristic for reasonable citizens that they are familiar with the principles and values of public reason that are present within the shared political culture. A further characteristic is that their comprehensive doctrines are able to support a political conception of justice. For Rawls, in short, reasonable citizens are *by definition* able to respect the requirements of public reason.[76]

According to those who voice the integrity objection, however, it is not the citizens who fail to comply with the duty of civility, but rather the duty itself that is unreasonable; citizens of faith are burdened without sufficient reason.[77] Wolterstorff and Perry, for example, argue that the costs caused by the requirement of reason are impermissibly high as they force many citizens to split their identity, bracketing parts of their identity in ways that cannot be reasonably justified. Rawls assumes that all reasonable citizens, in effect, have two simultaneously separate and related sets of reasons that they can draw on, one acceptable to all citizens and one acceptable only to fellow adherents of the same comprehensive doctrine. However, when religious and secular reasons conflict, 'it seems that being religious consists exactly in giving priority to religious over non-religious reasons.'[78] By demanding of religious citizens that they accept a division between their political and their religious existence which is alien to their own convictions, their integrity

75 The tensions between the 'integrity objection' and 'liberalism's commitment to non-domination' are discussed in Gaus and Vallier, "Religious Conviction in a Publicly Justified Polity," 63.

76 Chantal Mouffe points out in this context that there is a remarkable circularity to Rawls' reasoning in *Political Liberalism*: 'political liberalism can provide a consensus among reasonable persons who by definition are persons who accept the principles of political liberalism.' Chantal Mouffe, "The Limits of Rawls' Pluralism," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 56, No. 118 (March 2009), 4. A similar objection to Rawls' use of the criterion of 'reasonableness' is made, among others, by Steven Shiffrin, "Religion and Democracy" *Notre Dame Law Review* 74, No. 5 (1998-1999), 1636. Gosselin-Tapp argues, in contrast, that there is no circularity because 'Rawls conceives reasonableness differently when it concerns persons instead of moral propositions.' Gosselin-Tapp, "Lost in Translation," 862.

77 Kevin Vallier, "Liberalism, Religion and Integrity," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90 Vol. 1 (2011), 157.

78 Christina Lafont, "Religion and the Public Sphere" in Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendietta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 233.

as religious persons is threatened.[79] Furthermore, it creates, as Patrick Neal phrases it, an 'odd dynamic:' 'It is legitimate to take the 'whole truth' as the citizen understands it from the point of view of her comprehensive moral or religious view into account as one shapes and forms one's political sensibility, but then one is to switch to the point of view of public reason at, as it were, the moment of publicly declaring one's decision.'[80] Especially if the public reason they are required to publicly state carries little or no weight for the citizens themselves, it is easy to understand how they might see themselves as forced to be dishonest in their political advocacy.

One possible way to counter the integrity objection is by pointing out that whatever the psychological burdens citizens of faith might experience, these are trumped by the obligation to treat one's fellow citizens as free and equal.[81] For instance, consider Stephen Macedo's statement that to those who 'feel "silenced" or "marginalized" by the fact that some of us believe that it is wrong to shape basic liberties on the basis of metaphysical or religious beliefs, [… he] can only say "grow up!"'[82] By comparison, Rawls is considerably less dismissive of integrity-related concerns; in *Political Liberalism*, he makes a sustained effort to show that although the duty of civility does hold for the justification of laws in the public sphere when basic matters of justice and constitutional essentials are at stake, this still allows for quite a bit of leeway.

First of all, the duty of civility has a limited scope. In terms of content, it only holds for discussions on 'fundamental questions'[83] which include those of 'constitutional essentials and basic rights.'[84] Furthermore, it only holds for government officials, as well as for 'citizens when they engage in political advocacy in the public forum, and thus

79 Lafont, "Religion and the Public Sphere," 235.

80 Neal, "Is Public Reason Innocuous?" 150.

81 Vallier, "Liberalism, Religion and Integrity," 156-157; Finlayson, "No Proviso."

82 Stephen Macedo, "In Defense of Liberal Public Reason: Are Slavery and Abortion Hard Cases?" in *Natural Law and Public Reason,* ed. Robert P. George and Christopher Wolfe (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2000), 35. By contrast, as we shall see later, for Habermas the psychological objection that not all citizens are able to distinguish between their existence as a person of faith and their existence as a polity's citizen is convincing enough to relax the requirement, as 'every "ought" presupposes a "can."' Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 8.

83 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 217.

84 Ibid., 227-230. However, there are good reasons to doubt whether a strong, clear and uncontroversial distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental issues is tenable in modern politics. This is one of Habermas' criticisms of Rawls that will be discussed in section 1.2.1. At any rate, Rawls himself gives but little clarity of how he thinks the distinction could be made; see Kevin Vallier, 'Liberalism, Religion and Integrity,' 157.

for members of political parties and for candidates in their campaigns and for other groups who support them. It holds equally for how citizens are to vote in elections when constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice are at stake.'[85] So whenever people engage in political discussion, not in their specific role as citizens but rather as 'members of associations such as churches and universities,' the duty does not apply.[86]

Rawls makes another reservation, one that is of interest in light of my more specific focus on the political action of religiously motivated emancipatory movements. In specific cases, namely 'when society is not well ordered and there is a profound division about constitutional essentials,' Rawls considers it permissible for citizens to advance reasons in public political debate that are rooted in their comprehensive doctrines. Rawls names the abolitionists advocating against slavery as well as the advocacy by the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as historical examples of 'the nonpublic reason of certain Christian churches [… supporting] the clear conclusions of public reason.'[87] He considers that the abolitionists and King 'could have seen their actions as the best way to bring about a well-ordered and just society in which the ideal of public reason could eventually be honored' and that it was indeed plausible that 'the political forces they led were among the necessary historical conditions to establish political justice.'[88] In their particular historical situation, they had to invoke the comprehensive grounds that were current at the time, or otherwise political justice would likely not have come about. For this reason, Rawls argues they did not go against the ideal of public reason 'provided they thought, or on reflection would have thought (as they certainly could have thought), *that the comprehensive reasons they appealed to were required to give sufficient strength to the political conception to be subsequently realized.*'[89]

85 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 215.

86 Ibid., 215. However, there is reason to doubt whether Rawls' hard separation between the public sphere and the background culture can be maintained. See for instance Benhabib, "The Embattled Public Sphere" as well as Evan Charney, "Political Liberalism, Deliberative Democracy, and the Public Sphere," *The American Political Science Review* 92, No. 1 (March 1998); Tomasi and Weithman raise additional questions regarding the tenability of Rawls' separation between the public sphere and associational life, which will be discussed below.

87 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 249-250.

88 Ibid., 250-251.

89 Ibid., 251; my emphasis. As I will discuss later on, whether or not society is 'well-ordered' or 'fully just' in Rawls' sense at any given time (and by the same token: whether or not civil disobedience is a legitimate course of action) may well be an issue that is impossible to establish in advance.

So already in *Political Liberalism*, Rawls identifies some positive grounds for citizens to advance their comprehensive doctrine in public political debate in particular circumstances. In his essay 'The idea of public reason revisited,' he complements his account of public reason with a proviso stating that

> reasonable, comprehensive doctrines, religious or nonreligious, may be introduced in public political discussions, provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines introduced are said to support.[90]

Rawls deliberately leaves open how precisely this proviso is to be satisfied, as 'this needs to be worked out in practice and cannot feasibly be governed by a clear family of rules given in advance.'[91]

In the same essay, he also lists some additional reasons in favour of the introduction of comprehensive doctrines into public political debate. As citizens know of one another that their support for a democratic and constitutional regime is backed by the various reasonable comprehensive doctrines they adhere to, these doctrines can be seen as the 'vital social basis' of this support.[92] By bringing these doctrines out in the open (always provided they accept the proviso) and showing how exactly the doctrines they adhere to back the political conception, citizens can demonstrate to others their 'commitment to constitutional democracy.'[93] This, in turn, can increase civic solidarity between citizens adhering to mutually irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines.[94]

90 Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 783-784.
91 Ibid., 784.
92 Ibid., 785.
93 Ibid., 785.
94 Ibid., 785. Rawls also names other forms of discourse that are not public political reasoning, properly speaking, but that still involve the introduction of comprehensive doctrines into public political discussion. One of these he calls 'conjecture'; this is when citizen A demonstrates to citizen B how the comprehensive doctrine held by B, but not shared by A, could support a reasonable political conception, even if B does not think it can support one. (Ibid., 786). Yet another form Rawls terms 'witnessing.' Unlike the advocacy of the abolitionists and the Civil Rights Movement described above, he sees this form as typically taking place in 'an ideal, politically well-ordered and fully just society in which all votes are the result of citizen's voting in accordance with their most reasonable conception of political justice.' (Ibid., 787n.) In such a situation some citizens, while generally accepting the political conception of justice on which the constitutional democratic order is based, will still feel compelled by their comprehensive doctrine to 'express their dissent from existing institutions, policies, or enacted legislation' by a direct appeal to the comprehensive doctrine itself; these citizens feel

So both in *Political Liberalism* and in "The idea of public reason revisited," Rawls sets limitations on the scope of the duty of civility, describing a variety of situations in which it is permissible for citizens to draw directly on their comprehensive doctrines in the public sphere; furthermore, he stresses that outside of the public sphere, in associations like churches and universities, citizens are free to debate political matters without having to provide any freestanding justifications. These limitations and exceptions serve to show that in a society where the duty of civility is followed, people will still be able to lead religious and more broadly 'ethical' lives of integrity in many settings. However, as Quinn remarked as early as 1995, 'one cannot help wondering whether the strategy of exclusions tempered by exceptions is one liberals must adopt or the best one for them to adopt.'[95] For the very instances of communication that *are* covered by the duty of civility (that is, the public justification of policies that are binding for all citizens within the public sphere) are also likely to be the most controversial ones, for the same reasons as why Rawls singles them out: it is in these cases that matters of fundamental importance to all citizens are being decided.[96]

Furthermore, it is doubtful whether it is possible for associational life (that is to say, social life taking place outside of what Rawls considers to be the public sphere, like church meetings or family gatherings) to go on without being influenced by the mentalities that the duty of civility requires of reasonable citizens in the public sphere. As John Tomasi shows, even if the requirements of public reason do not touch on associational life directly, it is to be expected that its associated values and attitudes will 'spill over' into non-public domains of life.[97] As a consequence, the 'integrity costs' associated with political liberalism extend beyond public justification alone: 'Our point of view as citizens cannot be distinguished in any clean way from our point of view as members of families and other non-public groups.'[98]

The tension described here – between citizens' duty to offer generally acceptable justifications for their support of generally binding laws on the one hand and the right of citizens of faith to 'adopt their own religious stance in public deliberation about such

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that 'they must not only let other citizens know the deep basis of their strong opposition but must also bear witness to their faith by doing so.' Rawls considers this legitimate as they nonetheless accept the legitimacy of the law and the obligation not to violate it (Ibid., 787n.).

95 Quinn, "Political Liberalisms and Their Exclusions of the Religious," 46.

96 As James Finlayson points out, this includes as basic a political activity as voting or any advocacy for collectively binding laws. Finlayson, "No Proviso," 446.

97 Tomasi, *Liberalism beyond Justice*, 17-39.

98 Ibid., 54.

policies'[99] on the other – has led to an extensive literature. I want to look in more detail at some insights that have emerged in this debate which bear directly on the topic that is of central interest to me, namely the position, the action and the experiences of religiously motivated emancipatory movements. In the next section, I will discuss Paul Weithman's version of the integrity objection. Not unlike Tomasi, Weithman shows that justificatory standards cannot be meaningfully described in isolation from the citizens' participation in collective cultural practices. More than Tomasi, however, Weithman draws helpful attention to the fact that the plurality of citizens' perspectives within contemporary democratic societies is causally connected to the presence of unequal power relations within that society. This connection is of importance for my purposes because it relates directly to the existence of disenfranchised groups within democratic societies and the ways these groups can draw on historical traditions of existential meaning-making to render society more just and inclusive.

1.1.3. Weithman: religion, emancipation and the obligations of citizenship

In *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, Paul Weithman argues against what he calls 'the standard approach' in political theory, which entails the principle that citizens should not rely exclusively on religious reasons when they vote or when they engage in political advocacy.[100] He specifically singles out John Rawls for criticism, because Rawls, according to Weithman, provides us with one of the 'most sophisticated forms' of the standard account.[101]

Following Aristotle, Weithman uses the term 'citizen' 'to denote someone who is both affected by political outcomes and who is entitled to take part in bringing them about.'[102] A merely legal entitlement to participate in political decision-making, however, is not sufficient; other conditions, subjective as well as objective ones, need to be met before citizens can meaningfully act as such. Several activities that are typically associated with active citizenship – like joining a demonstration or giving a public speech – draw on psychological resources, like initiative, confidence, motivation and a sense of empowerment. Access to 'the resources of information, skills, networks and influence' are also needed.[103]

99 Lafont, "Religion and the Public Sphere," 232.
100 Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, 6-9.
101 Ibid., 9. The other 'most sophisticated version' of the standard account that Weithman criticizes is the one provided by Robert Audi: Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, 148-179.
102 Ibid., 13.
103 Ibid., 14.

Relying on empirical data, Weithman argues that in contemporary societies such as the United States, many of these resources become available to large segments of the population, especially relatively marginalized ones, through their engagement in churches and religious organizations. Churches and religious organizations provide 'the means by which many people gain access to realistically available opportunities to participate in politics and develop a sense of themselves as citizens.'[104] By doing this, they foster 'realized democratic citizenship;'[105] meaning that they enable otherwise disenfranchised citizens to participate fully in politics, which according to Weithman is 'a great political achievement.'[106]

First, churches and religious associations form a setting in which, through sermons, presentations, meetings and informal conversations, political information is shared. Second, those who attend these gatherings are sometimes encouraged to engage in 'the characteristic activities of citizenship'[107] and to see these activities as their own, helping them to identify with their role as citizens. Third, churches and religious organizations are 'venues where citizens can learn to speak in public, write letters, chair meetings, organize activities, recruit others and approach authorities,'[108] offering believers the opportunity to hone the civic skills that they need in order to make effective use of their rights as citizens. Additionally, Weithman argues, through some of the social services that churches and religious organizations often provide (like soup kitchens, homeless shelters, hospitals, schools, etc.) they 'go some small way toward bringing about the material conditions associated with democratic equality.'[109] In this sense, these institutions are 'part of what makes liberal democracy "work."'[110]

Of course, Rawls would object neither to churches and religious organizations making such contributions, nor to the assertion that within the walls of these non-public institutions, so to speak, the duty of civility does not hold. As shown above, he explicitly limits the scope of public reason to justification in what he calls 'the public forum;' citizens remain free to draw exclusively on whatever comprehensive doctrines they happen to subscribe to.[111] The fact that in Rawls' view, citizens are free to discuss political matters

104 Ibid., 5.
105 Ibid., 91.
106 Ibid., 22.
107 Ibid., 42.
108 Ibid., 43.
109 Ibid., 49.
110 Ibid., 5.
111 Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 768.

in non-public terms in other contexts implies that they are also 'free to go outside the bounds of public reason' in the process of arriving at the political positions that they subsequently advocate or vote for.[112] To a large extent, then, the positive contributions that Weithman ascribes to churches and religious organizations seem to be compatible with Rawls' account of public reason. Rawls only requires citizens to be prepared to *justify* their political positions by way of public reason once they actually advocate or vote.[113]

Why does Weithman find this requirement problematic? In order to see this, it is important to realize that his argument goes beyond merely noting the fact that citizens who come to realize their citizenship through religious engagement are likely to come to think of the content of political debates in religious terms. Rather, his point is that citizens who realize their citizenship through religious engagement may also reasonably come to think of their own *role and status as citizens* in ways that fit poorly with the view of citizenship upon which Rawls' standards for public justification are premised.[114] Citizens of liberal constitutional societies can reasonably disagree, not only on the issues that are at stake in any given political debate, but also on the exact obligations that participants in the debate have towards one another. Citizens whose understanding of their own role and obligations as citizens is at odds with the Rawlsian specification of citizenship may see little reason to comply with duties that are based upon this specification.[115]

Weithman points out that Rawls' account of public reason is premised on citizens having specific expectations of one another, and that these expectations, in turn, depend on citizens having a highly specific view of their own roles. Citizens are conceived of as having a fundamental interest in 'the autonomous endorsement and pursuit of the aims and aspirations that shape their plans of life.'[116] This fundamental interest is violated when the outcomes of debates on constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice are 'not supportable or seen to be supportable exclusively by values drawn from a comprehensive doctrine they reject.'[117] This is so because these debates bear directly on the social conditions

112 Neal, "Is Public Reason Innocuous?" 150.

113 As I wrote in the previous section, this does lead to the odd situation that some citizens are required to offer a different reason in support of the position that they defend than the one they actually think is convincing. But that is not the line of criticism that Weithman concentrates on.

114 Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, 132-133, 137-140, 206-211.

115 Ibid., 209.

116 Ibid., 189.

117 Ibid., 201.

under which citizens develop and pursue their life plans. When these conditions are at stake, the outcomes of political debate 'must be supportable and seen to be supportable by considerations which are appropriately connected to citizens' rational capabilities,'[118] that is, they need to be 'plausibly described as ones that free, equal and reasonable citizens *could* give themselves.'[119] So in order to have the 'settled disposition to comply with the duty of civility and the proviso,' citizens need to identify with 'a certain specification of citizenship' which includes their fundamental interest in autonomously pursuing their life plans as well as 'the capacity to recognize another's argument as respectful or disrespectful of one's fundamental interests as a citizen.'[120]

To illustrate: when my fellow citizens propose a legal measure that would seriously affect the fundamental conditions under which I develop and pursue my life plans, they owe me a good reason – that is, they owe me a consideration of the sort that a reasonable person could reasonably be expected to accept. By offering me a reason that is appropriate in that sense, my fellow citizens show me that they acknowledge me as someone who has a right to good reasons; they recognize, in other words, my status as a reasonable person and as an equal citizen. Conversely, when offered a consideration that I cannot be reasonably expected to accept, I am justified in feeling insulted and excluded from the public sphere because my status as an equal citizen and a reasonable person has been disrespected. Hence the duty of civility.

However, the entire scenario above is premised on a shared understanding between me and my fellow citizens: that we all identify with a politically liberal view of citizenship, which entails that a failure to comply with the duty of civility constitutes a form of disrespect. But this view of citizenship may not be the only one that citizens can reasonably hold, or the only one they can reasonably expect their fellow citizens to hold. As Weithman points out, it is a feature of modern, democratic societies that there is a 'pervasive and reasonable disagreement about what reasons are accessible, about what citizens owe to each other and hence about the specification of citizenship with which citizens should identify.'[121] It does not seem farfetched to suppose that citizens who come to realize their citizenship through their engagement in churches and religious organizations will arrive at a religious understanding of their own role as citizens. In this sense, the political activity of churches and religious organizations (which both Rawls and Weithman see as

118 Ibid., 203.
119 Ibid., 203.
120 Ibid., 207.
121 Ibid., 132.

a feature of any liberal democratic society) contributes to disagreement about citizenship and its related obligations in existing democracies.[122] The resulting variety in specifications of citizenship that exist in modern democracies, in Weithman's view, is as natural a consequence of a liberal democracy as the variety in conceptions of the good that Rawls discusses in *Political Liberalism*.[123]

A religious understanding of citizenship may well include the principle (to which Weithman himself subscribes)[124] that it is permissible for citizens to voice religious perspectives in the public sphere, even if no public reason is given to justify their position at any point in time – the very opposite of the principle that Rawls articulates with his duty of civility. To require of citizens that they only identify with the specification of citizenship that underlies Rawls' account would, according to Weithman, be unreasonable because (and this is what I consider one of Weithman's most interesting points) the plurality of political perspectives that characterizes contemporary democratic societies is causally connected to the existence of unequal power relations amongst the citizens. The view of citizenship that underlies Rawls' duty of civility may be intuitively plausible and attractive to those citizens who already feel at home in the established culture of the public forum, but for citizens from segments of the population with a history of political marginalization, such a familiarity cannot be assumed.

Citing sociological data, Weithman claims that contributions to the realization of citizenship by churches and religious organizations are particularly beneficial to relatively disenfranchised groups within society ('the poor and minorities'[125]). For people who are otherwise 'resource-poor,' these institutions represent a rare means by which they can access opportunities for political participation, for the development of civic skills and, importantly, for the formation of a sense of identity as citizens upon which they can subsequently act.[126] To demand of these citizens that they distance themselves from

122 Ibid., 138.

123 Ibid., 209.

124 Ibid., 3.

125 Ibid., 36. Weithman makes especially extensive use of Sydney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). As I will discuss in more detail in section 1.2, Habermas recognizes this point, though he does not see it as the main reason to adapt Rawls' theory; Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 6-7.

126 Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, 44. Here Weithman argues, again on the basis of Verba et al., *Voice and Equality,* that this is especially true for African-American churches, which 'seem to be more activist in this regard than white churches, no doubt to compensate for the even greater poverty of resources endured by those they serve.' (Ibid., 47).

their non-Rawlsian views of citizenship would be unreasonable because for them, 'the alternative entails disengagement from politics.'[127]

Weithman's claims are vulnerable to the objection that they seem 'to rely upon complex sociological judgments based upon inconclusive evidence.'[128] Nevertheless, the force of Weithman's argument can be clarified by considering historical examples of political action that are aimed at addressing issues of social and political inequality while drawing on markedly religious traditions. Paul Vallier cites the example of Bishop Desmond Tutu's engagement for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South-Africa, pointing out that Tutu publicly defended the work of the TRC on explicitly Christian terms on many occasions, and that by doing this, he reached South Africans who would likely not have been reached otherwise. According to Vallier, in post-Apartheid South Africa, much like in the United States in the days of the Civil Rights Movement to which Weithman often refers,

> principles of restraint would have closed off many avenues towards realized citizenship, and thus to the development of associated political identities. [...] The South African case exposes the considerable burdens imposed by asking citizens of faith to advance reasons only in line with political values and supplement their political convictions with language that does not resonate with their convictions. Restraint might be less onerous for university-educated citizens of Western liberal democracies. But when principles of restraint are applied outside of this privileged group, their restrictiveness becomes rather obvious, *as well as their soundness as moral norms.*[129]

Rawls could well respond to these examples that the principle of restraint in his account is meant to apply to societies that are more fully just and well-ordered than South Africa was during and right after the end of Apartheid; such a reply would be in line with his aforementioned comments on the use of religious language by leaders of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. An objection to this line of defense, however, is that it may not be possible to non-controversially establish whether or not any given society is sufficiently just before public debate has run its course.

In sum, Weithman's objection to the 'standard approach' is that religious traditions and organizations can be important resources for relatively disenfranchised groups within society to reach their goals and to develop the psychological resources that they require

127 Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, 138.
128 Vallier, "Liberalism, Religion and Integrity," 13.
129 Ibid., 159-160; the emphasis is Vallier's.

in order to meaningfully act as citizens. Under such conditions, it is not unreasonable to expect that some or even many of these citizens come to hold outlooks and approaches to citizenship that are different from those held by citizens outside of these groups. In other words, the plurality of viewpoints that characterizes contemporary democracies is in part a result of the existence of asymmetrical power relationships within these societies. Curbing such traditions and organizations in political discourse may exacerbate political estrangement and exclusion, an outcome which would seem to be at odds with the liberal aim of free and equal citizens.

1.1.4. Two further objections: cognitivism and finalism

Having discussed this important objection against Rawls' assumptions regarding the way that citizens understand their own roles and responsibilities as citizens, I will now focus on another assumption for which he has been criticized; namely, on the form of discourse that he imagines to take place between citizens in the public sphere. There are two interrelated objections that I will discuss here. The first, in a nutshell, is that his account is one-sidedly focused on justificatory argument as the primary form of communication between citizens, and also one-sidedly focused on those doctrinal dimensions of the citizens' existential commitments that can be straightforwardly translated into justificatory argument; to this tendency, I will refer as his 'cognitivism.' The second objection is related to the first: Rawls' account, in its emphasis on justification that proceeds from the premises and evaluative frameworks that are already shared by the participants in political discussions, leaves insufficient room for the introduction of new, not yet widely familiar or accepted principles and experiences; to this tendency, I will refer as his 'finalism.' In making these arguments, I will be drawing on the work of Iris Young as well as on that of William Connolly. [130]

William Connolly places Rawls' work in a tradition of attempts to purge public discourse from what Connolly terms the 'visceral register,' namely the range of emotions, unconscious sensibilities and similar psychological responses that operate largely below the level of articulated thought, and that typically are the result of imprints left by past experiences (especially intense or traumatic ones) on the human brain.[131] He claims that secularists since Kant, fearing that a 'religiously pluralized world would fall into either disorder or religious tyranny if its participants did not endorse a single standard of rational

130 Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*; Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*.
131 Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 27-29.

authority,'[132] have insisted 'upon an authoritative model of argumentation from which the visceral element is subtracted.'[133]

One way to see how this subtraction takes place is by considering how in Rawls' account, religion is treated in a highly cognitive manner; it is first and foremost a matter of articulated beliefs. Connolly draws on Talal Asad's studies on the shifting role of symbol and ritual in the Western Christian tradition to show that such a treatment tacitly proceeds from what is in fact a culturally specific, 'Western' or even 'Protestant' point of view. [134] He points out that 'with the emergence of secularism and Protestantism, a symbol, in its predominant valence, becomes the representation of an inner state of belief that precedes it; and ritual is now understood to be the primitive enactment of *beliefs* that could also be displayed through cognitive representation.'[135] In medieval Christianity, by contrast, 'a symbol was bound up with the *enactment or perfection* of inner states and meanings it also represented; and ritual was practised as a means of educating and constituting appropriate dispositions of appraisal and aptitudes of performance.'[136]

Once an understanding of religion as essentially a matter of 'belief' is taken for granted and practice is treated as only a secondary phenomenon, as merely a primitive means to represent belief, it becomes possible for secular accounts of religion and politics to establish purely cognitive modes of discourse as the only proper way to settle political disputes. For Connolly, such a cognitivist view is exemplified by Rawls, who, after all, also speaks of religion almost exclusively in terms of belief and doctrine, works hard to restrict this limited conception of religion to the private sphere as much as possible, and promotes a cognitivist conception of public life that largely ignores the visceral dimensions of political argument.

To be fair, Rawls nowhere writes that religion solely is a cognitive matter, or that it is made up exclusively of consciously held beliefs that can readily be articulated into speech or thought. Arguably, consciously held beliefs are merely the one aspect of religion that he singles out as highly relevant for the political activity that he seeks to describe, namely the public exchange of justifications for political positions by citizens when matters of fundamental justice or constitutional essentials are at stake. Such an interpretation, however, already indicates a significant choice. It proceeds from the assumption that the consciously

132 Ibid., 38.
133 Ibid., 35.
134 Ibid., 25, drawing on Asad, *Genealogies of religion.*
135 Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 25.
136 Ibid., 25.

held beliefs that explain and justify the citizens' political positions always can (and should) be readily isolated from the cultural practices, concrete experiences and largely inarticulate dispositions with which they tend to be intertwined. But even in cases where such an act of isolation is possible, there are reasons to doubt whether it is always equally desirable.

First, there is the point that whether or not we recognize it, emotions and largely unconscious gut responses caused by past life experiences are likely to continue to affect our articulated beliefs. According to Connolly, secularist models of political discourse that fail to acknowledge this (including Rawls' model) are 'insufficiently alert to the layered density of political thinking and judgement.'[137] He argues that this 'forgetting of an entire register of thought-imbued intensities in which we participate' leads secularism 'to misrecognize itself and encourages it to advance dismissive interpretations of any culture or ethical practice that engages the visceral register of intersubjectivity actively.'[138]

A similar argument is made by Iris Marion Young in *Inclusion and Democracy*. She argues that an overly strong separation between 'pure,' rational speech and mere rhetoric, whereby the first tries to convince by argument and the second seeks to influence at a more emotional level, is misleading. Rhetoric is an aspect of all discourse, even if it tends to be recognized more often in some cases than in others. She notes that the speech patterns of many politicians and academics, for example, carry 'the rhetorical nuances of particular situated social positions and relations, which social conventions do not mark as rhetorical and particular in the same way that they notice others.'[139] Differences in style of expression tend to correspond with differences in social position:

> The speech culture of white, middle-class men tends to be more controlled, without significant gesture or emotion. The speech culture of women, racialized minorities, and working-class people on the other hand, often is, or is perceived to be, more excited and embodied, values more the expression of emotion, uses figurative language, modulates tones of voice, and gestures widely.[140]

Although Young recognizes that rational argument – 'an orderly chain of reasoning from premises to conclusion'[141] – is indispensable to political discussion,[142] she also notes that a

137 Ibid., 4.
138 Ibid., 29.
139 Young, *Inclusion and Democracy,* 63.
140 Ibid., 39-40.
141 Ibid., 37.
142 Ibid., 56.

one-sided emphasis on this type of communication is dangerous because it often entails a preference for styles of expression that are perceived to be relatively dispassionate, formal and disembodied over ones that are perceived to be more emotional and figurative.[143] A tacit identification of 'reasonable open public debate with polite, orderly, dispassionate gentlemanly argument'[144] sharpens existing inequalities in terms of access to political power between citizens in so far as it has the effect that the voices of marginalized people tend to be taken less seriously.

Young gives another reason why an exclusive focus on rational, justificatory argument is problematic: it depends on the availability of shared premises and a widely accepted interpretive framework for understanding the issues at hand. Recall that for Rawls, justification among citizens is to proceed 'from what is, or can be, held in common:'[145] the standards and principles that are implicitly and explicitly present in the liberal political culture in which all citizens already participate, and which for that reason can be assumed to be 'familiar and intelligible to the educated common sense of citizens generally.'[146] For this reason, Rawls sees the U.S. Supreme Court as the 'exemplar of public reason'[147] and suggests that citizens, when they engage with one another in the public sphere, ask themselves whether it would be legitimate for the Supreme Court to cite the reason that they are appealing to in one of its rulings. After all, the primary function of this court is to interpret and apply already established general principles to particular cases.

Young draws attention to the limits of this approach when she argues that, given the heterogeneous nature of contemporary democratic societies, in many cases of genuine political conflict, already shared premises and frameworks may well turn out to be unavailable.[148] Furthermore, groups with a history of marginalization may well find that the assumptions, terms and frameworks that are dominant in wider society are ill-suited for the expression of their particular experiences and concerns. If shared premises are absent, public debate can certainly help in bringing them about; however, this typically involves forms of communication between citizens that cannot be reduced to dispassionate, justificatory argument alone. In such situations, Young argues, storytelling and rhetoric can serve as indispensable means to make situated

143 Ibid., 39.
144 Ibid., 49.
145 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 100.
146 Ibid., 14.
147 Ibid., 231.
148 Young, *Inclusion and Democracy,* 56.

knowledge and particular perspectives more generally understood, as well as to challenge stereotypes that may be commonly held in the wider society.[149]

Likewise, Connolly points out that the political action of historically successful emancipation movements (including those of feminists, LGBTQ+ communities and African-Americans) involved not just orderly argument from shared premises, but also 'periodic, disruptive performances' that effected shifts in widely shared, largely implicit understandings of full personhood and justice.[150] He argues that 'argument or the establishment of simple facts'[151] did not suffice on its own in these cases because in the evaluative frameworks that were widely shared prior to their actions, the claims and identities of these groups were discounted as 'immoral, inferior, hysterical, sinful, incapacitated, unnatural, abnormal, irresponsible, monomaniacal, or sick.'[152] Like Young, then, Connolly claims that emancipatory movements overcame such resistance, not only or even primarily through rational argument, but also and importantly by actively engaging 'the visceral register,' that is, by means of rhetoric, demonstrations and storytelling.

Again, to be fair, Rawls does in fact mention situations in which it is permissible for political actors to go beyond the premises and frameworks that all participants hold in common. It is legitimate to do so, he argues, when society is not well-ordered and there is 'a profound division about constitutional essentials.'[153] For instance, those who opposed slavery on religious grounds in the nineteenth century, or those who like Martin Luther King declared racial segregation to be a 'sin' a hundred years later, were justified in doing so because they had good reasons to believe that 'the comprehensive reasons they appealed to were required to give sufficient strength to the political conception to be subsequently realized.'[154] In the text referred to here, Rawls discusses public justification by non-public reasons rather than the use of emotive rhetoric; however, these example do show that Rawls is not entirely silent on those situations when appeals to already commonly shared premises and frameworks do not suffice to settle political conflicts.

149 Ibid., 70-74. It is of interest for my purposes that Young in this context refers to the struggles that Indigenous peoples in Australia and North-America engage in to protect sites that are sacred in their spiritual traditions, and their use of stories and myth to convey the importance of these sites to a wider audience. Similar arguments can be found in James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

150 Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 67.

151 Ibid., 67.

152 Ibid., 68-69.

153 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 249.

154 Ibid., 251.

Connolly's problem with this aspect of Rawls' argument is the assumption that the question whether or not society is *already* sufficiently just and well-ordered can be answered conclusively on the basis of established practices *prior to* the political action of emancipatory movements that may challenge those practices. According to Connolly, Rawls' theory treats currently established conceptions of justice, personhood, suffering and discourse as 'the most true, natural or advanced,' that is, as the *final word* in a historic process of collective learning, thereby possibly fostering insensitive attitudes towards those forms of suffering that currently still remain under the threshold of our moral appreciation.[155] The assumption that the premises and frameworks that *currently* enjoy such a high degree of acceptance among the citizens that, in public fora, they are likely to be accepted as 'common sense' will provide us with sufficient criteria to evaluate any *future* contribution to public debate is what I will refer to as Rawls' 'finalism.'

Note how these objections against cognitivism and finalism reinforce each other: social movements that seek to introduce new, not widely familiar experiences and concerns into public deliberation often require the use of forms of communication other than justificatory argument in order to do this successfully. An exclusive focus on rational, justificatory argument as the primary form of political communication between citizens in the public sphere renders Rawls' account of politics insufficiently sensitive to the emergence of needs and identities within society that cannot be readily expressed in terms of those principles and evaluative frameworks that are currently already widely shared.

To conclude this section, in *Political Liberalism,* Rawls crucially affirmed that it is an inherent feature of liberal democratic societies that citizens will subscribe to a great variety of mutually incompatible views on the 'good' and on what makes human existence meaningful or valuable. His term for these views, 'comprehensive doctrines,' tellingly expresses both an ambition of inclusion, given its capacity to denote religious as well as non-religious philosophical commitments, as well as an inherent limitation, as what is taken to be politically relevant within these commitments is the dimension of propositional truth, in contradistinction to, for instance, the citizens' participation in collective cultural practices and the implicit dispositions and expectations that are fostered by these. This 'cognitivist' limitation relates to other important objections that have been brought to bear against Rawls' approach to the citizens' existential commitments within the public sphere: namely, first, that it is 'finalist' in that it appears to presume that those premises that are currently well-established enough to be widely accepted as 'common

155 Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 71.

sense' will suffice as criteria to judge any future contributions to political debate, thus leaving insufficient room for the introduction of new, not yet widely familiar or accepted principles and experiences, and second, that, by consequence, it is insufficiently sensitive to the persistence of asymmetrical power relations between the citizens. In what follows, I will examine to what extent Habermas' response to Rawls can meet these objections.

1.2. Jürgen Habermas

1.2.1. The post-secular and the institutional proviso

I will now turn to Jürgen Habermas, whose response to Rawls' revisions in *Political Liberalism* sparked much philosophical debate on the relation of secularization to modernity as well as on the relation of political actors' existential commitments to the political life of contemporary democracies. I will confine myself here to this specific phase of Habermas' long and prolific philosophical career,[156] as it is my goal to outline the implications of Habermas' turn to the 'post-secular' for his ethics of citizenship, and to contrast the latter with Rawls' proposal. Key to Habermas' approach are the concepts of the 'post-secular,' of the 'formal' and the 'informal' public sphere, and of the task of translation in which he requires secular and religious citizens to collaboratively engage.

Although Habermas speaks of a 'post-secular age' and of 'post-secular societies,' the term 'post-secular' is best understood to refer to a shift in consciousness.[157] In order to

156 Although references to religion show up in writings throughout Habermas' career, religion only became a central topic of his attention around the turn of the twenty-first century; Eduardo Mendietta, "Introduction," *Religion and Rationality. Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, ed. Jürgen Habermas and Eduardo Mendietta, (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Eduardo Mendietta, "Appendix: Religion in Habermas' work" in Calhoun, Mendietta and VanAntwerpen, *Habermas and Religion*; Michael Reder and Josef Schmidt, S.J., "Habermas and Religion' in Jürgen Habermas, Michael Reder, Josef Schmidt, Norbert Briskorn, and Friedo Ricken, *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 3-8. Habermas' contributions to the debate on religion, secularism and post-secularism were followed by *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019), a work in which he examines the historical roots of Modern philosophy as well as its relation to theological and metaphysical worldviews. I will not include this last work in my analysis here, in part because this book takes a more historical and genealogical approach, whereas I focus more on systematic issues, and in part because it is not directly needed for the purposes of the present chapter (to make clear how prominent models of the public sphere problematically leave out a variety of important aspects of the interaction between the citizens' existential commitments and their political activity).

157 José Casanova, "Exploring the Postsecular: Three Meanings of "the Secular" and Their Possible Transcendence" in Calhoun, Mendietta and VanAntwerpen, *Habermas and Religion*;

see this, it is worthwhile to consider the motivations behind his own intensified interest in questions around religion and secularism. One motivation was his realization, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent Iraq War, that globally speaking the political role of religion seemed to be growing rather than declining.[158] Like many sociologists and political philosophers, Habermas had long followed Weber in assuming that increasing social modernization would be accompanied by a progressive decline in adherence to religious beliefs and practices. However, such a characterization never fit the case of the United States; furthermore, in societies outside Europe and North America, modernization processes in recent decades instead seem to be accompanied by religious revitalization movements, which casts doubt over the tenability of this hypothesis.[159]

A second reason for Habermas' intensified engagement with religion is his unease with the negative effects of 'the politically uncontrolled dynamics of the global economy and global society.'[160] He is concerned that democracy and civic solidarity are being increasingly corroded by the uncontrolled forces of a globalized economy. As markets are 'assuming regulatory functions in domains of life that used to be held together by norms,'[161] faith in reason and democracy is gradually fading. In combination with 'the establishment of new technologies that deeply permeate substrates of the human person that used to be regarded as "natural,"' these developments contribute to a 'disruption of normative consciousness,' manifesting itself in a 'dwindling sensitivity to social pathologies, indeed, to social deprivation and suffering in general.'[162] Habermas thinks these negative effects may be remedied through a renewed engagement between religion and philosophy,

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Michele Dillon, "Jürgen Habermas and the Post-Secular Appropriation of Religion" in *The Post-Secular in Question,* ed. Philip S. Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York and London: New York University Press / Social Science Research Council, 2012), 256-257. Habermas himself says he uses the term to indicate a shift in consciousness: Habermas, "Reply to My Critics," in Calhoun, Mendietta and VanAntwerpen, *Habermas and Religion*, 348.

158 Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the "Public Use of Reason" by Secular and Religious Citizens," in Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 114-147. This chapter will hereafter be referenced as: Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008] to distinguish it from the 2006 version of this text.

159 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008]; Casanova, "Exploring the Postsecular," 27-48; Habermas, "Reply to My Critics," 348.

160 Jürgen Habermas, "Prepolitical Foundations of the Constitutional State?" in Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 107.

161 Ibid., 107.

162 Jürgen Habermas, "The Boundary between Faith and Knowledge: On the Reception and Contemporary Importance of Kant's Philosophy of Religion" in Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 239.

because religious traditions represent valuable 'cultural sources that nurture citizens' solidarity and their normative awareness;' for that reason, he argues that constitutional states have an interest in 'conserving' them.[163]

In the present situation, Habermas sees a potential for religious contributions to provide constructive contributions to political debate. He is strengthened in that hope by the conviction that in the history of Western thought, the assimilation of Christian concepts by philosophy resulted in 'a normatively charged network of concepts as responsibility, autonomy and justification, history and remembrance, rebirth, innovation and return, emancipation and fulfillment, renunciation, internalization and incarnation, individuality and community.' Although the meanings of these concepts have been transformed, the process of translation 'did not deflate them and did not exhaust their meaning.' [164]

In the historical contributions by churches and religious groups to the 'realization or defense of human rights,' like those made by the Civil Rights Movement, Habermas sees evidence that religious traditions can make valuable contributions to democratic discussion. Following Weithman in this respect, Habermas accepts that 'in well-established constitutional states churches and religious communities generally perform important functions for stabilizing and advancing a liberal political culture' and that if these groups 'were obliged to find an equivalent in a universally accessible language for every religious statement they pronounce,' this self-censorship would likely impair their beneficial influence.[165]

Both the acknowledgement that religious traditions are not in decline and the appreciation for their valuable contributions to public discussions fly in the face of secularist assumptions that long dominated the social sciences but now seem obsolete. Habermas uses the label 'post-secular' in order to express this; the term is his 'sociological description of a shift in consciousness in largely secular or "un-churched" societies that now have come to terms with the continued existence of religious communities, and with the influence of religious voices both in the national public sphere and on the global political stage.'[166]

However, Habermas' use of the term is not merely descriptive; he employs it in a normative way, arguing in favour of a model of law and politics that enables the inclusion of religious arguments and that, importantly, includes an ethics of citizenship

163 Habermas, "Prepolitical Foundations of the Constitutional State?" 111.
164 Ibid., 110; Jürgen Habermas, "Religious Tolerance as a Pacemaker for Cultural Rights" in Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 264.
165 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 124-125.
166 Habermas, "Reply to My Critics," 348.

encompassing the mutual obligations of citizens under the conditions outlined above.[167] Habermas argues that religious citizens should, under certain conditions, be permitted to voice their comprehensive views in public debate, and that secular citizens cannot simply discard religious arguments as now irrelevant remainders of a bygone age or as being devoid of cognitive contents. He presents his position as an intervention in the debates surrounding Rawls' account of public reason, and proposes several modifications to this account as a way to meet the objections that have been raised against it.

Following Weithman and Wolterstorff, Habermas argues that the demand to provide secular translations for every religiously motivated public political statement would constitute an unreasonable psychological burden for religious citizens. He accepts this argument because of the integral role that religion plays in the life of a person of faith: '[a] devout person conducts her daily existence *on the basis* of her faith. Genuine faith is not merely a doctrine, something believed, but it is also a source of energy that the person of faith taps performatively to nurture her whole life.'[168] This 'totalizing' character of religion means that to require of those citizens who see their religion as the basis of *all* their actions and decisions that they separate between their religious and their political existence 'is to ignore the realities of a devout life, a life *guided* by faith.'[169] Every 'ought' presupposes a 'can,' he points out, and therefore the integrity objection is 'compelling.'[170] The 'proviso' that Rawls argues for is overly restrictive, according to Habermas:[171] '[w]e cannot infer from the secular character of the state a direct personal obligation on all citizens to supplement their publicly expressed religious convictions by equivalents in a generally accessible language.'[172]

Although Habermas wants to allow religious arguments in the public sphere, he also insists that the state needs to remain 'neutral in the face of competing world views,' distancing himself in this respect from Weithman and Wolterstorff.[173] By consequence, much like Rawls, Habermas faces the problem of reconciling the neutrality of the state on the one hand with the inclusion of religious voices on the other. Before outlining how he seeks to solve this dilemma, I want to discuss another reason why Habermas rejects

167 Maeve Cooke, "A Secular State for a Postsecular society? Postmetaphysical Theory and the Place of Religion," *Constellations* 14, No 2 (2007), 227.
168 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 127.
169 Ibid., 129; Habermas' emphasis.
170 Ibid., 127-128.
171 Ibid., 122-123.
172 Ibid., 129.
173 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 11.

Rawls' duty of civility, because it reflects deeper philosophical differences between his and Rawls' respective projects: in a nutshell, Habermas has a more ambitious view of the goals of public reason than Rawls.

Recall that Rawls expects citizens to accept the 'burdens of judgment;' they have to agree that it is unlikely that all will ever be able to agree on the whole truth as they see it. Rather than voicing their comprehensive doctrines in public discussion, they are to accept the political conception of justice, the principles of which are assumed to be already implicitly present in the political culture of constitutional democracies, as a guideline for their contributions in public debate. For Habermas, this scenario is problematic because the 'citizens are denied the "moral point of view" from which they could develop and justify a political conception *in joint public deliberation*.'[174] Democratic opinion formation is based 'on the moral act of mutual recognition which is expressed in taking one's fellow citizen's perspective and learning from it,' and this 'includes, rather than brackets off, the other's convictions of what is true.'[175] The legitimacy of legal norms cannot be separated from their status as the outcomes of a democratic procedure by which the participants aim to arrive at a shared perspective; the citizens are to accept the same norms *for the same reasons.*[176] Habermas holds that comprehensive views should be expressed in, rather than excluded from, public debate amongst citizens, because only then can they develop a truly shared perspective; it is only through the development of such a perspective that citizens can develop the sense of solidarity on which modern democracies rely.

Connected to the more encompassing task that Habermas attributes to public deliberation are his objections to two distinctions that are important to Rawls' proposal. The first of these is Rawls' rather sharp and fixed distinction between private and public, which Habermas attributes to a 'liberal' emphasis on the protection of citizens' private interests against state intrusions and a corresponding neglect of the 'solidarity-building consequences of deliberation.'[177] The boundary between what is public and what is private is not a hard and sharp one, 'especially in view of the expansion of state-regulated areas, e.g. in welfare

174 Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other. Studies in Political Theory*, ed. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo de Greiff (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 84.

175 Maureen Junker-Kenny, "Between Postsecular Society and the Neutral State: Religion as a Resource for Public Reason" in Nigel Biggar and Linda Hogan, eds., *Religious Voices in Public Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 62.

176 Ciaran Cronin and Pablo de Greiff, "Editors' Introduction" in Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other. Studies in Political Theory*, ed. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo de Greiff (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), xviii.

177 Mark Redhead, "Reasoning between Athens and Jerusalem," *Polity* 47 (2015), 5.

provisions.'[178] Rather than being mandated prior to deliberation among the citizens, it should be the *outcome* of these deliberations: '[i]t is left to the democratic process continually to define and redefine the precarious boundaries between the private and the public so as to secure equal freedoms for all citizens in the form of both private and public autonomy.'[179]

If the line between public and private is not as clear-cut as Rawls assumes, the same is true for the boundary between constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice on the one hand and less fundamental political issues on the other. Habermas rejects the latter distinction as 'unrealistic in the case of modern legal systems in which basic rights directly affect concrete legislation and adjudication, so that virtually any controversial legal issue can be heightened into an issue of principle.'[180] Like the boundary between public and private, the distinction between constitutional essentials and other political issues should in Habermas' view be the outcome of public reason, rather than being mandated before any deliberation has taken place.

So for Habermas, the public sphere is the site where citizens, their divergent perspectives notwithstanding, co-operate in what is a far more ambitious and open-ended project than the one envisioned by Rawls. The mutual perspective-taking involved in Habermas' view requires that many of the premises which Rawls assumes the citizens will take for granted, and which he locates in the shared, established political culture, in fact remain open for further discussion. *Contra* Rawls, it also requires citizens to introduce their perspective on the truth as they see it into public debate, their religious perspectives included.

In order to solve the dilemma between state neutrality on the one hand and the inclusion of religious voices on the other, Habermas makes use of a distinction between a 'formal' and an 'informal' public sphere. As pointed out in 1.1.2, for Rawls, public reason applies 'only to those deliberations which form part of the official process for arriving at binding decisions that will have the force of law.'[181] When Rawls refers to the public forum or the public sphere, it is these deliberations that he has in mind. Habermas, on the other hand, uses the term 'public sphere' in a much broader way, referring to 'the whole array of complex networks of multiple and overlapping publics constituted through the critical communication of individuals, groups, associations, social movements, journalistic enterprises and other civic institutions.'[182]

178 Junker-Kenny, "Between Postsecular Society and the Neutral State," 65.
179 Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 101.
180 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 123, n18.
181 Larmore, "Public Reason," 381.
182 Lincoln Dahlberg, "The Habermasian Public Sphere: Taking Difference Seriously?" *Theory and Society* 34, No. 2 (2005), 112.

When political deliberation takes place amongst citizens in settings such as churches, social clubs and universities (which Rawls would consider part of the 'background culture'), this corresponds with what Habermas calls the 'informal public sphere.'[183] By contrast, when political deliberation takes place at the level of parliaments, courts and ministries, and is formally part of the process of lawmaking, we may say that it takes place in the 'formal public sphere.' Whereas Rawls tends to emphasize the distinction between the public sphere and the background culture, Habermas pays more explicit attention to the ways in which the formal and the informal public sphere interact with each other, emphasizing 'the need for a permanent feedback relation between the opinion-forming, informal public sphere and the formally organized, legislative and democratic decision-making bodies.'[184] He sees the deliberations of the informal public sphere as an unregulated, but nonetheless integral part of the democratic process.[185]

Habermas requires that citizens 'know and accept that only secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold separating the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries, and administrations.'[186] He presents this 'institutional proviso' as a more modest version of Rawls' requirement; as long as their utterances take place in the informal public sphere, citizens may freely express themselves in public political debate in terms drawn directly from their religious worldview, even if they never offer a secular translation.[187] For government officials and politicians, on the other hand, the demand to use only secular language continues to hold.

Habermas sees the citizens' acceptance of such an 'institutional filter' as necessary in order to 'exclude the possibility that policies and legal programs will be implemented solely on the basis of the specific religious or confessional beliefs of a ruling majority.'[188] This would render decisions illegitimate, because 'the democratic procedure owes its

183 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 9.

184 Maeve Cooke, "A Secular State for a Postsecular Society," 228.

185 Habermas, "Reply to My Critics," 371-372.

186 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 130.

187 However, in two regards, Habermas' institutional proviso is arguably *more*, rather than *less*, restrictive than Rawls' proviso. First, whereas the second's proviso only applies to constitutional issues and matters of basic justice, for Habermas all political issues are affected. Gosselin-Tapp, "Lost in Translation," 865. Second, whereas Rawls presents his proviso as a moral, but not a legal limitation, Habermas' institutional proviso is in fact a legal measure. Finlayson, "No Proviso," 446.

188 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 133. Here Habermas is criticizing Paul Weithman's argument, which I discussed above.

power to generate legitimacy to the fact that it includes all participants; for the justified presumption of rational outcomes rests on this in the long run.'[189] Laws need to be based on reasons that are accessible to all members of society because otherwise democratic decision-making fails to be truly inclusive.

In the informal public sphere, Habermas requires religious and secular citizens to work together to develop a shared perspective by identifying legal norms that they all can accept for the same reasons. Part of this collaborative effort is to translate the results of their discussions into a generally accessible language, so that these results are fit to be introduced in the formally organized democratic decision-making process. Habermas argues that, although for the citizens, this certainly is a demanding enterprise, in his solution at least the burdens of living in a post-secular society are shared more evenly than in Rawls' proposal. Religious and secular citizens alike need to develop a mentality that is characterized by epistemic self-criticism in order for them to exercise their 'communication and participation right […] not only in their enlightened self-interest but also with a view to promoting the common good.'[190] Religious citizens also need to accept that only secular reasons count in the formal public sphere, which is 'the price to be paid for the neutrality of the state toward competing worldviews.'[191] On the other hand, 'the role of democratic citizenship assumes a mentality on the part of secular citizens that is no less demanding than the corresponding mentality of their religious counterparts,'[192] for they need 'to determine the relation between faith and knowledge in a *self-critical* manner'[193] and to understand 'their non-agreement with religious conceptions as a *disagreement* that is *reasonable* to expect.'[194] This means that, rather than simply discarding religious traditions and communities as 'archaic relics of premodern societies persisting into the present,'[195] they need to take religious contributions seriously, and even to actively co-operate with their religious peers in finding secular translations for the hidden cognitive content that may be present in religious statements.[196]

189 Ibid., 134.
190 Habermas, "Prepolitical Foundations of the Constitutional State?" 105.
191 Redhead, "Reasoning between Athens and Jerusalem," 6.
192 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 143.
193 Habermas, '"Religious Tolerance as a Pacemaker for Cultural Rights," 264.
194 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 139; Habermas, "Equal Treatment of Cultures and the Limits of Postmodern Liberalism," in Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 309-310.
195 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 138.
196 Ibid., 130-131.

Habermas hopes that citizens will acquire the requisite mentalities through 'complementary learning processes.' In a practical manner, they can do this by their very participation in the political practices of a constitutional democracy, which includes the mutual perspective-taking: 'civic solidarity [is] produced, renewed, and deepened through the democratic process,'[197] that is, 'in the medium of politics itself.'[198] Through co-operation in political practice, citizens make the constitutional principles their own, 'not only in the abstract sense' but also through concrete experience.[199] Deliberation amongst the citizens will not only result in an agreement on legal norms, but also in the citizens acquiring the mentalities and sense of civic solidarity on which the stability of a constitutional democracy ultimately depends.

In sum, Habermas rejects Rawls' proposal in part because he finds the integrity objection compelling, and in part because he thinks Rawls' account of public reason is not ambitious enough. In his view, public deliberation involves deeper, more open-ended dialogue by which citizens establish legal norms that all find compelling because they have all reached a shared perspective on the truth. Contra Rawls, this requires them to introduce their perspectives on the whole truths as they see it – their comprehensive doctrines, as Rawls would say – into public discussion. Furthermore, religious and secular citizens are to co-operatively translate their findings into a language that is universally accessible. This last requirement, of universal accessibility, constitutes one of the most important continuities between Rawls' and Habermas' proposals; both insist that citizens need to engage in some form of translation in order to guarantee the neutrality of the state. However, crucially, for Habermas, it is only the 'formal public sphere' in which universally accessible language is required. It is in the informal public sphere that citizens engage in complementary learning processes as they to co-operate in finding universally accessible translations which subsequently can be introduced into the formal public sphere. This explicit incorporation of an 'informal public sphere' into the model gives Habermas' theory of the public sphere a much wider scope of public life than the one forwarded by Rawls. The next subsection will take a more detailed look on the extent to which this modification answers the objections that I have discussed.

197 Habermas, "Equal Treatment of Cultures and the Limits of Postmodern Liberalism," 275.

198 Jürgen Habermas, "Prepolitical Foundations of the Constitutional State?" 106.

199 Ibid., 106. Habermas also considers it possible for religious traditions to contribute to civic solidarity, which is one more reason why he thinks that the constitutional state has an interest in preserving these traditions, especially in the face of contemporary crises of meaning caused by an uncontrolled global economy. Ibid., 106, 111.

1.2.2. Objections to Habermas' proposal

Habermas' proposal can be seen as an effort to meet some of the objections that have been raised against Rawls' proposal while also remaining true to central principles that motivate Rawls' project. In this section, I will revisit the objections against Rawls that I discussed in sections 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 (the integrity objection, the objection against finalism, and the one-sided focus on rational discourse) and discuss to what extent Habermas' account meets them.

As we have seen, Habermas' view of the goals of public reason is more ambitious than Rawls' perspective; this is the case both in the sense that he wants the citizens to agree on collectively binding laws *for the same reasons*, and in the sense that he emphasizes that citizens, by reasoning together, also performatively build dispositions of civic solidarity to each other. It follows from this more ambitious agenda that Habermas affirms that citizens should articulate their comprehensive views to one another, at least in the informal public sphere, and that he also objects to the rather sharp distinctions that Rawls draws between private and public, and between constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice on the one hand and less fundamental political matters on the other: such distinctions, Habermas maintains, ought to be the outcome, rather than the starting point of debate. In these respects, Habermas' account of public reason seems clearly less finalist than the one offered by Rawls.

As we have seen, Habermas' efforts to include religious contributions to public discussion are in part a response to the integrity objection. As the liberal state is committed to protecting religious freedom, it cannot impose requirements upon its citizens that cannot be reconciled with an authentic life of faith. Furthermore, for secular citizens, the fact that religious contributions can be of great value to public deliberation constitutes a good reason to take these contributions seriously and to actively co-operate with their religious citizens in translating them into a universally accessible language.

In relation to the helpful connection that Weithman draws between the integrity objection and asymmetrical power relations among the citizens, it is noteworthy that Habermas does not see the presence of unequal social power relations amongst citizens as the main reason to reject Rawls' proviso; rather, this is formed by the more general principle that every 'Ought' presupposes a 'Can.'[200] In my view, this shift away from power differences is, in a sense, unfortunate. Consider how in Europe, post-2001 discussions of

200 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 127.

(post-)secularism and the public role of religion have to no small degree been a response to a growing trend of popular anxiety about the presence and public visibility of Muslim citizens, an anxiety often termed 'islamophobia,' that has manifested itself in increased electoral support for far-right parties, in the adoption of laws specifically outlawing expressions of Muslim faith, and also in publicists and politicians making the exclusionary claim that the European continent has an essentially 'Christian,' 'Judeo-Christian' or 'secular Christian' identity.[201] A political climate in which one group of citizens is more likely to be perceived and characterized as alien and/or as lacking the requisite authority to make legitimate claims, rather than as equal members of society and as equal contributors to public deliberation, would clearly obstruct the type of equitable dialogue between citizens that Habermas envisions. In this historical context, which forms the direct background to Habermas' writings on religion and the public sphere, Weithman's central argument that religious traditions can provide politically disenfranchised minorities with a sense of pride and with other psychological and material resources for political mobilization seems of obvious relevance. It is unfortunate, in this respect, that when Habermas defends a view of religious traditions as respectable conversation partners capable of making valuable contributions to democratic debate, these efforts tend to be limited to the Jewish and the Christian religions.[202]

201 For helpful discussions of the connection between islamophobia, Europe's 'Christian' or 'secular identity' and questions of secularism, see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Talal Asad, *Secular Translations*; Tariq Modood, "Is There a Crisis of Postsecularism in Western Europe?" in Rosi Braidotti, Bolette Blaagaard, Tobijn de Graauw, and Eva Midden, eds., *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere: Postsecular Publics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

202 For instance, Habermas frequently emphasizes the 'Judeo-Christian' roots of Enlightenment ideals like egalitarianism, universalism, individual autonomy and rationality; examples include Habermas, "Religion and the public sphere;" Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005); and Habermas, "Equal Treatment of Cultures and the Limits of Postmodern Liberalism." He also asserts that contemporary Judaism and Christianity 'no longer have any fundamental difficulties with the egalitarian structure and the individualistic character of the liberal order,' suggesting that for other religions, this is not (yet) the case; Habermas, "Equal Treatment of Cultures and the Limits of Postmodern Liberalism," 305. When he discusses the possibility of 'alternative modernities,' what he has in mind is non-Western societies *in the future* finding functional equivalents to innovations that Western societies have already made *in the past;* ibid., 310; Jürgen Habermas and Eduardo Mendietta, 'A Conversation about God and the World' in: Jürgen Habermas and Eduardo Mendietta (ed.), *Religion and Rationality. Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA 2002). Overall, he thus posits an exceptional relation between a 'Judeo-Christian' tradition and 'liberal,' 'modern' or 'secular' values, in effect de-linking other religions from rationality, leaving them without 'claim to modernity,

Habermas' recent contributions still presuppose a highly cognitive view of religion, one typically associated with 'modern' liberal Protestantism. For this reason, his contribution is vulnerable to the previously discussed objections against Rawls' cognitivism. Michele Dillon, for example, argues that Habermas 'construes religion primarily in cognitivist terms – as ideas and ethical knowledge claims, and ones that can be translated into secular argumentation.'[203] His approach leaves out important aspects of what religion also is – it 'marginalizes the centrality of spirituality, emotion and tradition.'[204] Because the 'visceral emotion many attach to religion or spirituality inhibits the translation of feeling and experiences into a rationally coherent secular idiom,'[205] the mutual sharing of perspectives that Habermas calls for will have to be far more complicated than the image of 'translation' suggests. Similarly, Craig Calhoun objects to Habermas' use of the term because it 'implies a highly cognitive model of understanding, independent of inarticulate connections among meanings or the production of meaning rather than in passive contemplation.'[206] And according to Maeve Cooke, Habermas' view of public deliberation is one-sidedly conceived purely in terms of the exchange of reasons, ignoring (or invalidating) the role of what she calls 'non-argumentative' factors (like personal history and particular, concrete experiences) in bringing about shifts in perspective.[207] Much like Connolly and Young, these authors are highly critical of a model of discourse that leaves out those aspects of understanding that cannot readily be described as articulated thought or speech, or that cannot be represented independently from concrete experiences such as participation in collective cultural practices.

In respect to Rawls, I wrote earlier that he nowhere claims that religion is *exclusively* about consciously held beliefs and that an alternative reading is possible according to

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emancipation, or human rights.' Rosi Braidotti, Bolette Blaagaard, Tobijn de Graauw, and Eva Midden, 'Introductory Notes' in Braidotti et al., *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere*, 2. The same point is made by Talal Asad, *Secular Translations,* 49. In this regard, it is also interesting to note that although Habermas' recent writings present Christianity as a potential resource and valued conversation partner for post-secular philosophy, in these same writings Islam tends to feature almost exclusively as a challenge for the Enlightenment project, not unlike the fundamentalist forms of Christian faith that Habermas rejects. For example, Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 114-119; Habermas, "Equal Treatment of Cultures and the Limits of Postmodern Liberalism."

203 Dillon, "Jürgen Habermas and the Post-Secular Appropriation of Religion," 260.

204 Ibid., 250.

205 Ibid., 260.

206 Calhoun, "Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere," 85.

207 Maeve Cooke, "Violating Neutrality? Religious Validity Claims and Democratic Legitimacy" in Calhoun, Mendietta and VanAntwerpen, *Habermas and Religion*, 268.

which these beliefs just happen to be the one aspect of religion that is politically relevant when citizens justify their political positions to one another. A similar argument can be made for Habermas.[208] Several of his remarks indicate an awareness of the non-cognitive aspects of religion, such as his already quoted observation that 'genuine faith' is more than 'merely a doctrine, something believed.'[209] This statement would likely be welcomed by the critics discussed above. Connolly's description of the visceral register as consisting of energies and intensities which can be performatively modified through various cultural strategies and practices, and his use of Asad's interpretation of Christian ritual in this light, seem to fit with Habermas' description of religion as a performatively tapped source of energy. In these lines, Habermas arguably displays some acknowledgement of what Connolly terms the visceral register, or what Dillon and Calhoun would call non-cognitive elements of religion.

Another indication that Habermas shows more acknowledgement for the intertwinement of concrete experience, articulated beliefs and inarticulate attitudes is that he expresses the hope that the mentalities that individuals in society require in order to be responsible citizens can be acquired, in a concrete rather than in an abstract sense, by means of active participation in actual political decision-making. This statement helps to shift our view from Rawls' rather exclusive focus on consciously held beliefs by introducing practice and experience more explicitly into the account of politics. Habermas, in other words, moves closer to Rawls' critics in showing more explicit acknowledgement for the performative effects of concrete experience on political dispositions and the development of political skills. This, in combination with the introduction of the concept of an 'informal public sphere' where many of these political experiences would naturally take place, represents an important step in bringing back some of the 'cultural depth and density' that secularist accounts of politics, according to Connolly, tend to 'dredge out of public life.'[210]

In comparison to Rawls, then, Habermas expresses a somewhat more explicit acknowledgement of the non-doctrinal, performative and experiential dimensions of the worldviews to which citizens adhere and which motivate them towards taking political action. In light of this, it seems fitting that in the texts under consideration, he is much

208 Such a more generous view of Habermas' model of the public sphere is proposed, for instance, by Dahlberg, "The Habermasian Public Sphere." Although he does not refer to religion specifically in this particular text, an interpretation that is more open to 'aesthetic-affective modes of communication' (115) would arguably be more open to religious groups as well.

209 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2008], 127.

210 Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 22-23.

more inclined to speak of 'religion' or 'faith' than of 'comprehensive doctrines,' the term preferred by Rawls. But note that whereas Rawls explicitly coined the term 'comprehensive doctrines' to inclusively refer to religious *as well as* secular outlooks, there is a clear tendency in Habermas' discussion to frame religious outlooks as 'special cases' that, in part due to their non-doctrinal content, from a secular perspective pose unique problems for the public justification of collectively binding laws.[211] By contrast, as Connolly, Cécile Laborde, Maeve Cooke and others have argued, non-doctrinal dimensions are by no means unique to those outlooks that are commonly referred to as 'religious.'[212] I will have more to say on this in the following chapters; for now, suffice it to say that throughout the rest of this dissertation, I choose to speak of the citizens' 'existential commitments' or 'existential foundations,' rather than of 'comprehensive doctrines' or 'religions,' because I aim to facilitate reflection on the political role of the commitments that underlie and structure the citizens' understanding of what is just, good, authoritative and meaningful, including 'religious' as well as 'secular' commitments, without reductively considering these commitments in terms of doctrine alone.[213]

Importantly, notwithstanding Habermas' abovementioned isolated remarks that suggest a more multi-dimensional understanding of existential commitments and of public life, he ultimately does not break with the cognitivist assumptions behind Rawls'

211 Cooke, "Violating Neutrality?"

212 Ibid.; Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*;' Cécile Laborde, *Liberalism's Religion*.

213 There is a similarity here with Cécile Laborde's argument in Cécile Laborde, *Liberalism's Religion*. She argues that religious citizens and non-religious citizens alike have ethical commitments that underlie and structure their sense of who they are and of what 'their life is fundamentally about' (204), and that asking them to violate such commitments involves a violation of their integrity (197-238). Laborde terms these commitments 'integrity-protecting commitments,' or 'IPCs' (203-204) and differentiates between obligation-IPCs (commitments that impose duties that one cannot ignore without violating one's integrity) and identity-IPCs (commitments that motivate practices that are non-obligatory but that do sustain the citizens' sense of identity and meaning) (215-217). I agree with Laborde that it is useful to see such commitments as a feature of citizens more generally, rather than viewing religion as a 'special case.' Moreover, I agree with her that such commitments are often connected to 'specific *actions and practices*' and appreciate how her theory correspondingly accommodates 'practice-centered, embodied conceptions of religion' rather than assuming a cognitivist understanding of religion that one-sidedly focuses on 'antecedent beliefs' (205; Laborde's emphasis). Laborde's IPCs correspond to what I call existential commitments; however, as will become clear in the following chapters, in comparison to Laborde, my focus in this dissertation is not so much on the protection of the citizens' integrity against disproportionate burdens (221-229) or majority bias (229-237) as it is on understanding how the meaning-making practices by which citizens performatively connect to and build upon their fundamental commitments relate to questions of power and authority.

proposal. Faith may be about 'more' than doctrine alone, but this 'more' – emotion, tradition, participation in collective cultural practices, concrete experiences and widely shared but largely inarticulate dispositions – remains by definition excluded from public consideration in so far as it cannot be translated. As his insistence on the model of translation indicates, for Habermas, public deliberation in the end largely remains an affair of citizens co-operatively exchanging, testing and translating validity claims that can be presented without reference to concrete experiences such as participation in collective cultural practices.

An overly cognitivist approach hampers the usefulness of Habermas' model for understanding the obstacles that citizens may be confronted with when they make their claims in public on the basis of their more comprehensive views. For instance, as Christoph Baumgartner argues, the controversies surrounding the so-called 'Muhammad Cartoons' did not revolve around the translation of religious convictions into universally accessible arguments, but rather around the profound offence felt by devout Muslims who experience a close relation to the prophet Muhammad as central to their identity, and around their experiences of social marginalization. Even though the offence was unintelligible to many non-Muslim Europeans, the communicative problems that were involved here are not fruitfully interpreted in terms of the translation of religious beliefs because they included particular, visceral experiences as well as issues of social exclusion.[214]

Given the importance that many religious people attach to those aspects of religion that Habermas' model of translation in the informal public sphere seems to leave out, one can wonder how far the inclusivity of his model actually goes. Before they can participate in the collaborative effort of translation that he envisions, many people of faith will first need to isolate a set of articulated propositions from other, non-cognitive elements that are present in their religion, and to agree that only these propositions are 'fit' for introduction into public debate; in other words, they would be required to

214 Drawing on Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, edited by T. Asad, W. Brown, J. Butler, and S. Mahmood, 64–100 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009), Baumgartner points out that these visceral aspects include an experience of religion as a 'habituated embodied practice' and of the believer's relation to Muhammad as a relationship of 'intimacy and similitude,' noting that this implies a markedly different perspective on religion than the more liberal or Protestant one, such as the one still implied by much of Habermas' account, which instead understands it first and foremost as a set of articulated creeds to which believers intellectually assent. Christoph Baumgartner, "Re-Examining an Ethics of Citizenship in Postsecular Societies" in Braidotti et al., *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere*, 88-89.

develop a more 'modern' or 'liberal Protestant' stance towards their own faith.[215] This seems hard to square with Habermas' own statement that the liberal state is committed to the protection of all religions equally and 'may not demand anything of its religious citizens which cannot be reconciled with a life that is led authentically "from faith."'[216] A 'Protestant' emphasis on articulated and possibly translatable propositions over other, non-cognitive aspects of their faith may well be no less artificial to the believers' minds than the distinction between political and religious aspects of their lives which Habermas recognizes to constitute a violation of the believers' integrity.

Habermas hopes that the requisite transformations in religious consciousness will come about through 'learning processes' by which believers 'modernize' their faith and learn to cope with the pluralism that is a feature of contemporary societies. However, it is far from evident that the believers' adoption of a cognitivist stance to their own religion would represent an advance in terms of their ability to cope with modern conditions of plurality. One could argue instead (as for instance Connolly does) that practice, experience, emotion and largely inarticulate dispositions inevitably continue to shape articulated beliefs, and that these non-cognitive elements can be valuable resources for fostering solidarity between citizens adhering to a variety of existential commitments within modern, pluralist societies.[217]

In sum, Habermas' view of democratic politics, by way of its incorporation of an 'informal' public sphere, does set the stage for a 'thicker' view of politics that, in comparison to the model offered by Rawls, seems more capable to accommodate the shifts in understanding that have historically been brought about by emancipatory movements such as the Civil Rights Movement; furthermore, he explicitly recognizes that existential commitments encompass more than believed content. This goes some way to meeting the objections that were raised against Rawls' account. That said, Habermas' account continues to take for granted a highly cognitive understanding of both existential commitments and political life in the sense that the collaborative learning that he seeks to make room for remains conceived in terms of articulated beliefs that can potentially be 'translated' into universally acceptable truth claims. The public controversies that movements like the Civil Rights Movement participated in, by contrast, often involved widely held group images that reinforced social power inequalities amongst citizens in ways that a highly

215 Ibid.

216 Jürgen Habermas, "An Awareness of What is Missing" in: Habermas et al., *An Awareness of What is Missing*, 21.

217 Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, esp. 25-29, 175-177.

cognitive model of public deliberation are ill-equipped to recognize. While Habermas' account of the public sphere is commendable for explicitly incorporating a space for such movements, its cognitivist focus still leaves us without theoretical equipment to make sense of non-deliberative manifestations of existential commitments within the public sphere.

1.3. Conclusion

In this first chapter, I have reconstructed the debate between Rawls and Habermas with the aim of demonstrating that, despite a range of accommodations in recent decades, the most prominent philosophical accounts of religion in the public sphere retain, to varying degrees, a predominantly cognitivist approach to the citizens' existential commitments as well as to the political life of contemporary democracies. In these accounts, religion still features primarily as a collection of discursively rendered creeds while politics still features primarily as the rational exchange of stated opinions. This continued focus on propositions which believers and citizens can rationally assent to is exemplified by the term 'translation,' the favoured metaphor by which these accounts refer to constructive efforts of collaboration between citizens adhering to a variety of existential commitments.

As we have seen, this cognitivist approach is especially problematic from the vantage point of democratic equality. As a range of authors has demonstrated, the conscious as well as the less-than-fully conscious criteria by which participants in the public sphere evaluate each other's political contributions cannot be neatly isolated from their engagement in other collective cultural practices; moreover, informal power differences within contemporary democracies continue to co-determine which collective cultural practices and views any given political actor is likely to be exposed to and thus to participate in. Taken together, this underscores that the great variety of citizens' perspectives within contemporary democratic societies is causally connected to the continued presence of unequal power relations within formally democratic societies. If we seek to understand how citizens adhering to a multitude of mutually incompatible viewpoints can fairly and democratically coexist, it is essential to note that these power differences are not exclusively situated on a conscious level, but are also implicitly carried in stories, images, collective cultural practices, and so on. Consequently, it is to be expected that the citizens' efforts to tackle these differences do not exclusively take the shape of deliberate argument but also of various other activities, including ones that draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making, such as processions, vigils, prayer circles, etc., by which elements of the social imaginary can be performatively challenged and/or affirmed.

All of this establishes the need for an interpretive model by which we can approach political actors' public expressions of their core existential commitments within the political sphere without taking a reductive view of these commitments as discursively rendered creeds and of politics as a rational exchange of stated opinions, which is what this thesis seeks to help to develop. The next logical step in doing this is to examine more closely those forms of political action that, as they do not have a propositional character, do not seem likely candidates for any collaborative 'translation' effort but that nevertheless seek to effect political change. As we shall see in the coming chapters, such instances of political action frequently build upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making, notably including religious ones, in their efforts to render society more just and inclusive.

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2

Citizenship, sociocultural interventions and authority

2.0. Introduction

As the next step towards an interpretive model by which we can approach political actors' public expressions of their core existential commitments within the political sphere without taking a reductive view of these commitments as discursively rendered creeds and of politics as a rational exchange of stated opinions, in this chapter I will propose a theoretical vocabulary that enables reflection on and discussion of non-discursive expressions of the political actor's existential commitments in the public sphere. Later on, I will develop this vocabulary more fully and then elaborate on the relation between the kind of political expressions that I describe here and the ones that were at the centre of the theoretical models which I discussed in the previous chapter.

I will start by drawing a distinction between two types of contribution to the public sphere: deliberative argument and sociocultural interventions (2.1). I focus on the second type, arguing that these interventions represent important avenues for citizens to actualize their democratic citizenship. I will do so by means of an elaboration of the effects of sociocultural interventions, first, on the target audiences that do not (yet) assent to the perspectives disclosed by the interventions, and second, on the authors of sociocultural interventions themselves, as well as on those who already agree with the authors to a sufficient degree to regard the contribution's disclosed perspectives as their own. Because the first set of effects concerns the perceptions of citizens other than the contributors themselves, I will refer to them here as 'external effects' of sociocultural interventions; correspondingly, I will use the term 'internal effects' to denote the impact that sociocultural interventions can have on the contributors and their politically kindred

spirits. Both effects are of interest for political philosophers because they affect the power dynamics between the citizens.

I will try to bring out these points using two examples drawn from recent political life in North America: first, a poster used in the 2017 demonstrations surrounding the inauguration of Donald Trump as president of the United States; and second, the activities of Idle No More, an Indigenous grassroots movement that emerged in Canada in the winter of 2012-2013. After introducing my first example (2.2.1), I will introduce some other concepts to elucidate the workings of sociocultural interventions (2.2.2-2.2.4), namely 'perceived authority,' 'speaker authority,' and 'markers of authority.' Then, I will show how these concepts apply to the example, distinguishing between two interrelated external effects that sociocultural interventions have on those that do not, as of yet, agree with the perspectives that sociocultural interventions disclose (2.3). I will argue that sociocultural interventions can be employed to influence widely shared perceptions of who can and who cannot legitimately participate in democratic decision-making processes. Furthermore, I will argue that through sociocultural interventions, citizens can also make available alternative interpretations on and evaluations of the cultural elements that underlie political debate, thus increasing the perceived authority associated with these elements. By doing so, they can enhance the likelihood that their own future contributions to public debate will elicit the attention or assent of their addressees.

It is worthwhile to explicitly state at the outset that although the sociocultural interventions that I will use as examples here represent (in my interpretation, at least) efforts to bring about a greater degree of democratic equality, and thus potentially to lay the foundation for deliberative argument to occur on a more equal footing, there is nothing in my definition of sociocultural interventions that requires an underlying democratic or emancipatory agenda. On the contrary, sociocultural interventions, much like deliberative argument, can be employed in order to achieve a great variety of political goals; they can challenge as well as maintain sociopolitical inequalities.[218] While anti-democratic and

218 As an example, consider the notorious 'Unite the Right' rally that took place in August 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia. In the aftermath, the Washington Post published an article explaining the symbolism of the many far-right posters, placards and other paraphernalia that were on display there. These political expressions also fall under my definition of sociocultural interventions, even though their political message is quite obviously at odds with the democratic and emancipatory concerns of the movements that inspired my account. Washington Post staff, "Deconstructing the Symbols and Slogans Spotted in Charlottesville," *Washington Post*, 8 August, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/local/charlottesville-videos/.

anti-emancipatory movements are not my primary interest here, the reality that these groups *also* employ sociocultural interventions does support the broader point that the theoretical frameworks by which we make sense of political interactions in the public sphere should incorporate the conceptual equipment by which these interactions and their effects can be named and discussed. The language of sociocultural interventions, markers of authority, speaker authority, external effects and internal effects that I develop in what follows will go some way in providing us with this equipment.

Another preliminary remark: while I think it useful to discuss perceptions directly concerning the authority of particular contributors to public, political debate (2.2.3 and 2.3.1) separately from other elements of the social imaginary (2.2.4 and 2.3.2), it is also important to stress at the outset that in practice, they are inevitably closely intertwined. In fact, I discuss them separately, not because I view them as isolated factors that affect the impact of sociocultural interventions independently of each other (which I do not), but precisely because it is the interaction between such elements that accounts for the effects of many sociocultural interventions. Sociocultural interventions that are aimed at bringing about a change in how a given group within society is perceived frequently do so by promoting a particular perspective upon society as a whole, and upon its associated symbols, narratives and values, and such perspectives are always in competition with other available perspectives. If these sociocultural interventions are successful, they contribute towards a change both in how a given minority and the polity as a whole are perceived and understood. It is in order to map out the interplay between these elements of the social imaginary in sociocultural interventions that I believe it useful to have a clear picture of each of the elements in play, which is why I devote distinct subsections to each of them.

Sociocultural interventions do not only affect the contributor's audience, but also the contributor's own perceptions and emotional states; correspondingly, in 2.4 I discuss the 'internal' effects of sociocultural interventions through a consideration of the Idle No More movement. A consideration of this movement discloses various insights, namely: first, while there are many motives that can draw citizens into political activity, such as the need to defend their rights, status and material wellbeing, political activity additionally provides participants with an avenue to fulfill a need for and capacity to connect to shared cultural meanings and frames of reference; in that sense, political activities can be understood as collaborative meaning construction projects. Second, engaging in such projects tends to bring out desirable emotional states and emotionally resonant meanings that themselves can also motivate people to participate in political activity. Third, insofar as religious traditions,

narratives and imagery are shared cultural meanings that are emotionally resonant, sociocultural interventions that draw upon these traditions can be especially effective in motivating people to engage in political activity, despite discouraging conditions of political marginalization. I conclude that it is for this reason, too, that sociocultural interventions drawing upon religious registers can help to contribute towards greater democratic equality (2.5.)

2.1. Citizenship and sociocultural interventions

2.1.1. Aspects of citizenship

In this section, I will introduce the concept of sociocultural interventions, and argue that they are an important means by which individuals in society, and especially members of groups with a history of political marginalization, shape and exercise their citizenship. I will start by making explicit in this subsection what I have in mind when I speak of citizenship, arguing, first, that the question of what rights, responsibilities, and what level of social standing the status of citizenship ought to confer, and to whom it should be extended, are subject to ongoing contests; and, second, that it is in part through the participation in these contests that citizenship is constituted.

Citizenship is a complex concept, denoting a status or role that is tied to membership in a political community and connected to an array of rights and responsibilities as well as to a certain level of social standing or prestige; to further complicate matters, the specifics of each of the aspects just listed change over time as they are the object of ongoing political contests.[219] Consequently, a multiplicity of views of what citizenship entails can be found, both in the literature of political theory and in the everyday political life of modern democratic societies. Despite these complexities, on a general level there is a widespread acknowledgement that in a democracy, citizenship crucially entails political agency; that is to say, a citizen is someone who is entitled to real opportunities to participate in the bringing about of political outcomes that affect the conditions under which he or she

219 For discussions of the contested meanings of this concept, see Étienne Balibar, *Citizenship* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015); John Clarke, Kathleen Coll, Evelina Dagnino, Catherine Neveu, *Disputing Citizenship* (Bristol and Chicago: Bristol University Press / Policy Press, 2014); Ní Mhurchú, 'Exploring the Citizenship Debate: The Sovereign Citizen-Subject' in: Aoileann Ní Mhurchú, *Ambiguous Citizenship in an Age of Global Migration* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, *Citizenship and Identity* (London and Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 1999).

lives.[220] This is the aspect of citizenship that I am primarily interested in here, as the focus of my argument is on the normative question of what citizens should be expected to do or not do when they participate in political decision-making.

In a constitutional democracy, the citizen's entitlement to political agency is codified in various political rights that are outlined in the law, such as the right to vote, to organize and participate in demonstrations, to form or to join a political party, or to run for office. However, having rights in theory is not the same thing as being able to actually exercise them, which is to say that formal citizenship is not the same thing as substantive citizenship.[221] In order for citizens to be able to actually participate in the bringing about of political outcomes, a range of other conditions need to be in place as well – such as basic economic and educational resources. I will not attempt to spell out in great detail what objective conditions need to be met in order for political agency to be possible; instead I simply note that citizenship in constitutional democracies typically involves legally guaranteed opportunities to participate in political decision-making as well as access to the requisite resources to make effective use of these opportunities, and that the specifics of these resources are of a contested, context-dependent and historically evolving nature. Recognizing that the requisite resources for citizenship are a matter of ongoing political contests, rather than treating citizenship as an accomplished legal fact, has major consequences for the ethics of citizenship, not least because it is in part through an active engagement in these contests that citizens constitute themselves as such – as I will indicate in a moment.

Citizens exercise their political agency through a variety of actions, like voting, running for office, organizing a rally or giving a speech in public. To all of these, I

220 Or as Weithman concisely puts it, a citizen is 'someone who is both affected by political outcomes and who is entitled to take part in bringing them about.' Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, 13.

221 The distinction between 'formal' and 'substantive' citizenship can be found in literature building on T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950). For instance, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Constructing Citizenship: Exclusion, Subordination, and Resistance," *American Sociological Review*, 76, No. 1 (February 2011) describes the distinction as 'frequent' (2). Similarly, James Holston and Arjun Appadurai, "Cities and Citizenship," *Public Culture,* 8 No. 2 (Winter 1996), describe the distinction as 'conventional' (190). While the terms did not appear in Marshall's essay, they do build upon its content: if citizens only have formal citizenship (that is, if they have legal membership in the state) but lack the civil, political and social rights that Marshall described, they do not yet have substantive citizenship. In his essay, Marshall argued that it was only when British working-class citizens started to enjoy the social benefits of the welfare state (like schooling, which guaranteed literacy) that they were finally able to make use of civil and political rights that had previously been theirs in a merely theoretical sense.

will refer in the following as 'political activities' or 'political practices.' The ability to engage in a political activity depends not only upon objective conditions, but upon subjective conditions as well, as political activities rely upon a great deal of largely implicit, role-specific knowledge; in order to engage in them citizens need to have a basic understanding of how they 'work.' Furthermore, as Paul Weithman points out, political activities draw upon psychological resources, like a sense of motivation, confidence, initiative and efficacy.[222] Both the role-specific practical knowledge and the psychological resources upon which political activities draw, become available in part through practice: citizens acquire the necessary skills and attitudes by actually engaging in the political activities themselves.[223]

The extent to which the requisite conditions to exercise political agency are met for any given individual is determined in part by his or her particular social position. In many contemporary democracies, there are groups within society that have a long history of political disenfranchisement. Inequalities that prevent citizens from engaging in political activities are likely to persist on an informal level, even when formal forms of exclusion have been abolished; so it is not very surprising that groups that were once denied the right to participate in political decision-making are found today to have less access to the requisite resources for political agency than others in society.[224] In light of the continued presence of social inequality in contemporary democratic societies, it would be a mistake for an account of the ethics of citizenship to assume that the role-specific practical knowledge and the psychological resources that are necessary to engage in political practices like voting and running for office are already equally accessible to all citizens.

222 See my discussion of Weithman in the previous chapter.

223 Hence the efforts by various organizations in the Global North as well as in the Global South that seek to empower disenfranchised groups by providing them with opportunities to chair meetings, facilitate workshops, and to do public speaking. For concrete examples, see Shireen P. Huq, "Bodies as Sites of Struggle: Naripokkho and the Movement for Women's Rights in Bangladesh" and Naila Kabeer, "Nijera Kori and Social Mobilization in Bangladesh," both in Naila Kabeer, ed., *Inclusive Citizenship* (London: Zed Books, 2005). Weithman's argument (discussed in chapter 1) that it is through their engagement in churches and religious organizations that many citizens hone the civic skills that they need in order to make effective use of their citizenship speaks to the same point for the context of the United States.

224 As argued, for instance, by Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, 36-66, on the basis of empirical data in Verba et al., *Voice and Equality*. As feminist scholars have emphasized, political activity depends on self-esteem, and the development of self-esteem in turn is impacted by differences such as gender, class and orientation in combination with persisting forms of discrimination within society. See Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 13-42, and the literature listed there.

On the other hand, it is also noteworthy that shared experiences of political disenfranchisement have inspired instances of collective action by social movements, at times on a massive scale. In the course of successive generations, African-Americans and the Indigenous peoples of North America have, the presence of exclusionary norms and structures on both formal and informal levels notwithstanding, developed traditions of resistance, like protest marches, blockades and ritual fasts, upon which contemporary activists belonging to these communities continue to draw when they make their political claims. These forms of collective protest represent political activities by which relatively disenfranchised groups and individuals manage to exercise political agency, even when access to the more regular and institutionalized activities of political citizenship – voting or running for office – is barred.

An adequate account of citizenship is aware, then, not only of the diversity of activities by which citizens may exercise political agency, but also of the fact that differences in power and in social position, historical and current, co-determine the practical accessibility of any of these activities to the various groups that are present within society. Insofar as political agency is indeed a central dimension of citizenship, a commitment to democratic equality requires any adequate account of citizenship to be especially attentive to those practices upon which relatively disenfranchised groups have historically relied to exercise their political agency.

This is also suggested by the work of various empirically oriented authors, especially political scientists and sociologists, who in the last two decades have argued that the type of collective action against exclusionary norms that I just described played a crucial role in shaping the meaning that citizenship has to actual citizens.[225] In an effort to address the problem that theoretical work on citizenship has long taken place in an 'empirical void' where it is largely unknown 'what citizenship means to people – particularly people whose status as citizens is either non-existent or extremely precarious,'[226] these authors have come to approach citizenship not primarily as a legal status bestowed top-down by the state upon its subjects, but rather as the outcome of both past and ongoing contests by particular social groups, especially disenfranchised ones, each with its own history, challenges and concerns.[227] Their approach is rooted in a recognition that the successive

225 See, for instance, the contributions to Kabeer, *Inclusive Citizenship*. This is one volume in the series "Claiming Citizenship: Rights, Participation, Accountability" (series editor: John Gaventa) which aims to show that citizenship is claimed and shaped through the collective political struggles by groups that, at least to a degree, lack substantive citizenship.

226 Naila Kabeer, "Introduction" in Kabeer, *Inclusive Citizenship*, 1.

227 For examples, see the contributions to Kabeer (ed.) 2005; Glenn, "Constructing Citizenship."

struggles of various marginalized groups against social, political and cultural norms that prevented them from enjoying equal rights or recognition as full members of society have resulted in a dramatic broadening of the terms in which citizenship is commonly conceived.[228] The historical contributions of collective action by social movements towards the acceptance of more inclusive views of citizenship represent another reason for political theorists to see informal forms of political participation that transgress established political norms, no matter how rare and extraordinary they may seem, as central to understanding citizenship, rather than as merely an epiphenomenon that, next to a more institutionalized political activity like voting, is of secondary importance to political theory.

One other reason to pay explicit attention to such emancipatory struggles relates to the psychological resources for political agency that were mentioned above. The recollections of some of the most salient moments in the history of emancipatory movements – like the Civil Rights Movement's March on Washington – have an enduring, inspirational effect on the members of the communities that drove these movements, having brought about a change in the self-understanding of the participants as people with political agency, that is, as citizens. Enshrined in the collective memory, these stories continue to provide disenfranchised groups within society with some of the psychological resources upon which political agency draws.

In conclusion, while citizenship is a complex concept that denotes a status or role that is connected to membership in a political community, to a set of rights and responsibilities, as well as to a certain level of social standing, and while the specifics of each of these aspects are subject to historical change and recurring political contests, one central dimension of citizenship is political agency. The capacity to exercise political agency is dependent upon the availability of specific resources – importantly including psychological resources – which become available in part *through* the exercise of citizenship. An adequate account of the ethics of citizenship should not assume that the resources that are requisite for the activities by which people exercise their political agency are equally accessible for all groups within society. It should be aware of the crucial role that collective engagement in

228 This is one of the main points that Danielle Allen makes in relation to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Neil Stammers argues that what we now refer to as the struggles of social movements have had a profound influence on the discourses surrounding the concepts of 'rights' and 'citizenship,' not only in contemporary times, but ever since the time of Absolutism. Neil Stammers, "The Emergence of Human Rights in the North: Towards Historical Re-evaluation" in Kabeer, *Inclusive Citizenship*.

informal forms of political action has played in enabling relatively disenfranchised citizens to exercise political agency, and how this engagement has contributed to the achievement of more and more inclusive views of what citizenship entails and to whom it should be accorded. Engagement in these activities is one way through which the resources for political agency have become available to relatively disenfranchised groups within society. For these reasons, collective, informal forms of political action are of utmost relevance to normative accounts of citizenship.

2.1.2. Citizenship and the social imaginary

In this subsection, I will connect the above discussion of citizenship and political agency to the concept of the social imaginary, the largely implicit grasp of social space upon which political activities rely and that has an important role in co-determining the conditions under which citizens live. This will further clarify the links between citizenship, political agency, and the informal power relations amongst citizens; it is my claim that active attempts to modify the social imaginary constitute one of the ways by which citizens commonly exercise their political agency; that is, that it is one of the activities through which individuals are able to act as citizens.

First, let me draw some further connections between citizenship on the one hand and inequalities of power within society on the other. The various aspects of citizenship that I listed in the previous section – political agency, rights and responsibilities, membership of a political community, and a certain level of social standing – are not merely a matter of law or formal policy; they are co-determined by the everyday interactions between citizens.[229] In an informal sense, citizens, through their face-to-face interactions with one another, help to define who is entitled to the civil, political and social rights and the forms of recognition that are associated with full membership of society.

Particularly salient examples of this can be found in the history of racial segregation in the United States, which was maintained in part by white, 'ordinary' citizens (that is to say, citizens who are not holders of any formal political office), who often effectively denied the rights and recognition associated with equal citizenship to Americans of African, Mexican or Asian origins. Evelyn Nakano Glenn illustrates this with the example of the segregation in street cars: often, 'the lines demarking the white section were established by how far back whites chose to sit. Segregation was maintained and enforced not only

229 Glenn, "Constructing Citizenship," 3.

by white drivers, conductors, and police, but also by white passengers.'[230] Significantly, at times, this informal maintenance of borders by citizens was in direct contravention of the law – for instance, for citizens of Mexican or Asian ancestry in the Southwest, who, even though legally having the same rights and status as white U.S. citizens, were still subjected to segregation on a local level, being denied access to localities that were only open to whites.[231] These stories illustrate how informal norms and practices form part of the political regime under which citizens live and how they co-define who really is a full citizen. By maintaining patterns of informal exclusion, the white passengers from the example above were exercising their political agency, as were the non-white passengers who resisted these boundaries. It is in this sense, as Glenn writes, that 'citizenship is continually constituted and challenged through political struggle,' through the everyday interactions of citizens.[232]

As described in the previous section, one way in which disenfranchised individuals have exercised political agency despite the presence of firmly established, exclusionary norms is by engaging in collective action; the boycotts of public transportation by the Civil Rights Movement are an obvious example of this.[233] It is important to note here that the changes that these actions sought to achieve were not located exclusively on the level of law or formal policy (although these certainly were of great importance) but included extensive transformations in the domain of informal power relations amongst the citizens as well. This is also the point that Danielle Allen makes when she writes that the informal, creative protests by the Civil Rights Movement so fundamentally altered the way citizenship was commonly viewed in the United States that the country was in effect reconstituted.[234]

To put it differently, the political order under which the citizens live and that determines what avenues of political agency are available to them is not limited to the legal framework, but include informal power relations and shared, largely implicit expectations. It would seem that an acceptance of the principle that 'political outcomes can only be legitimate if those who must abide by them have had a part in their formation,'[235] which in one version or another is fundamental to liberal and deliberative democratic

230 Ibid., 3-4.
231 Ibid., 5-6.
232 Ibid., 2.
233 Ibid., 6-9.
234 Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 2-3.
235 Young, *Inclusion and Democracy,* 53; similar reasons can be found in the theories of Rawls and Habermas (see the previous chapter).

accounts of citizenship, would also compel us to accept that citizens have a right to have a part in the shaping of these expectations, understood as an integral part of the political order they live in. And one of the ways in which individuals, particularly those who lack substantive citizenship, exercise their political agency (and hence, their citizenship) in political practice is indeed by modifying these largely implicit relations and expectations, either on the level of individual interactions, or collectively, through the action of social movements.

In political theory, the largely unstated expectations that citizens have of one another, their practical, implicit grasp of social space and of their relations to others within this space, are sometimes referred to as 'the social imaginary.'[236] As Charles Taylor describes it, the term denotes 'the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.'[237] Thus defined, the social imaginary clearly touches on virtually every aspect of citizenship that I have described so far. It includes what courses of political action citizens see as being realistically open to and appropriate for them to pursue, as well as their sense of their own social standing and entitlements. This second aspect is important because, as noted in the previous paragraph, many of the activities that are commonly associated with active citizenship, like casting a vote, joining a rally or giving a public speech, also depend on a sense of self-esteem or confidence. Furthermore, the social imaginary performs a somewhat analogous role to what Rawls terms the 'public culture' in the very specific sense that it encapsulates the practical grasp of norms by which citizens are able to determine whether any given political action is legitimate or illegitimate (although the social imaginary in Taylor's usage is far more open and much harder to define, and is not restricted to the sphere of politics).[238] During times of intense controversy and increased political mobilization, activists sometimes intentionally transgress what bystanders might consider appropriate forms of action, because it is through this very transgression that the social imaginary might be modified.

While Charles Taylor emphasizes how the social imaginary is shared by or common to all citizens, it is of course, as Iris Young writes, to be expected for individuals who

236 The term 'social imaginary' was derived from Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

237 Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14 No. 1 (2002), 106.

238 Ibid.; For Rawls' notion of 'public culture,' see the previous chapter, as well as Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* 13-14.

are 'differently positioned in social structures to have very different experiences and understandings of social relationships and the operations of society because of their structural situation.'[239] The very existence of political controversy within democratic societies shows that the degree of commonness of the social imaginary should not be overstated. And finally, as Taylor also writes, the social imaginary is not stable, but subject to considerable change over time;[240] it is exactly because of this possibility of transformation in the social imaginary that many instances of political action seek to influence it. Above, I wrote that one of the ways in which citizens exercise their political agency is by modifying, through everyday interactions or through collective action, the largely unstated norms that govern social and political space. Another way to phrase this is to say that citizens exercise their political agency by actions that affect elements of the social imaginary.

Because political agency, the availability of real opportunities to co-determine the political conditions under which one lives, is a central aspect of what it means to be a citizen, and because these conditions are inseparably intertwined with the largely implicit informal norms and expectations that make up the social imaginary, it is a requisite for an adequate ethics of citizenship that it pays explicit attention to how citizens can shape or transform elements of the social imaginary. In order to facilitate reflection upon a variety of ways in which citizens can do this, I will now introduce the concept of 'sociocultural interventions.'

2.1.3. Introducing sociocultural interventions

In this section, I introduce a distinction between two categories of political expression that are common in the public, political life of contemporary democracies: deliberative argument on the one hand and sociocultural interventions on the other. I further argue that taking the latter seriously will better enable us to recognize, analyze and discuss a range of aspects of public life that, in light of my discussion in the previous two subsections, are of clear importance for democratic politics, but on which liberal and deliberative democratic accounts of the public sphere, with their near-exclusive focus on deliberative argument, are virtually silent.

As I hope to be clear from my discussion so far, one important reason to pay explicit attention to these elements is that they are closely intertwined with informal power inequalities amongst citizens. Historically, members of social minorities have frequently

239 Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 98.
240 Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," 110-111.

found that their formal status as citizens notwithstanding, in practice their fellow citizens did not acknowledge them as competent citizens with the authority to make legitimate claims in public – for instance because of widely shared, but not necessarily explicitly articulated or consciously held, ethnic prejudice.[241] To recall Iris Young's argument from the previous chapter, a similar, perhaps more subtle form of informal exclusion can be observed when styles of expression that happen to be associated with lower social status are dismissed as 'excessive' or 'hysterical' in favour of the supposedly more 'reasonable' forms of speech that are associated with more prestigious groups. Because of their entwinement with informal power differences, an account of public life that ignores its 'non-cognitive' aspects is at risk of overlooking important obstacles that minorities with a history of political marginalization can be confronted with when they attempt to bring their concerns to public attention.

Conversely, explicit attention to non-cognitive aspects of public life can help to clarify by what means such obstacles can be overcome. These means are what I want to focus on at this point. In the course of the last century, there has been a succession of groups with a history of political marginalization (including women, religious or ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, Indigenous peoples, and others) that sought to overcome dominant assumptions that prevented their concerns and identities from being taken seriously. Although their efforts to acquire recognition as legitimate contributors to public debate often took the form of deliberative arguments in favour of generally binding laws, their political action was generally not limited to this. In addition, they relied upon forms of communication that theorists have termed 'presentative,' rather than 'rational,' 'informative' or 'discursive,' including 'rituals and ceremonies, demonstrations, festivals, slogans, placards, and other visual forms of expression, music, film and, in general, important parts of art and popular culture.'[242] These acts of public communication are important for contemporary democratic societies because at times they have an ability to effect shifts in the way that citizens perceive themselves, their political action and their relations to one another that cannot be effected by reasoned argument alone.

As Maeve Cooke points out, accepting the validity of a particular point of view sometimes requires the addressee 'to see the world in a new way;' it requires what she refers

241 As was the case, for example, with African Americans during the Civil Right Movement (Allen, *Talking to Strangers*) as well as with citizens of a Muslim immigrant background in the Netherlands during the Muhammad cartoon controversy (Baumgartner, "Re-Examining an Ethics of Citizenship in Postsecular Societies").

242 Bernhard Peters, *Public Deliberation and Public Culture. The Writings of Bernhard Peters 1993–2005*, ed. Hartmut Wessler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 58.

to as 'an epistemologically significant shift in perception,' or alternatively, as 'disclosure:' 'the opening of one's eyes that precedes new ways of seeing in the domain of practical reason.'[243] Such a shift can be effected in two analytically distinct ways. First, it can result directly from the act of articulating certain points of view; if this is the case, the mode of transformation is, in Cooke's terminology, *internal* to the argumentation.[244] This is the type of persuasion that is central to Rawls' and Habermas' accounts of politics. But alternatively, the shift in perspective can be caused by factors *external* to argumentation, such as intense experiences or behaviours that are practiced repeatedly over a long period of time.[245]

One illustration of the importance that 'argumentation-external' acts of communication sometimes have specifically for the emancipation of marginalized groups can be found in Danielle Allen's *Talking to Strangers*. In that book, Allen discusses a well-known photo taken by Will Counts on September 1957 in front of Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas, in which Elizabeth Eckford, an African-American high school student, after being denied access to the school, is cursed at by Hazel Bryan, a white anti-desegregation protester of approximately her own age. According to Allen, the photo represented an intense, even traumatic, experience for many U.S. citizens: 'much like a violent wound reveals bone, sinew, blood, and muscle, the picture stripped away idealized conceptions of democratic life and directed the eyes of the citizenry to the ordinary habits that in 1957 constituted citizenship despite the standing law.'[246] Exemplifying the type of argumentation-external factors discussed by Cooke, the photo 'elicited throughout the citizenry an epiphanic awareness of the inner workings of public life.'[247] The image (and others like it) so profoundly changed 'how citizens of the United States imagine their political world' that for Allen, it is no overstatement to say that the year 1957 'inaugurated a new constitution.'[248] This is so because for her, a constitution consists not merely of the official texts of the law, but also of the habits and practices of citizenship which manifest the ways that citizens *imagine themselves as citizens*.[249]

Presumably, Charles Taylor has a similar implicit grasp of social space in mind as Allen does when using the term 'social imaginary.' Like Allen, Taylor emphasizes that the

243 Cooke, "Violating Neutrality?" 256-257.
244 Cooke notes that she uses the term argumentation 'in a broad Habermasian sense, referring to the activity of raising and responding to validity claims.' Ibid, 259.
245 Ibid, 261-262.
246 Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 4.
247 Ibid., 5.
248 Ibid., 3-5.
249 Ibid., 12-18.

background understandings by which citizens make sense of their social surroundings and upon which they draw when they engage in common practices like elections and demonstrations tend to be expressed in images and stories rather than in theoretical terms; he chooses the visual metaphor of 'imagination' precisely because he wants to highlight this point.[250] Allen's example illustrates how emancipatory action at times transforms the dominant social imaginary by means of communication other than rational argument.[251]

One consequence of the strong focus on rational argument in influential traditions of political theory is that these other forms of communication do not receive the attention that they deserve. In order to redress this, I propose to distinguish between two forms of communication that are both intended by their authors as contributions to public discourse: deliberative argument and sociocultural interventions. With the term 'deliberative argument,' I will be referring to the type of public justifications for generally binding rules that is familiar from many liberal and deliberative democratic accounts of the public sphere, including the very prominent versions proposed by Rawls and Habermas. With 'sociocultural interventions,' on the other hand, I will be referring to acts of communication that are 1) not readily identifiable as deliberative argument, but that are nevertheless also intended by their authors as public, such as publicly performed rituals, cartoons, vigils, films, art, fasts and demonstrations, and 2) that can be interpreted as attempts to modify the social imaginary, that is, as expressions by which authors invite or provoke their audience to imagine their social surroundings, their identity and their relations to others in new ways. The social imaginary is simultaneously the medium in which sociocultural interventions are articulated, the context that gives them meaning, and the substance that they seek to alter.

Before I continue, I want to briefly comment on several aspects of sociocultural interventions. The first concerns their relation to deliberative argument; I should point out that I do not see the distinction between the two as a hard and sharp one. There are many intermediate instances of communication that cannot neatly be categorised as exclusively 'discursive' or 'symbolic,' like text in films, novels or theatre plays that can be used to express rational argument as well as to invite new perspectives on relations and

250 Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," 106.

251 As in the previous chapter, I am following Calhoun, Connolly, Cooke and Young in their use of the term 'rational argument' here. Of course, the 1957 events involved a good deal of argument as well, but as Allen argues, the visual impact of the photos profoundly shaped the political effects of these events precisely because of their direct impact on how American audiences imagined their citizenship.

identities in the social realm. And the same ambiguity is present in public and formal settings, like debate between politicians in parliament, where it can be quite difficult to distinguish between 'framing' an issue and deliberative argument. The two categories, in short, are not mutually exclusive, but are better thought of as ideal types; I will have more to say on the relation between the two in the fourth chapter.

I wrote that sociocultural interventions can be *interpreted* as attempts to modify the social imaginary. But whether or not any particular public act of communication is actually intended by its author to invite or provoke the audience to understand themselves and their social surroundings in a different light may not be clear, just like it is not always clear whether an act of communication is intended by its author as a deliberative argument. Explicit statements by the author can help to lend credence to interpretations; this is the case, for example, for Haida artist Bill Reid's sculpture *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*; which inspired James Tully's *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*.[252] It is Reid's commentary on his own work that make it possible for Tully to interpret the work of art as an invitation to a 'constitutional dialogue, or multilogue, of mutual recognition.'[253]

For the photos of the events in Little Rock, the situation is similar: Allen argues that their power to engage the imagination and to bring about transformations in the way citizens view themselves and one another was not just a matter of circumstance, but rather (like many other instances of action in the Civil Rights Movement era) the result of an acute awareness on the part of the agents of the power of symbol in framing an issue. In the photos, Eckford wore a black-and-white checkered dress that she had deliberately made for this specific occasion.[254] Based on Eckford's statements, Allen interprets this as an instance of a citizen's use of symbolic power where her access to other forms of power is barred: with her dress, Eckford 'named the political moment as one of a reconstitution and told her fellow citizens it was so. [… She] intended, even if only intuitively, to provoke political epiphanies with her dress so that real, and not merely symbolic, reconstitution might occur.'[255]

This brings me to another feature – next to the power to effect shifts in the social imaginary – that makes an examination of the use of presentative discourse by emancipatory movements worthwhile: from the perspective of a commitment to democratic equality, sociocultural interventions are of special interest because symbolic power is at times one

252 Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*, esp. 17-29.
253 Ibid., 24.
254 Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 20-24.
255 Ibid., 24.

of the very few resources available to politically marginalized citizens. As discussed before, a merely legal entitlement to participate in political decision-making is not sufficient to ensure that people can meaningfully act as citizens, for the activities that are commonly associated with active citizenship draw upon specific resources, subjective as well as objective ones, that are not equally available to all in contemporary democratic societies. By definition, politically marginalized minorities lack access to some of these resources, at least to a degree; in Weithman's terms, they are 'resource-poor.'[256] If political actors who are members of such groups mean to bring about social change, they often need to draw upon (or develop anew) alternative resources, which themselves may or may not be taken seriously by mainstream audiences.

In the rest of this chapter, I will elaborate on sociocultural interventions and the various effects that they can bring about. As I believe this is best done through concrete examples, I will provide one in the next section.

2.2. Sociocultural interventions and perceived authority

2.2.1 Example: *We the People – are greater than fear*

During the demonstrations surrounding the inauguration of Donald Trump as president of the United States on 20 January 2017 (including the 'Women's March' demonstrations on the day after the inauguration itself), protestors carried a variety of posters that had been commissioned by an American non-profit organization called the Amplifier Foundation, which, according to its mission statement, seeks to amplify 'the voices of grassroots movements through art and community engagement' and that describes itself as 'an art machine for social change.'[257] By commissioning and distributing the posters,[258]

256 See the discussion of Weithman's argument against Rawls' duty of civility in the previous chapter.

257 "Mission," The Amplifier Foundation (discontinued website), archived on January 29, 2017 and retrieved from the Internet Archive on June 17, 2022: https://web.archive.org/web/20170129123049/http://theamplifierfoundation.org/mission/).

258 The posters were distributed to demonstrators in various ways: they were published as full-page advertisements in national newspapers, made available for printing on the foundation's website, and handed out manually during the demonstrations. The money to do this was raised through online donations. Jessica Gelt, "Shepard Fairey Explains His 'We the People' Inauguration Protest Posters," *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 2017, http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-shepard-fairey-inauguration-20170119-story.html; Steph Solis, "Shepard Fairey's Inauguration Poster: The Meaning behind the 'We the People' Art," *USA Today*, January 16, 2017, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/01/16/we-the-people-activists-make-art-inauguration/96627614/.

the organization hoped to ignite 'a national dialogue about American identity and values through public art and story sharing.'[259] This goal was also reflected in the poster series' title, 'We the People,' an obvious reference to the first three words of the preamble to the constitution of the United States. The poster that I will focus on in what follows was among the most widely used and discussed posters in the entire campaign, depicting the portrait of a young woman, wearing a hijab that was patterned after the American flag, framed by the slogan 'We the People - are greater than fear.' [260]

This poster was one of three contributions to the series by Shepard Fairey, a street artist best known for his 2008 poster featuring a red, white and blue portrait of then-presidential candidate Barack Obama and the word 'Hope,' which came to be one of the central symbols of Obama's first election campaign. Fairey's 2017 posters referenced the 2008 design in colour and style, but rather than depicting a political candidate, they featured the portraits of women representing various minorities within the U.S. population in combination with empowering slogans.[261] Fairey further based his particular design for *We the People – are greater than fear* on a photo of a Bangladeshi-American woman, Munira Ahmed, that was taken by Syrian-American photographer Ridwan Adhami, in the city of New York, close to the site of the September 11, 2001 attacks, titled *I am America*, a photo that had already circulated on weblogs and internet forums for some years.[262]

259 "We the People Campaign," The Amplifier Foundation (discontinued website), archived on January 21, 2017 and retrieved from the Internet Archive on June 17, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20170309161713/http://theamplifierfoundation.org/wethepeople/.

260 The artist's website displays the use of this poster in these demonstrations: "We the People across the World," ObeyGiant.com (Shepard Fairey's official website), 27 January 2017, https://obeygiant.com/people-across-world/ (retrieved 9 June 2022).

261 One of Fairey's other contributions features a Latina and the slogan: 'We the People – defend dignity;' another shows an African-American woman with the slogan 'We the People – protect each other.' Perry Stein, "The Artist Who Created the Obama 'Hope' Posters is Back with New Art this Inauguration," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2017/01/20/the-artist-who-created-the-obama-hope-posters-is-back-with-a-new-art-this-inauguration/. Variations on the same theme by other artists can be found at the "We the People Campaign" site cited above; they include a poster by Jessica Sabogal depicting a lesbian couple (*We the indivisible*) and one by Ernesto Yerena depicting an elderly Native American woman (*We the resilient – have been here before*). All of these slogans refer to the political struggles that each of these groups are engaged in, as well as to remarks made by Trump during the election campaign which his opponents criticized as divisive and stigmatizing.

262 Molly McCluskey, "Inaugural Protest Poster Stirs Debate among Muslim American Women," *Middle East Eye*, January 20, 2017, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/inaugural-protest-poster-stirs-debate-among-muslim-american-women-1620652102; Edward Helmore,

Both the poster and the initial photo were responses to concerns that had dominated much of American public debate for more than fifteen years, and in which the themes of national security, immigration, Islam and terrorism were frequently linked together. In the presidential campaign preceding the demonstrations, these also had been key themes, as the inaugural candidate had made various controversial statements (such as calling for a national database of Muslim citizens, surveillance of mosques, and 'a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States'[263]) which were widely criticized, not only as impermissible infringements on the legal rights of Muslim citizens, but also as perpetuating a climate of islamophobia by casting Islam and Muslims as a danger to U.S. society. In interviews, the artist, the photographer and the model each explicitly presented their contribution to the art project as a response to these debates, and indicated that they hoped to express the idea that, strong currents of islamophobia notwithstanding, Muslim Americans should continue to be fully included as equal and legitimate members of the American people.[264]

It is noteworthy that the poster's creators chose to channel their efforts into a *visual* act of communication. Although it is certainly possible to interpret what their work has to say on Muslim citizens and attribute a discursively rendered meaning to it,[265] this would not turn the poster itself into an instance of deliberative argument, and treating it as such would clearly be reductive.[266] Doing this would be to ignore the poster's polysemic character: even though some interpretations may seem more convincing than

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"Munira Ahmed: The Woman Who Became the Face of the Trump Resistance." *Guardian* (US edition), 23 January 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/23/womens-march-poster-munira-ahmed-shepard-fairey-interview; Ishani Nath, "What It's Really Like to Be the Face of the #Resistance," *Flare*, 23 January 2017, http://www.flare.com/culture/womens-march-munira-ahmed-interview/.

263 Jenna Johnson, "Trump Calls for 'Total and Complete Shutdown of Muslims Entering the United States,'" *Washington Post*, 7 December 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/12/07/donald-trump-calls-for-total-and-complete-shutdown-of-muslims-entering-the-united-states/; Patrick Healy and Michael Barbaro, "Donald Trump Calls for Barring Muslims from Entering U.S." *New York Times*, 7 December 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/12/07/donald-trump-calls-for-banning-muslims-from-entering-u-s/.

264 Ibid.; Elizabeth Flock, "Why Shepard Fairey's Inauguration Protest Posters Won't Have Trump on Them," *PBS*, last modified January 16, 2017, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/shepard-fairey-launches-people-poster-campaign-trumps-inauguration/.

265 In this case, such an interpretation would be facilitated by the fact that the posters' creators themselves made fairly explicit statements on what message they hoped for their product to convey – see the interviews cited above.

266 Cf. Peters, *Public Deliberation and Public Culture*, 70-71.

others, it remains a work of art that cannot be flatly reduced to a single interpretation. It is also noteworthy in this respect that the image was interpreted in a variety of ways, and evaluated both negatively and positively, by American Muslimas; whereas some (like Munira Ahmed herself, the woman depicted) expressed appreciation for the image, others voiced concerns that the picture fails to recognize the diversity amongst Muslim women (who may or may not choose to wear a hijab), and that the U.S. flag is also associated with military campaigns against Arab nations and a 'disconcerting' type of nationalism; it was also pointed out that the suggestion that Muslims, unlike non-Muslims, should need to wear a flag to 'prove their loyalty' is in itself problematic.[267]

Moreover, treating the poster as merely an instance of deliberative argument would fail to account for much of the poster's performative force, which in no small part derives precisely from a well-considered set of visual elements (such as Ahmed's face, with its calm but defiant expression, the colour scheme that evokes the 2008 Obama poster, and the surprising combination of various emotion-invested symbols like the American flag and the hijab) that together reflect the artists' intent to 'make a strong statement.'[268]

The significance of the poster as an act of political expression does not lie so much in its capacity to convey antecedent cognitive content, as is the case in the 'constative utterances' that were famously theorized by John Austin,[269] but rather, in its potential repercussions in the existing constellation of political relations; these repercussions, moreover, are achieved (or intended to be achieved) *performatively*: the political constellation is altered *by the act* of showing it in a different light. According to Fairey, the poster is

267 For an overview of opinions, see McCluskey, "Inaugural Protest Poster Stirs Debate among Muslim American Women." As Azeeza Kanji, a commentator in Canada, pointedly wrote, 'the compulsion to swaddle Muslims in flags is not a cure for Islamophobia – in fact, it is one of its symptoms. Instead of acceding to the demand placed on Muslims to profess their loyalty loudly and repeatedly, we should ask why Muslims are required to engage in such exceptional professions of allegiance in the first place.' Azeeza Kanji, "Wrapping Muslims in Flags Stifles the Struggle for Equality," *Toronto Star*, 26 January 2017, https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2017/01/26/wrapping-muslims-in-flags-stifles-the-struggle-for-equality.html.

268 Ridwan Adhami, as quoted in Helmore, "Munira Ahmed: The Woman Who Became the Face of the Trump Resistance." It is also interesting to note that on the poster, the model looks directly at audience. With the suggestion of eye-contact, the poster prompts its audience to process the encountered image as an invitation into a relation, rather than as a cognitive claim. This fits with Fairey's own statements on the poster: 'I want this campaign to be about us *seeing* ourselves in each other and *feeling* a connection to one another." (Fairey as quoted in Gelt, "Shepard Fairey Explains His 'We the People' Inauguration Protest Posters")

269 John Austin, *How To Do Things With Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

'about people seeing the common bonds we have, and our connections as human beings.'[270] In this respect, as I will argue in the next chapter, the poster exemplifies how sociocultural interventions resemble 'action' in Hannah Arendt's account, which likewise brings about changes in what Arendt calls the 'web of human relationships' simply by appearing in public.[271]

Recall that in the previous section, I defined sociocultural interventions as acts of communication that are intended to be public by their authors, that cannot be readily understood as instances of deliberative argument, and that aim to invite or provoke the audience to imagine their social surroundings, their identity and their relations to each other in new ways. This poster, as a visual act of communication that was widely distributed in order to be displayed by protesters during highly public and political events with the explicit intent of influencing the perceptions underlying political debate, neatly fits my earlier description.

2.2.2. Introducing 'perceived authority'

I see the poster described above as an example of a sociocultural intervention that is employed in an effort to affect the established perceptions of authority underlying political interactions. This is done by presenting widely familiar images and narratives that evoke strong associations and evaluations in terms of identification, authority and respect (to which I will refer as 'markers of authority'). After using the poster to demonstrate these concepts, I will build on the connection between perceived authority and markers of authority to work out what the lens of sociocultural interventions contributes to our understanding of cases of political conflict in which one or more of the parties draw upon a spiritual or religious register.[272] Before doing so, however, I need to clarify what precisely I have in mind when referring to 'authority' in this context. Therefore, in this subsection, I introduce and define 'perceived authority,' presenting it as a key political resource for citizens who seek to participate in democratic decision-making processes.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in a democracy, political decisions derive their legitimacy from their conformity to a fundamental norm of democratic equality: a collective decision is legitimate to the extent that 'all members of the polity are included

270 Flock, "Why Shepard Fairey's Inauguration Protest Posters Won't Have Trump on Them."
271 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 181-188.
272 I use the terms 'spirituality' and 'religion' interchangeably.

equally in the decision-making process and have an equal opportunity to influence the outcome.'[273] The normative implications of my project follow from this principle, as the discussion that I am contributing to is centered on the question of what citizens can and cannot responsibly do in the public sphere, given the wide variety of existential commitments in contemporary societies, if all are to participate in politics as equals. Now, in a theoretical project that is partly motivated by a commitment to democratic equality, it may at first glance seem odd to focus, of all things, on 'authority,' given that term's usual, decidedly un-democratic connotations of hierarchical power, obedience and domination.[274]

However, when speaking of 'perceived authority,' what I seek to bring into focus is the effect, in any given society at any given time, of that society's particular configuration of the elements of the social imaginary – the largely implicit norms, expectations and understandings that structure social and political interactions – upon the ability of a given contribution to public debate to draw the attention, elicit the assent, and/or provoke another desired response in those who bear witness to it. Insofar as the configuration of the social imaginary tends to reflect and reinforce informal differences in social position between the citizens, and insofar as it has a profound influence on the citizens' ability to actualize their citizenship through participation in public, political decision-making processes, it is highly relevant for any account of the ethics of citizenship that is motivated by a concern for democratic equality.

Given these considerations, George Shulman's definition of authority as a 'capacity to elicit assent' seems a very useful starting point.[275] I further see similarities between his definition and what sociologists studying social movements have described as 'resonance.'[276] The concept of 'resonance' was first used by David Snow and Robert Benford to refer to

273 Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 52. While alternative ways of phrasing this point can be found, the general principle is common enough, as it underlies most liberal and deliberative democratic accounts, including the theories of Rawls and Habermas which are central to the conversation that I am contributing to.

274 For a helpful reflection on the need to think through issues of authority for understanding democratic practice, see George Shulman, "Thinking Authority Democratically: Prophetic Practices, White Supremacy, and Democratic Politics," *Political Theory*, 36, No. 5 (October 2008).

275 Shulman, "Thinking Authority Democratically," 710.

276 In the following succinct summary of this usage, I draw on Rhys Williams, "The Cultural Contexts of Collective Action: Constraints, Opportunities, and the Symbolic Life of Social Movements" in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 105-106.

the degree to which the 'frames' that are used by social movements to explain political issues succeed in mobilizing their target audience.[277] They argued that, in order to 'build upon and elaborate existing dilemmas and grievances in ways that are believable and compelling,'[278] there needs to be a cognitive 'fit' between the frames articulated by social movement leaders on the one hand and the 'extant interpretive frames' of the movement adherents on the other.[279] Building upon this 'frame resonance' concept, other scholars, who were primarily interested in the way collective action is shaped by the cultural environment in which it takes place, developed the concept of 'cultural resonance' to indicate the 'fit' between the expressions of social movements on the one hand and wider society's cultural understandings of what is intelligible and legitimate on the other.[280] Later on, Snow and Benford incorporated something quite like cultural resonance into their theory, namely 'narrative fidelity,' which they defined as 'the extent to which a frame fits within existing cultural narratives and meanings" and described as one of several factors upon which frame resonance depends.[281]

As Rhys Williams succinctly puts it, resonance is 'in one sense a straightforward and intuitively appealing idea – [… it] is the`` "fit" between [social movement] frames and audiences' previous beliefs, worldviews, and life experiences.'[282] However, my own focus is not on social movements as such, but on sociocultural interventions, which may but do not necessarily take place on a collective scale. Furthermore, I am primarily interested in how these interactions and their reception by their audience are shaped by the social imaginary; in other words, the 'fit' that I am after is not, such as the term 'cognitive fit' would imply, primarily a matter of consciously held, articulated beliefs, but explicitly

277 David A. Snow et al., "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 4 (August 1986).

278 Ibid., 477.

279 Ibid.

280 'Movement discourse, ideologies, and actions must be culturally resonant – coherent within some shared cultural repertoire – if they hope to strike bystander publics as legitimate, or neutralize oppositional positions by elites and countermovements. Thus movement culture must resonate with people outside the movement community even as it recruits and mobilizes.' Williams, "The Cultural Contexts of Collective Action," 106; see also Timothy J. Kubal, "The Presentation of Political Self: Cultural Resonance and the Construction of Collective Action Frames," *Sociological Quarterly*, 39, No. 4 (Autumn, 1998), 539-542.

281 Other factors that affected frame resonance in Snow and Benford's later account included the internal consistency of the used frame and the status and credibility of the frame articulator; Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 26 (2000).

282 Williams, 'The Cultural Contexts of Collective Action," 105-106.

includes the not fully conscious associations and visceral responses that are brought out by the symbols and narratives that are drawn upon in sociocultural interventions. Drawing on the insights that have been articulated in social movement studies and in the interdisciplinary field of performance studies, in the following I will use the term 'perceived authority' (and simply 'authority' as a shorthand) to refer to the capacity of a contribution to public debate, or of one of that contribution's components (including the person who contributes, and the symbols, narratives and values that are referenced in the contribution) to elicit a wished-for response in a given public, given that public's particular, largely implicit grasp on reality.[283]

Before proceeding, let me share a few additional clarifications on this definition. First, I speak of a 'wished-for response,' rather than of 'assent,' because the reaction that the act seeks to elicit can be something other than 'assent' itself. At minimum, the wished-for response will typically consist in the audience's mere willingness to invest some time and effort in determining what it is that the communicative act seeks to communicate, for instance by taking the time to fully read an opinion piece or taking a second look at a political poster.[284] Beyond that, the audience may additionally be moved to seriously reflect upon the import of a communicative act, perhaps to affirm it passively, and/or ultimately, to actively endorse it by acting a certain way, for instance, by engaging in some form of advocacy or by voting. Contrarywise, if the audience does *not* perceive a communicative act as authoritative, it will feel justified in ignoring, rejecting, or actively countering the act. Second, I choose the term '*perceived* authority' here in order to emphasize the perspectival, non-discursive character of many of the factors that together determine the

283 That idea that an act of communication derives its effectiveness from a great variety of components that together constitute the act of communication (or 'performance') itself is an insight that has been well-developed in performance theory. See Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy" in *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), as well as other contributions in that volume.

284 For examples of contributions to public debate that do not seek the audience's assent or agreement, see Jane Monica Drexler, "Politics Improper: Iris Marion Young, Hannah Arendt, and the Power of Performativity" *Hypatia*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Autumn, 2007). While the examples of intentionally disruptive feminist activism that Drexler discusses are not aimed at eliciting the audience's assent, they certainly are aimed at being noticed and considered. As Drexler notes, not all of these effects may be controversially legitimate (even though she herself believes they are legitimate); however, my point at this juncture is not so much the legitimacy of public statements as the mere fact that those responsible can have a variety of intended outcomes beyond assent in mind.

success of contributions to public debate in eliciting the wished-for response, such as the largely tacit, only partially conscious norms, responses and associations, all of which are located in what Connolly terms the 'visceral register.'[285] This relates to my choice, up to this section, to speak of perceptions of authority as components of the *social imaginary*, rather than of 'public culture', despite similarities between the two terms.[286] Charles Taylor chooses the visual metaphor of the 'imaginary' specifically because he wants to highlight that the grasp that people have of their social environment in practice is largely inarticulate, indefinite, unstructured; it is 'carried in images, stories and legends' and impossible to neatly define in theoretical terms.[287] In order to stress that the distinction between who is and who is not in practice acknowledged as having the requisite authority to contribute to democratic decision-making processes is frequently based on factors that are located on visceral or not fully conscious levels, I speak of '*perceptions* of authority' while noting that these perceptions can be seen as part of the social imaginary as well as of public culture.

2.2.3. Introducing 'speaker authority'

In this subsection, I will introduce the term 'speaker authority' to refer to what I see as an important factor in determining the ability of a given contribution to public debate to elicit a wished-for response in a given audience: namely, the widely shared perceptions and implicit judgments concerning the identity of their author. Because they directly affect a given contributor's ability to participate in collective decision-making processes, speaker authority is a crucial element of the social imaginary and a key factor in the interpretation of sociocultural interventions.

The social imaginary consists of a multitude of cultural elements that can be drawn upon by sociocultural interventions in a variety of ways. These cultural elements include perceptions of particular groups within society (such as, in the case of the poster discussed above, perceptions regarding young Muslim American women) that are widely familiar, largely implicit, and that underlie and structure interactions between people within society, including public, political interactions. Within the social imaginary, perceptions regarding the identity of particular groups of contributors have an especially prominent

285 See chapter 1.

286 As explained in chapter 1, for Rawls, the term 'public culture' refers to the basic ideas, norms and principles that are, often implicitly, present in a society's public institutions and traditions, and that enable citizens to recognize whether any given action is legitimate or, conversely, constitutes a 'foul.' The social imaginary in Taylor's usage is far more open, not being restricted to the sphere of politics.

287 Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," 107.

place because they tend to inform how an audience interprets and evaluates *any other* cultural elements that a contribution to public debate, when made by the member of one of these groups, makes reference to.

Let's consider more precisely what type of communicative act a contribution to public debate through which citizens seek to actualize their citizenship represents. As Christoph Baumgartner demonstrates in the case of controversies around the publication of Muhammad cartoons in Danish newspapers in 2005, one's ability to participate as an equal citizen in public debate is severely obstructed when one is not recognized by their fellow citizens as having the requisite competence and authority to do so. Baumgartner helpfully connects this insight to Mary Kate McGowan's distinction between 'communication' and 'communication-plus.'[288] For any communicative act to be successful, it obviously needs to be noticed by the addressee, and in order to function as a sign, it also needs to be recognized by the addressee, which means the addressee needs to already have some familiarity with the sign's conventional meaning; in other words, the success of the communicative act depends on 'uptake' – the addressee's recognition of the intention of the speaker.[289] For instances of what McGowan calls 'purely communicative speech acts,' the addressee's uptake is a sufficient condition for the utterance to be successful; these utterances merely serve a speaker to convey a certain antecedent proposition to an audience; in other words, they are what Austin called 'constatives.'[290] Other instances of communication, which McGowan terms 'communication-plus,' aim to do more than merely communicating antecedent propositions; for instance, they seek to alter the addressee's behaviour (such as the order, 'Please, close that door!').[291] In order to be successful, communication-plus acts require conditions in addition to uptake by the audience to be met; for example, an 'authority condition,' which is met if the addressee recognizes that the speaker has the requisite

288 Baumgartner, "Re-Examining an Ethics of Citizenship in Postsecular Societies," 94; Mary Kate McGowan, "On Silencing and Sexual Refusal," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 17, No. 4 (2009); see also Mary Kate McGowan, "'Conversational Exercitives:' Something Else We Do with Our Words," *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 27, No. 1 (February 2004).

289 McGowan, "On Silencing and Sexual Refusal," 488. While McGowan, like other authors writing on speech act theory, follows Austin's terminology, I actually prefer the term 'communicative act,' rather than 'speech act,' because not all contributions to public debate come in the form of articulated speech (as our example of the poster illustrates). In what follows, I follow McGowan's (and Austin's) terminology, but note that what they say about speech acts is true for communicative acts that are not mediated through speech as well.

290 McGowan, "On Silencing and Sexual Refusal."

291 Baumgartner, "Re-Examining an Ethics of Citizenship in Postsecular Societies," 83, drawing on McGowan, "On Silencing and Sexual Refusal."

authority to perform the speech act in question. Speech acts for which this particular condition needs to be met are referred to as 'authoritative speech acts' by McGowan. For instance, the audience may perceive the speaker to be dishonest, undemocratic, threatening or unworthy, and hence as lacking the requisite authority to participate as an equal in the public forum. If a speaker is perceived in such a way, their contributions to public discussion are far less likely to be listened to or to be given serious consideration, let alone to be assented to, by others.

My central interest at this juncture concerns the ways in which sociocultural interventions are employed by political actors to affect the perceived authority that is associated with the elements of the social imaginary that underlie public, political debate. These cultural elements are not limited to speaker authority alone; in the poster of our example, for instance, the American flag and the American declaration of independence are also referenced. However, the meaning ascribed to these other cultural elements interacts with speaker authority in interesting ways: a statement made by a contributor who is perceived as a white man from a Christian or post-Christian background, and that invokes widely respected values like freedom or national identity (for instance by referring to the country's flag or foundational documents) would doubtlessly be heard, interpreted and evaluated differently than if coming from Munira Ahmed (the woman depicted in the poster). It is precisely the interaction *between* the various components of a given sociocultural intervention, *including* the social position of the contributor *as well* as the symbols and narratives that the contribution makes reference to, that structures how this sociocultural intervention 'works.'

Consider the difference between McGowan's use of the term 'authority' in this context and my definition of perceived authority as a communicative act's capacity to elicit a wished-for response. In McGowan's usage, this capacity features exclusively as a quality attributed to the person performing the act; the act's success is entirely determined by how the person performing the act of communication is perceived by the audience. In my definition, by contrast, authority is a quality of the act itself that is produced by the interaction between all of its components, including the perceived identity of the contributor, but *also* including the symbols and narratives that are referenced in the act. The advantage of having a theoretical vocabulary that differentiates between the distinct components of a given communicative act, such as between the perceived authority of the speaker and the perceived authority of the cultural elements that the communicative act incorporates, is that it enables us to discuss and reflect upon the ways in which they interface with each other to achieve the act's outcome.

From here on, I will use the term 'perceptions of *speaker* authority' to refer to the audience's largely non-discursive perceptions of the identity of the person performing a communicative act. These perceptions co-determine whether or not the act can elicit the wished-for result. They constitute an important subset of the larger category of 'perceptions of authority;' though important (as they can be critical for the act's success), they are merely a *subset* because not all perceptions of authority that affect the success of the act concern the identity of the speaker directly.

Before continuing, I will also elaborate on how considerations of 'respect' relate to the issues under consideration here. In political controversies in which some subset of citizens is denied the authority that is associated with the actions that are undertaken by them, and which, by engaging in the action, they implicitly claim and exercise, evaluations and interpretations in terms of 'respect' and 'disrespect' arise quite naturally. For instance, when Muslim citizens are categorically treated as lacking democratic competencies which are simultaneously treated as typical, inherent qualities of other non-Muslim citizens, so that in effect their authority to contribute equally to public debate is denied, we might well say that their status as equal members of the community is being disrespected.[292] We can understand the disrespect here to be constituted by certain *actions* that manifests a failure to acknowledge the rights and claims that are associated with the other person's status; we can also understand one's failure to take what a citizen who happens to be a Muslim has to contribute seriously to be caused by a disdainful *attitude* towards Islam.[293]

292 That a failure to comply with the duties associated with their respective accounts constitutes a form of 'disrespect' is also implied, for instance, by Habermas' statement that for 'all their ongoing dissent on questions of world views and religious doctrines, citizens are meant to *respect* one another as free and equal members of their political community' (my emphasis). Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 5.

293 Joseph Raz defines respect as *essentially* a matter of action: 'Respecting people is a way of treating them. It is neither a feeling, nor an emotion, nor a belief, though it may be based on a belief and be accompanied (at least occasionally) by certain feelings.' (Joseph Raz, *Value, Respect and Attachment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 138.) When developing an account of the ethics of citizenship, to discuss disrespect primarily in terms of behaviour is an attractive option in the sense that unlike action, attitudes and beliefs cannot be enforced – even if we consider some attitudes and beliefs to be more desirable than others. I agree with Leslie Green's response to that definition, namely that an overly exclusive focus on behaviour may not be sufficient as "people are sensitive not only to the way they are treated but also to the spirit in which that treatment is afforded." (Leslie Green, "Two Worries about Respect for Persons," *Ethics*, 120, No. 2 (January 2010), 219) Furthermore, whether they can or should be enforced or not, my fellow citizens' attitudes towards me or the symbols and values that my contribution invoke are politically relevant to the extent that they determine whether or not my contribution will be able to meet a wished-for response.

Whether we take the disrespect to be primarily about actions, attitudes, or both, the result is a form of 'silencing' or 'disempowering': those who are not respected are in effect denied the possibility of having their rights and concerns taken seriously.[294]

In Stephen Darwall's definition,[295] recognition-respect 'consists in giving appropriate consideration or recognition to some feature of its object in deliberating about what to do.'[296] A prominent instance of this is the kind of respect frequently thought to be owed to every person merely on the basis that they are a person, irrespective of any further admirable or apprehensible traits that they may also have.[297] The objects of recognition-respect are *facts* that are being recognized as ones that ought to be reckoned with in the sense that they ought to influence our actions: 'to have recognition respect for something is to regard that fact as itself placing restrictions on what it is permissible for one to do.'[298] Appraisal-respect, on the other hand, involves one's 'positive appraisal' or 'admiration' for the object's particular traits.[299] It concerns the esteem that an object deserves by manifesting excellence as a person or in a pursuit, for instance because of their originality as an artist or because of the exemplary ethical stance manifested by their life-choices. In contrast to recognition-respect, appraisal-respect concerns merit, admits of degrees, and does not by necessity prescribe or limit one's course of action.[300]

To give an example, consider the situation in which a train conductor asks a passenger to show him her railway ticket, and that the passenger complies because, upon seeing the conductor's uniform and recognizing its significance, she evaluates him as someone whose directions she ought to follow in this situation. In Darwall's terminology, this scenario would represent an instance of recognition-respect; in evaluating

294 Christoph Baumgartner makes this point on silencing in "Re-Examining an Ethics of Citizenship in Postsecular Societies." See also Christoph Baumgartner, "On Silencing and Public Debates about Religiously Offensive Acts," in *Gestures: The Study of Religion as Practice*, edited by Michiel Leezenberg, Anne-Marie Korte and Martin van Bruinessen (New York: Fordham, 2022). Also see McGowan, "On Silencing and Sexual Refusal."

295 Stephen Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respects," *Ethics*, 88, No. 1 (October 1977); see also Stephen Hudson, "The Nature of Respect," *Social Theory and Practice* 6, No. 1 (1980); Sarah Buss, "Respect for Persons," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, No. 4 (December 1999); Colin Bird, "Status, Identity and Respect," *Political Theory* 32 No. 2 (April 2004); Leslie Green, "Two Worries about Respect for Persons," *Ethics* 120 No. 2 (January 2010).

296 Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respects," 38.

297 Ibid.

298 Ibid., 39.

299 This corresponds to what Axel Honneth terms 'esteem'; Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. by Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

300 Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respects," 38-45.

the situation, the passenger recognizes the fact that the speaker is a conductor, and that for that reason, showing him her ticket would be the appropriate response. Her personal esteem (or lack thereof) for the conductor is not (or should not be) pertinent to her evaluation.

Likewise, in Rawls' and Habermas' accounts, the fact that the person that I find myself in public communication with is a fellow citizen places restrictions on the courses of action that I can permissibly take; my recognition of the rights that they derive from this status does not allow for degrees and should not be affected by my admiration (or lack thereof) for the person under consideration. This norm can be said to be violated when, in contemporary debates on immigration and Islam, Muslim citizens are categorically presented as 'outsiders' with suspect loyalties and with questionable democratic competencies, because it infringes on the right of citizens to participate in democratic decision-making processes on an equal footing. In this sense, respect for citizens as it underlies both Rawls' and Habermas' accounts of citizenship is akin to the recognition-respect due to persons.

However, this is only one part of the story. The principle, fundamental to liberal theory, that all citizens are to be addressed and understood simply as citizens is in practice frequently violated. We do not always simply address and understand our fellow citizens as citizens *without qualification*; rather, at least at times, we address and understand them as citizens who have values, beliefs and commitments that locate them at lesser or greater ideological distance from us, and this perceived ideological distance can affect how we evaluate their contributions. The likelihood that a given public responds positively to my contribution to public debate – the perceived authority of my contribution – is co-determined by the degree to which that public perceives me as someone whose values and commitments they can respect. In other words, in practice, perceived authority, which I defined as the capacity of a communicative act or of one of its components to elicit a wished-for response in a given public, is to some degree also a function of perceived proximity within shared meaning systems.[301] Furthermore, if someone is highly respected for their accomplishments or expertise, this can enhance the likelihood that their contributions elicit attention or assent. The citizens' esteem for other citizens, based on what they know

301 As Todd Nicholas Fuist writes, via 'behavior, language, use of props, and aesthetics,' social and political actors display their 'beliefs, values and allegiances' to an audience which subsequently interprets these clues, drawing on its cultural knowledge of the referenced meaning systems, to situate themselves and each other in relation to one another within those shared meaning systems. Todd Nicholas Fuist, "The Dramatization of Beliefs, Values, and Allegiances: Ideological Performances Among Social Movement Groups and Religious Organizations," *Social Movement Studies*, 13, No. 4 (2014) 427-442.

of them (or what they think they know of them) – in Darwall's terms, their appraisal-respect for them – is a factor in whether or not they take the time and effort to listen to their contributions to public debate, and in whether or not they are likely to assent with a contribution.[302] In short, the interactions that go on between citizens depend both on factors of recognition-respect and on appraisal-respect.

Consequently, when it is a widely held view that the commitments or accomplishments of a particular group render them somehow suspect or unworthy, this lack of speaker authority will severely hamper that group's ability to make itself heard in the public forum. Insistence that all citizens have a right to an equal hearing is one fully appropriate response to such situations – and, as I will argue, this insistence can be realized through sociocultural interventions, such as the poster in our example. But another way in which the resulting democratic inequality can be countered is by disclosing alternative perspectives and evaluations upon the cultural elements that underlie public debate. This can be especially important when these elements are frequently associated with the identity, the values and the accomplishments of a marginalized minority within society. Sociocultural interventions can be employed to this effect as well – and this use of sociocultural interventions is also illustrated by the poster. I will illustrate both functions of sociocultural interventions such as the poster later on. First, however, I need to introduce one more concept.

2.2.4. Introducing 'markers of authority'

Sociocultural interventions draw upon both visual and auditory cues, such as widely familiar symbols, images and narratives, that evoke strong associations and evaluations in terms of identification, authority and respect in the audience, and that may help to persuade the audience to accept the act as worthy of their attention, consideration, agreement and/or active endorsement. As it happens, the poster also demonstrates how new perspectives upon these cultural elements, which I call 'markers of authority,' are made available. Doing this may be especially important in situations of widely established prejudice, in which some groups of speakers are not widely perceived as having the proper authority to participate in public debate.

Consider how in the example of the train ticket, the conductor's uniform communicates to the passenger that, given the status and role of the conductor, it is appropriate for her

302 Compare Snow and Benford, who include the status and the credibility of the frame articulator as one of several factors upon which the resonance of a frame depends. Benford and Snow, "'Framing Processes and Social Movements."

to comply with his request. Here the cultural element of the uniform functions as a visual cue accompanying the communicative act that leads the addressee to evaluate the speaker as having the requisite authority to check train tickets; in this situation, it has the function of steering the evaluation of the communicative act towards the wished-for response.

Likewise, sociocultural interventions involve an element of *evaluation* on the part of the addressee. This evaluation proceeds by drawing upon various visual and auditory clues and signs that accompany the communicative act, that enable the audience to place the received information in the context of antecedent referential frameworks and hence enable them to interpret and evaluate the contribution. These clues can be consciously employed by political actors in order to steer the interpretation and evaluation of their contribution in such a manner that it is likely to elicit the response that they hope to achieve.

Incorporating widely familiar symbols, images and narratives that evoke strong associations and evaluations in terms of identification, authority and respect in the audience – or, in the terms of social movement scholars, symbols, images and narratives that are culturally resonant – into a communicative act can be highly effective in steering an audience to accept that act as worthy of their attention, consideration, passive agreement and/or active endorsement. I will refer to such cultural elements as 'markers of authority,' to denote their capacity to enhance that act's perceived authority (its ability to elicit a wished-for response).

In what follows, taking my lead from Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam,[303] I will work from the assumption that human beings tend to be both desirous and capable of making sense of their experiences by relating these to cognitive models that are, to a degree, intersubjective and conventional, and that these models, by serving as explanatory frameworks, assist them in orienting themselves in various domains of life.[304] A special case of these endeavours to construct, connect to and transmit shared meanings (to which I, following a variety of sociologists, will refer as 'meaning construction'[305]) concerns

303 Neal Fligstein and Doug McAdam, *A Theory of Fields* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

304 Fligstein and McAdam, 35-56. They point out that the view of 'collaborative meaning-making' as a defining human quality has been shared by many sociologists since Weber; Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 40.

305 Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields* 35-56; also see Anne E. Kane, 'Theorizing Meaning Construction in Social Movements: Symbolic Structures and Interpretation during the Irish Land War, 1879-1882,' *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Nov., 1997), esp. 249-257; Bradd Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52, 319-320; Christian Smith, "Correcting a Curious Neglect:

those meanings that inform a person's sense of self and of ultimate purpose – beliefs and orientations, in other words, that we could broadly call 'existential.'[306]

The concepts, symbols and narratives that people strongly associate with their sense of self and of their ultimate purposes in life tend to evoke strong associations and evaluations in terms of identification, authority and respect. Our sense of self and of our purpose in life are usually not just a matter of cognitively held beliefs, but understandings we care deeply about; that is to say, we are affectively invested in them. Because these cultural elements are closely associated with people's understanding of themselves and their life purposes, they are likely to elicit a strong evaluation, and thus they are likely to appear as markers of authority in sociocultural interventions.

Markers of authority are effectively employed in the poster of our example: each of the prominent visual elements that have been selected by the artists – the flag, the constitution, the style and colour that reference the 2008 Obama poster, and, in a different way, the hijab – stands out because of their ability to elicit powerful associations and evaluations in the American public. I will examine its use of markers of authority in further detail in the next section.

2.3 External effects of sociocultural interventions

2.3.1. Laying claim to speaker authority

Having introduced the concepts of 'perceived authority,' of 'perceptions of speaker authority,' and of 'markers of authority' in the previous section, in this section I will introduce a distinction between two interrelated ways in which sociocultural interventions can draw upon markers of authority to affect the perceptions of authority held by their audience. I will refer to these two ways as 'external effects' of sociocultural interventions, because they deal with the perceptions of others than the contributors themselves; in the next section, I will discuss the 'internal effects' of these

Bringing Religion Back In" in *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*, ed. Christian Smith (New York: Routledge, 1996), 5; Fuist, "The Dramatization of Beliefs, Values, and Allegiances;" Elizabeth Hutchinson, "Spirituality, Religion, and Progressive Social Movements: Resources and Motivation for Social Change," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 31, Nos. 1-2 (2012).

306 Fligstein and McAdam refer to this as 'the distinctive human capacity and *need* to fashion shared meanings and identities to ensure a viable existential ground for existence.' Fligstein and McAdam *A Theory of Fields*, 18; cf. 40-45. Of course, the importance of intersubjective, evaluative, historically evolving frameworks as sources of a person's sense of self and purpose was also at the core of Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

contributions to public debate, that is, the impact that sociocultural interventions can have on the contributors themselves; these, too, are relevant for they affect the power relations between citizens.

The first of the two external effects I wish to discuss concerns the manner in which sociocultural interventions can be used to influence widely shared perceptions of who can and who cannot legitimately contribute to public, political debate – or put differently, who is and who is not in practice recognized as having the speaker authority that is requisite for political participation as an equal fellow citizen. By doing so, sociocultural interventions serve as a means to lay claim to citizenship and to directly redefine the practical boundaries of the political community.

Instances of political communication in which socially dominant perceptions of speakers' authority critically diminish the political participation of some subset of citizens are common enough in everyday political life, but one example that is particularly prominent in contemporary debate in Europe, North America and elsewhere is a widespread perception of Muslim citizens as foreign, threatening, illiberal and/or undemocratic. It was precisely such a framing of Muslim citizens as threatening and 'foreign' that the makers of the poster that I introduced above sought to counteract. Fairey indicated that the purpose of the posters series was 'to create images around the most attacked and excluded communities;' he further stated that he saw it as 'immoral' to 'characterise [Muslim Americans] as something "other" to be feared when [… they] are our friends, neighbours and citizens.'[307]

In the perspective that is challenged by the poster, then, adherence to Islam, as symbolized by the hijab, disqualifies a citizen as having a legitimate claim on equal membership in the collective (the 'we' in 'We the People'). The poster, a sociocultural intervention that deliberately seeks to cast American Muslims in an alternative light, not as threatening aliens, a 'fifth column' of sorts, but rather as legitimate and intrinsic part of the American citizenry, seeks to effect a change concerning the perceived identity of a particular group within the larger society, a change which clearly would affect the way in which contributions to public debate made by citizens who happen to be Muslims would be evaluated, and that hence would also clearly affect the ability of these citizens to participate in democratic decision-making.

The contributors to the poster indicated that they sought to counter characterizations of Muslim citizens as 'something "other" to be feared,' and to highlight their status as

307 McCluskey, "Inaugural Protest Poster Stirs Debate among Muslim American Women."

citizens.[308] This warrants an interpretation of the poster as the visual indication of a fact that the audience ought to recognize: namely, that citizens with a Muslim background (as represented by Munira Ahmed) are to be recognized and addressed as equal fellow members of the political community. One of the ways in which political actors employ sociocultural interventions to affect perceptions of authority and counter informal political exclusion is by asserting, through means other than deliberative argument, that they share in the status of free and equal citizens, no matter what other particular traits they may have, and no matter how these particular traits may be esteemed by others; in other words, sociocultural interventions can be employed in order to lay claim to recognition-respect as citizens through non-discursive means that redefine the practical boundaries of the political community. This is the first of two functions of sociocultural interventions that I aim to bring out here.

It is consistent with an interpretation of the poster as an example of a visually expressed claim to recognition-respect that Munira Ahmed is represented with cultural elements that emphasize her membership of the political community – the flag and the quoted preamble to the U.S. constitution. By citing the hijab, a cultural element that here serves as an identifier of a group that is frequently presented as consisting of 'non-members,' and intertwining it with markers of membership, the artists suggest that what really is at stake in contemporary debates about Islam, immigration, databases, and national security are the political boundaries of the American citizenry, and offer an answer to the question of who counts (and who does not count) as an equal member of the demos. The reference to the widely familiar preamble of the U.S. constitution also corresponds with this reading, given its strong association with the idea of a political community of equals engaged in a collective project of self-legislation.

Laying claim to the recognition-respect that is due to equal fellow citizens is only the first of the two uses of markers of authority in sociocultural interventions that I have set out to discuss here. It concerns a feature that all citizens hold in common: their sharing in the status of being an equal citizen. By contrast, the second function of the markers of authority that are referenced in sociocultural interventions, to which I will now turn, concerns traits and features that are precisely *not* shared by all citizens, but that distinguish (or, at least, are widely perceived to distinguish) particular groups and individuals within society from the rest, and which, furthermore, are subject to evaluations that are more analogous to appraisal-respect.

308 Ibid.

2.3.2. Disclosing alternative perspectives upon markers of authority

Perceptions of speaker authority are not the only perceptions of authority that affect the effectiveness of political contributions. Contributions to political debate are made up of many different components that together co-determine the contribution's ability to elicit the response that the contributor hopes to achieve. Especially when a speaker is not widely perceived as authoritative, these additional components can help to increase the contribution's ability to elicit a wished-for response. It is these additional components that I want to concentrate on now; by advancing alternative perspectives upon cultural elements that appear in public discussion, sociocultural interventions can influence how future contributions to public debate are received. This is especially important when these cultural elements are frequently associated with subsets of society that have a history of political marginalization.

How a communicative act is evaluated by its intended audience is determined by a range of factors distinct from, but interacting with, the perceived authority of the contributor, such as how the audiences evaluates the various reasons, values and symbols that the speaker references, as well as on how we evaluate the style and register in which the contribution is delivered.[309] While in my interpretation, the poster draws upon several cultural elements (the hijab, the flag, and the refenced preamble to the constitution) in an effort to bring about a shift in the way that Muslim citizens are perceived, this is not the only perceptive shift that this sociocultural intervention, if it is successful, would bring about, for alternative perspectives upon all the referenced elements themselves are also disclosed. The other function of sociocultural interventions, which the poster also demonstrates, is that they make available different perspectives and evaluations on the markers of authority that they draw on, and by doing so, affect the evaluation of future contributions to public debate.

To return to my earlier example, consider one difference between the train conductor's uniform on the one hand and the markers of authority that are referenced in the poster on the other: namely, that the latter does more than merely communicating the relevant status of a group of citizens; additionally, they evoke (and are referenced because they evoke) strong associations and evaluations in terms of identification and belonging on

309 For the effect of these other components of the speech act, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics." For the effect of style and register, also recall Iris Young's argument that views that differ greatly from socially dominant premises, that do not conform to socially dominant norms of orderliness, or that are phrased in a form widely deemed silly, excessive or hysterical tend not to be taken seriously (chapter 1).

the part of the public, and it is in part *from* these strong associations and evaluations that the symbols referenced in the poster derive their ability to steer the communicative act's evaluation towards a wished-for response. The perceived authority of symbols like the flag and the constitution derives for a considerable part from the strong evaluations (in Darwall's terms, a case of appraisal-respects) that they elicit; as culturally resonant visual cues that are incorporated in a sociocultural intervention, they are examples of what I defined as 'markers of authority.'

That sociocultural interventions can be employed to disclose alternative perspectives and evaluations on the markers of authority that they draw on is exemplified by one of the most prominent visual elements of Fairey's poster, the hijab, which, over the last two decades, has risen to prominence as a central symbol in controversies around Islam, islamophobia and immigration.[310] While a sizable part of the non-Muslim American public associates the hijab with largely negative ideas about Islam and about Muslim women,[311] sociologists have pointed out that American Muslimas themselves assign a wide variety of meanings to it; to give a non-exhaustive list, it can express religious devotion,[312] attitudes towards gender,[313] resistance to Western colonialism in the Middle East,[314] as well as solidarity

310 As a result, the literature on the political significance of the hijab is quite extensive; see Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Seyla Benhabib, "The Return of Political Theology: the Scarf Affair in Comparative Constitutional Perspective in France, Germany and Turkey," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 36 Nos. 3–4 (2010). For sociological studies that deal specifically with the various meanings that are ascribed to the hijab in the United States, see: Jen'Nan Ghazal Read and John P. Bartkowski, "To Veil or Not to Veil? A Case Study of Identity Negotiation among Muslim Women in Austin, Texas," *Gender and Society*, 14. No. 3 (June 2000); Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "The Post-9/11 "Hijab" as Icon," *Sociology of Religion*, 68, No. 3 (Fall 2007); Rhys H. Williams and Gira Vashi, "'Hijab" and American Muslim Women: Creating the Space for Autonomous Selves," *Sociology of Religion*, 68, No. 3 (Fall 2007); Inger Furseth, "The Hijab: Boundary Work and Identity Negotiations among Immigrant Muslim Women in the Los Angeles Area," *Review of Religious Research*, 52, No. 4 (June 2011).

311 Read and Bartkowski, "To Veil or Not to Veil?" 396; Haddad, "The Post-9/11 'Hijab' as Icon," 255; Williams and Vashi, "'Hijab" and American Muslim Women," 275-276; Furseth, "The Hijab," 365.

312 Read and Bartkowski, "To Veil or Not to Veil?" 403-404, 408; Furseth, "The Hijab," 370-373.

313 Read and Bartkowski, "To Veil or Not to Veil?" 396, 404-405, 408; Furseth, "The Hijab," 373-374.

314 Read and Bartkowski, "To Veil or Not to Veil?" 396.

in response to increased islamophobia in the United States and elsewhere.[315] It is, in other words, 'a contested symbol with multiple meanings.'[316] The act of donning the hijab, furthermore, involves more than the mere expression of antecedent cognitive meanings, beliefs and attitudes; it is also a performative contribution to the wider cultural project of forming, and negotiating a space for, a distinct Muslim-American identity.[317] As such, it can involve a claim to authenticity and pride[318] as well as to the rights of freedom of religion and of free speech which are promised by the American system.[319]

Whereas non-Muslims at times interpret the hijab as symbolizing negatively evaluated perceived traits of 'outsiders,' covering Muslimas themselves have advanced alternative interpretations, and connected them in some cases to positively evaluated traits that are widely associated with the American polity, such as free choice and individualism. By thus making available alternative perspectives upon and corresponding alternative evaluations of cultural markers, political actors can affect the weight that is attributed to future political claims. In a similar vein, consider how in one of his interviews, Fairey explicitly links his image to a widely familiar and positively evaluated self-narrative about the history and identity of the United States: 'the image of American flag hijab is very powerful because it reminds people that freedom of religion is a founding principle of the United States and that there is a history of welcoming people to the United States who have faced religious persecution in their homelands.'[320] By presenting the hijab thus, as a symbol that *exemplifies* a trait that is already positively evaluated and regarded as typical of membership (namely, the pursuit and exercise of the freedom of religion), the artists make available an alternative interpretation and evaluation of the hijab, that is in competition with other interpretations, and that, if it came to be widely established, would affect the future evaluation of public contributions referencing the hijab, or the adherence to Islam that it signifies.[321]

315 Haddad, "The Post-9/11 'Hijab' as Icon," 253-254; Furseth, "The Hijab," 382.
316 Furseth, "The Hijab," 367.
317 Williams and Vashi 2007, 272, 274; Furseth, "The Hijab," 382.
318 Haddad, "The Post-9/11 'Hijab' as Icon," 254.
319 Ibid.
320 McCluskey, "Inaugural Protest Poster Stirs Debate among Muslim American Women."
321 Here I seek to make explicit a part of what I think it is the poster is intended to accomplish, taking my cue from the statements by its makers. To what extent it actually manages to accomplish this is a different matter; as indicated, sociocultural interventions are open to multiple interpretations. One objection that was raised against the poster, already referenced above, namely, that the demand, frequently placed by opinion makers and politicians upon

In this section, I have distinguished between two ways in which sociocultural interventions affect the ability of political actors to participate successfully in democratic decision-making processes. First, sociocultural interventions can be employed to influence widely shared perceptions of who can and who cannot legitimately contribute to public, political debate. By doing so, sociocultural interventions serve as a means to lay claim to citizenship and to directly redefine the practical boundaries of the political community. Second, sociocultural interventions can also be employed to disclose alternative perspectives, and corresponding alternative evaluations, upon the cultural elements that are referenced in contributions to public debate. By providing alternative interpretations of the cultural elements upon which political debate draws, politically disenfranchised minorities indirectly affect the weight that is attributed to their own future political claims, and by doing so, expand their own ability to actualize their citizenship.

2.4. Internal effects of sociocultural interventions

2.4.1 'Internal effects:' the importance of motivational resources of citizenship

Both of the functions of sociocultural interventions that I described in the previous section represent ways in which a political actor can employ sociocultural interventions in an effort to bring about a shift in the way her audience perceives political reality. Both uses are thus in line with a basic premise from which much of liberal and deliberative democratic political theory proceeds: namely that citizens do what they do in the public sphere in order to convince others who do not (yet) share their own perspective.[322] However, not every contribution to public, political discussion aims to convince those who think differently.

In the rest of this chapter, I will look at contributions that, rather than being aimed at convincing those who think differently, are aimed at strengthening the resolve, sense of purpose and collective identity of those who already largely agree with the contributor's point of view – including the contributors themselves. I refer to these effects as 'internal'

Muslim citizens, 'to profess their loyalty loudly and repeatedly' (Kanji, "Wrapping Muslims in Flags Stifles the Struggle for Equality") constitutes a form of discrimination, corresponds with the strategy of upholding the principle that citizens are to be addressed *as equal citizens*, and not singled out for their religion or ethnicity. While I agree, given the statements by Fairey, Ahmed and others, I focus on an alternative reading of the poster; rather than as a concession to such an unfair and illiberal demand, it can also be seen as an attempt to make available new perspectives and evaluations of commonly invoked cultural elements that are closely associated with a particular group of citizens.

322 This premise is also shared by the authors I discussed in the first chapter.

effects, to indicate that the intended response is brought about in the original contributor themselves as well as in citizens who, in the sense that they already largely identify with the perspective of the contributor, can think of themselves as belonging to the same 'side' of the issue at hand as the contributor.

One of my reasons to explicitly include internal effects in my account is that they are important from the standpoint of a commitment to democratic equality. Consider that the engagement in public political action takes time, effort, and especially in more repressive situations, personal risk, and that political actors therefore must work not just to convince those in the citizenry at large who do not yet agree with their political stance to support their cause, but also to encourage those who are already supportive of their perspective and agenda to stay involved and not to be overwhelmed by the potential dangers and futility that can be associated with advocacy and activism.[323] In this regard, Deborah B. Gould's work on AIDS activism in the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s is instructive.[324] She points out that the activist group ACT UP in this period did extensive 'emotion work' through a wide variety of activist practices and tactics, including clear examples of what I have termed 'sociocultural interventions' such as the scattering of the ashes of those who died of AIDS in public spaces like the lawn in front of the White House.[325] On her account, the various emotions that are fostered through this work, including anger, self-affirmation, a shared sense of purpose, love, exhilaration, and mutual connectedness,[326] contribute towards sustaining a movement over time.[327]

It is not surprising, then, that political and social movement leaders often actively encourage perceptions that changes in policy can in fact be achieved through political action; they do this, for instance, through celebrations of smaller or larger victories on the way and through hope-inspiring speeches.[328] This work is especially important in the case

323 Hutchison, "Spirituality, Religion, and Progressive Social Movements," 118.

324 Deborah B. Gould, "Passionate Political Processes: Bring Emotions Back into the Study of Social Movements" in Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (eds.), *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotions and ACT UP's fight against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

325 Gould, "Passionate Political Processes," 155.

326 Gould, *Moving Politics*, 213-265.

327 Ibid., 211.

328 Examples coming to mind include Martin Luther King's famous 'I have a dream speech' as well as Barack Obama's victory speech in 2008, in which he spoke extensively about Ann Nixon Cooper, an African-American centenarian who had lived through various stages of Black struggle for equality in the U.S.

of political actors who strive to counter the political marginalization of disenfranchised groups within society, as these groups by definition face higher obstacles to participation on an equal footing, so that discouragement is a greater risk.

The motivational power of the internal effects of sociocultural interventions is also present in situations where the obstacles to having political hopes fulfilled appear so great that they seem almost or entirely insurmountable. Consider how citizens can be drawn to political activity, not only by hope for change but also by the satisfaction that comes from 'acting *now*, in the face of those who deny their capacities for courage, dignity, and coordination.'[329] Through their activity, political actors may also come to see themselves and their relation to others within society in a new light, for instance, as people standing up against injustice, and such self-images can be invested with a sense of pride. This is important because the way people interact with one another does not only depend on how they perceive the other, but also on how they perceive *themselves*. In what follows, I will demonstrate the internal effects of sociocultural interventions through a discussion of Idle No More, a movement of Indigenous peoples that originated in Canada during the winter of 2012-2013.

2.4.2. Example: Idle No More

While Indigenous peoples in Canada have a long history of defending their traditional territories, their rights, their cultures and traditions, non-Indigenous Canadians have only rarely paid widespread and sustained attention to these efforts.[330] One amongst several exceptional periods during which this was not the case was the winter of 2012-2013, which saw the rise of Idle No More, a grassroots protest movement that emerged in late November 2012 and that, during the following months, achieved great visibility in the Canadian public sphere.[331] The Indigenous elders, academics, artists, authors and activists

329 Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, "Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements" in: Snow, Soule and Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, 421. See also Ronald R. Aminzade and Doug McAdam, "Emotions and contentious politics" in Ronald R. Aminzade et al. *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

330 Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced*, 21.

331 Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced*, 21. Adam J. Barker argues that Idle No More draws from Indigenous nationhood movements extending back as far as five centuries ago. Adam J. Barker, "A Direct Act of Resurgence, a Direct Act of Sovereignty": Reflections on Idle No More, Indigenous Activism, and Canadian Settler Colonialism" *Globalizations 12 No. 1,* 2015. Likewise, Richard G. Baker and Nadia Verrelli stress that '[w]hile Idle No

who participated in this movement publicly expressed themselves in a wide variety of ways, including traditional ceremonial practices such as smudging, round dances and fasting, as well as through art, poetry, social media posts and opinion pieces. In *The Winter We Danced,* the Kino-nda-niimi Collective brought many of these expressions together in a rich compilation that preserves much of this diversity.[332] In the following, I take up the Kino-nda-niimi Collective's invitation to their readers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to 'reflect upon this beautiful and significant moment [that is, the emergence of Idle No More], to remember, celebrate, think, and contribute to change we can all benefit from.'[333] In that spirit, what follows is by no means intended as a comprehensive, overarching account of Idle No More, but rather as an effort to bring out some helpful lessons from this movement on the specific question of how to think, talk and write about the intersection of political actors' existential commitments as expressed through sociocultural interventions on the one hand and issues of persisting injustice and inequality on the other. In the next subsections, I will argue that Idle No More demonstrates, first, how public, political action provides those who participate in it with opportunities to engage in collaborative projects of fashioning and transmitting shared cultural meanings, second, that doing so tends to generate desirable emotional states, and third, that these, in turn, exert a motivational force.[334] Before doing so, however, I will use the rest of this subsection to give a brief and general introduction to this movement.

Idle No More started with, and derived its name from, a campaign that was initiated in November 2012 by four women in Saskatchewan (Sylvia McAdam, Jessica Gordan, Nina Wilson, and Sheelah McLean) to inform both Indigenous and non-Indigenous

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More clearly represents an important inflection point in the history of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian setting, it is crucial to situate the protest in the broader context of ongoing Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism.' Richard G. Baker and Nadia Verrelli, "'Smudging, drumming and the like do not a nation make:' Temporal Liminality and Delegitimization of Indigenous Protest in Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d'études canadiennes*, 51, No. 1 (Winter 2017), 40-41. The same point is made by Coates, *#IdleNoMore and the Remaking of Canada*, 23-43.

332 The Kini-nda-nimmi Collective describes itself as a 'group of Indigenous writers, artists, editors, curators, and allies.' Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced*, 439.

333 Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced,* 25.

334 For a discussion of the role of political actors' emotions in political action see Aminzade and McAdam, "Emotions and contentious politics;" James M. Jasper, "Not in Our Backyards: Emotion, Threat, and Blame" in Jasper, The Art of Moral Protest, 103-129, including an interesting table listing diverse emotions and how they may affect citizens' readiness to engage in protest (114); and Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, "Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements."

communities on the impacts of the Canadian government's proposed bill C-45, the so-called Jobs and Growth Act, a 457 pages long legislative document containing many changes that, according to many Indigenous people and communities, greatly endangered their rights and environmental protections.[335] On December 4, Chief Theresa Spence of the Attawapiskat Cree Nation announced a liquid diet hunger strike to raise awareness of inadequate housing conditions, a lack of safe drinking water and other structural problems in her community, and also to indicate support for the Idle No More movement.[336] From December 11 until January 24, 2013, she fasted in a teepee on Victoria Island, close to Parliament Hill in Ottawa, indicating that she would continue the fast until Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Governor-General David Johnson would consent to meet with her and discuss treaty rights.[337] Spence's hunger strike, while initially separate from and not co-ordinated with the movement that was emerging in Saskatchewan, 'soon inspired and galvanized the movement' and played an important role in the public perception of Idle No More as it was shaped by and reflected in mainstream media coverage.[338]

Assisted by social media, where the Twitter hashtags '#IdleNoMore' and '#INM' were used, the movement sparked gatherings and protest events across the country, initially mainly consisting of 'a combination of "flash mob" round-dancing and drumming in public spaces like shopping malls, street intersections, and legislature grounds, coupled with an ongoing public education campaign organized through community-led conferences, teach-ins, and public panels;' near the end of December more disruptive tactics such as 'the use of blockades and temporary train and traffic stoppages'[339] were employed. According to the Kino-nda-niimi Collective, eventually hundreds of thousands of Indigenous organizers and activists across North America were involved.[340]

Beyond Bill C-262, Idle No More responded to a vast and interrelated range of justice issues that resulted from Canada's colonial past and present, prominently including the

335 Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced*, 21; Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 160.

336 Baker and Verrelli, "Temporal Liminality and Delegitimization," 41; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 160.

337 Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 160.

338 Baker and Verrelli, "Temporal Liminality and Delegitimization," 41; Ken Coates is critical towards Chief Spence's hunger strike and seeks to sharply delineate it from the Idle No More movement; he refers to the strike as the 'The Ottawa Distraction.' Coates, *#IdleNoMore and the Remaking of Canada*, 77-109.

339 Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 161.

340 Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced,* 21-23.

appropriation and exploitation of traditional Indigenous land (with its associated environmental destruction, health hazards, and loss of life), the deadly heritage of the Indian Residential School system, and the thousands of unsolved cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women in the country. This multitude of issues led some commentators to criticize Idle No More for what was perceived as a lack of unified goals and clear leadership.[341] Idle No More participants, on the other hand, countered this criticism by emphasizing that a diversity of expressed opinions and the absence of a single leader figure or spokesperson reflected the democratic ethos that was central to Idle No More as an Indigenous grassroots movement.[342]

2.4.3. Sociocultural interventions as opportunities for existential meaning-making

In this subsection, I argue that sociocultural interventions present those who participate in them with opportunities to engage in collaborative projects of existential meaning-making, that these opportunities can strongly affect the emotional life of participants, and that this helps to explain why existential commitments have a major role in understanding the internal effects of sociocultural interventions. I will draw upon the example of Idle No More to bring out these points.

One of the most striking aspects of the events that took place during the emergence of Idle No More, commented upon by participants and observers alike,

341 See Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 161, for examples.

342 See Baker and Verrelli, "Temporal Liminality and Delegitimization," 4; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks,* 161. For instance, Wab Kanew, an Indigenous author, journalist and politician, emphasized that this aspect of Idle No More bespoke the movement's deeply democratic ethos: 'There is no one leader or "list of demands" attributable to Idle No More. While this may seem chaotic, this is what democracy is all about. Democracy is messy. Democracy is loud. Democracy is about hearing a wide range of voices and trying to build a path forward among them. It is not about shutting off debate or trying to rush things in through the back door.' Wab Kinew, "Idle No More is not just an 'Indian thing'" in: Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced*, 98. The Kino-nda-niimi Collective distinguishes three broad motivations or aims that remained central to Idle No More from the start: first, 'the repeal of significant sections of the Canadian federal government's omnibus legislations (Bills C-38 and C-45) and specifically parts relating to the exploitation of the environment, water, and First Nations territories;' second, the 'stabilization of emergency situations in First Nations communities' as well as 'an honest, collaborative approach to addressing issues relating to Indigenous communities and self-sustainability, land, education, housing, healthcare, among others;' and third, a 'commitment to a mutually beneficial nation-to-nation relationship between Canada, First Nations (status and non-status), Inuit, and Metis communities based on the spirit and intent of treaties and a recognition of inherent and shared rights and responsibilities as equal and unique partners.' Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced*, 22.

was the very prominent manifestation of Indigenous cultural practices through round dances, drums, smudging, fasts, etcetera, which were highly public in the sense that they took place in locations of high public significance, and highly political in the sense that they were explicitly aimed at bringing about political change. Moreover, as the following statement by Sturgeon Lake Cree member Tanya Kappo illustrates, these expressions exhibited a remarkable capacity to performatively disclose new perspectives on social reality:

> The round dance revolution, the flash mob round dances […] were a really intense and beautiful moment for me because they somehow brought to life what I really hoped the movement would address. Those issues were first, our sense of ourselves and communities, and second, our existence in this country. I remember going to the round dance at the West Edmonton Mall – it was massive – the amount of people who showed up to drum, the people that came to sing and dance or just be there was incredible. The power and energy that was there, it was like we were glowing, our people were glowing. For the first time, I saw a genuine sense of love for each other and for ourselves. Even if it was only momentary it was powerful enough to awaken in them what needed to be woken up – a remembering of who we were, what we are. And as for the second point, the non-Native people at the mall that day, people who were just doing their Christmas shopping, there was nothing they could do. They had no choice but to stop and wonder, and to see us, really see us. And it was amazing.[343]

Because these events were public and political, because they invited their participants and observers to re-imagine their social reality, their identity and their relations to each other anew, and because they cannot be neatly classified as deliberative argument, they squarely fit my category of sociocultural interventions. However, as Kappo's statement also indicates, it would be a mistake to interpret them in terms of their external effects alone: what is significant is not just how they affected *observers*, but also, and perhaps especially, how they affected *participants*; more specifically, what they affected was these participants' 'sense of themselves.' This existential[344] dimension of the engagement in Idle No More's sociocultural interventions is also pointed out by Wab Kinew, a Cree activist and politician from Winnipeg, according to whom Idle No More, besides being about rights and democracy, was also, and importantly, about 'finding meaning:'

343 Tanya Kappo and Hayden King, "'Our people were glowing:' an Interview with Tanya Kappo" in Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced*, 71.

344 On my use of this term, see 2.2.4.

> Much of the talk around Idle No More is about preserving indigenous culture, either by revitalizing spiritual practices, or by keeping intact what little land base we have left. The reason culture is so important is that it provides a way to grapple with the big questions in life: "Who am I? "What am I doing here?" and "What happens after I die?" Some of the answers have been handed down as words of wisdom. Other times, you are told to go out on the land and discover them for yourself through fasting or prayer. We need those ways. As I look around and see many fellow Canadians searching for meaning in their own lives, I think to myself perhaps they could use these ways as well.[345]

This point corresponds to the insight, argued by sociologists Neal Fligstein and Doug McAdam, that while people choose to engage in collaborative action out of all kinds of motives (for instance, because they want to defend their rights, their lands, or their access to the necessities of life such as clean drinking water), viewed as a form of collaborative meaning-making, it *also* has the benefit that it connects participants with collective identities, a sense of community, a sense of purpose, and shared understandings of the world.[346] It was in no small part *because* Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices are inextricably connected to understandings of self and purpose that the latter provided participants with very resonant evaluative frameworks to challenge the dispossession and exploitation of Indigenous people and their land.[347] Consider the following reaction from Leanne Simpson, a Mississauga Nishnaabeg writer, academic and prominent Idle No More organizer, to non-Indigenous critics of Chief Spence's ritual fast who tried to frame the latter's continued consumption of fish broth as a form of 'cheating:'

345 Wab Kinew, "Idle No More is not just an 'Indian thing,'" 97.

346 Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, esp. 43-51. For more discussion of the point that existential and cultural dimensions on the one hand and 'material' dimensions on the other cannot be neatly separated, see Axel Honneth, "Redistribution as Recognition," in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003) as well as Veit Bader, "Misrecognition, Power, and Democracy" in: David Owen and Bert van den Brink (eds.), *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

347 As John Hansen and Terry Wotherspoon succinctly put it, 'Idle No More has provided a focal point that enables contemporary Indigenous people and their allies to connect with an aspect of Indigenous culture that signifies a heritage designed to respect the environment and to prevent others from devastating the natural world.' Terry Wotherspoon and John Hansen, "The "Idle No More" Movement: Paradoxes of First Nations Inclusion in the Canadian Context" *Social Inclusion* 1.1. (2013), 23.

> My Ancestors survived many long winters on fish broth because there was nothing else to eat – not because the environment was harsh, but because the land loss and colonial policy were so fierce that they were forced into an imposed poverty that often left fish broth as the only sustenance. *Fish broth.* It carries cultural meanings for Anishinaabeg. It symbolized hardship and sacrifice. It symbolizes the strength of our Ancestors. It means survival. Fish broth sustained us through the hardest of circumstances, with the parallel understanding that it can't sustain one forever. We exist today because of fish broth. It connects us to the water and to the fish who gave up its life so we could sustain ourselves. Chief Spence is eating fish broth because metaphorically, colonialism has kept Indigenous Peoples on a fish broth diet for generations upon generations. This is utterly lost on mainstream Canada, as media continues to call Ogichidaakwe Spence's fast a "liquid diet" while the right-wing media refers to it as much worse. Not *Chief* Spence, but *Ogichidaakwe* Spence – a holy woman, a woman that would do anything for her family and community, the one that goes over and makes things happen, a warrior, a leader, because because Ogichidaakwe Spence isn't just on a hunger strike. She is fasting and this also has cultural meaning for Anishinaabeg. She is in ceremony. We do not "dial back" our ceremonies. […] We support. We pray. We offer semaa. We take care of the sacred fire. We sing each night at dusk. We take care of all the other things that need to be taken care of, and we live up to our responsibilities in light of the faster. We protect the faster. We do these things because we know that through her physical sacrifice she is closer to the Spiritual world than we are. We do these things because she is sacrificing for us and because it is the kind, compassionate thing to do.[348]

In order to appreciate the significance of these Indigenous traditional practices in the Canadian public sphere, it should also be borne in mind that these practices, and the worldviews to which they are related, have long been intentionally repressed by colonial authorities. One particularly prominent policy by which this was attempted was the Indian Residential School system; Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their communities to be brought up in church-led Indian Residential Schools where they were given new, European names and forbidden to speak their Indigenous languages, meet their family, or practice Indigenous spirituality – a policy that was in place for over a century and resulted in numerous cases of abuse and death, and that the investigating Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2015

348 Leanne Simpson, "Fish Broth and Fasting" in Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced*, 154-155.

found to be 'a policy of cultural genocide.'[349] Against this background, to revitalize, practise and celebrate Indigenous culture, especially in highly public places from legislature grounds to public malls, represents a politically important form of reclamation which brought about an important sense of empowerment. The following statement, on the significance of the drum during Idle No More gatherings, by Ryan McMahon, an Anishinaabe/Metis writer, comedian and independent media producer, speaks to this point:

> We are the Indigenous peoples of this lands. We have held unique worldviews and cultural and spiritual practices for thousands of years. So many of these practices included drums. As kids, we were told that the drum beats represent the heart of Mother Earth. We were told that our communities are as strong as the sound of our drums. Then "they" came. And many of our drums went silent. Completely silent. Our songs were banned. Torn from our lives. Forcefully. Violently. But, although they were silent for a time, our old people kept their bundles. Some hid them. Some buried them. Then, slowly, the sound of our drums re-emerged. They started to spread through our communities again. They signalled hope. They signalled our return. Our drums were being used. And we began to gather again. And our communities are slowly regaining their strength. It's perfect. It makes perfect sense. A *Round Dance Revolution.* It has re-invigorated us and re-inspired our People. It has lifted the spirits of thousands. The act of the "flash mob" can be called "Political/Guerilla theatre" but it's not politics in and of itself. It's who we are. It is perfect.[350]

Note that the engagement in meaning construction here shows itself to be generative of desirable emotional states; as Fligstein and McAdam put it, aside from the material goals that people hope to achieve with political interactions, the fashioning of shared meanings is *also* an 'inherently satisfying endeavour.'[351] As discussed in 2.4.1, motivating one's fellow political actors to maintain their active engagement for a shared political cause, especially under conditions of political marginalization, is a critically important political achievement.[352]

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349 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 133.

350 Ryan McMahon, "The Round Dance Revolution: Idle No More" in Kini-nda-nimmi Collective, *The Winter We Danced*, 100.

351 Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 202.

352 See 2.4.1.

This resonates with the argument by Ken Coates, a non-Indigenous Canadian author and scholar of Indigenous history, that the confusion among non-Indigenous Canadians who were trying to work out what exactly Idle No More was asking of them reflected their failure to understand how the movement could ultimately not be about 'them' or their own political stance; rather than trying to persuade anyone of anything, Idle No More was 'the largest and most sustained public demonstration of Aboriginal confidence, determination, pride, and cultural survival in Canadian history.'[353] A substantial part of why the round dances, the rallies, the fasts, the art, and other sociocultural interventions that together made up the emergence of Idle No More marked a highly significant moment in Canadian history, then, lies in their *internal*, rather than in their *external* effects.

In conclusion, the public manifestations of Indigenous culture and spirituality that took place in the context of the emergence of Idle No fit my definition of sociocultural interventions. Their internal effects were closely connected to the existential meanings that are connected to these practices. While political action may arise from all kinds of motives, such as the wish to defend one's rights, life or material interests, it *also* provides participants with an avenue to engage in the collaborative construction and transmission of shared meanings, and this engagement is generative of desirable emotional states that go some way towards explaining why people are drawn to political action, even in circumstances of political marginalization when chances of success are relatively limited. Invoking emotionally resonant symbols, practices and narratives, as are frequently found in historical traditions of existential meaning-making, can be helpful in inspiring hope and courage in the face of the obstacles that are presented by political inequality; in that sense, these traditions can contribute towards greater democratic equality.

2.5. Conclusion

It was the aim of this chapter to start building a theoretical vocabulary to describe public manifestations of the political actors' existential commitments that do not take the form of propositional validity claims. Doing so is an important step towards the overall aim of this dissertation: the development of a new, alternative model for the interpretation of public manifestations of the political actors' core existential commitments that avoids the reductively cognitivist assumptions of received models of religion in the public sphere. In order to do this, I first introduced a distinction between deliberative argument and

353 Coates, *#IdleNoMore and the Remaking of Canada*, XXI.

sociocultural interventions, and then examined how the latter is connected to the idea of political agency, which is at the heart of citizenship: the idea that a citizen is someone who is entitled to real opportunities to participate in the bringing about of political outcomes that affect the conditions under which they live.

The concept of sociocultural interventions, as I defined it, refers to the multitude of non-deliberative ways by which political actors can affect the social imaginary – the implicit grasp of social space which importantly includes informal power relations and the shared, largely implicit expectations that shape the conditions under which people live together. As the availability of real opportunities to co-determine the political conditions under which one lives is a central aspect of what it means to be a citizen, and as these conditions are inseparably intertwined with the largely implicit informal norms and expectations that make up the social imaginary, it is a requisite for an adequate ethics of citizenship that it pays explicit attention to the ways that citizens seek to shape or transform the social imaginary through largely informal interactions.

I further developed the theoretical vocabulary to discuss and reflect upon sociocultural interventions by introducing the concepts of 'perceived authority,' 'markers of authority,' and 'speaker authority,' and by using these terms to show how sociocultural interventions can affect perceptions of authority in at least three ways, which are analytically distinct though closely intertwined in practice. First, sociocultural interventions can influence widely shared perceptions of who is and who is not in practice recognized as having the speaker authority that is requisite for political participation as an equal fellow citizen, thus serving as a means by which political actors can lay claim to citizenship and redefine the practical boundaries of the political community. Second, sociocultural interventions can modify how the cultural elements that political discourse draws and relies upon are commonly interpreted and esteemed. Beyond these 'external effects,' which enable political actors to effect shifts in how they themselves as well as their actions are perceived, interpreted and evaluated by others, sociocultural interventions also enable political actors to strengthen the resolve, sense of purpose and collective identity of themselves as well as those who already substantially share their perspective. Through all of these effects, sociocultural interventions present a varied repertoire of means by which political actors can practically mitigate and counter the effects of enduring formal and informal democratic inequality. Insofar as sociocultural interventions are an important way for citizens to exercise political agency, normative accounts of citizenship ignore them and their effects at their peril.

This is especially the case for theories of democratic citizenship that specifically address the place of *religious* traditions in the public sphere. As the examples that I used in this chapter illustrate, religious traditions encompass rich repertoires of culturally resonant images, narratives and practices, and sociocultural interventions that draw upon these resources can be especially effective in motivating people to engage in political activity in the face of discouraging conditions of political inequality.

The motivating force exerted by such religiously inflected sociocultural interventions attests to the point that while participation in political activity may arise from many other kinds of motives, it *additionally* provides participants with an avenue to engage in collaborative efforts of meaning-construction, and that these efforts have politically important existential and phenomenological dimensions that reductively cognitivist accounts problematically ignore. In the following chapter, I will argue that Hannah Arendt offers us an alternative account of the public sphere that is particularly well-suited to make sense of these aspects of sociocultural interventions.

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3

Arendt, sociocultural interventions and performative augmentation

3.0. Introduction

In this chapter, I will use the political thought of Hannah Arendt to further elucidate the features of sociocultural interventions. Later on, in the next chapter, I will also examine how these features apply to deliberative argument.

I believe Arendt's work to be useful for my project for two reasons. First, in works like *The Human Condition*[354] and (to a lesser extent) *On Revolution*,[355] she highlighted and celebrated action's performative, aesthetic and existential aspects, and while these aspects can of course be identified in many acts of political communication, including instances of deliberative argument, I see them as especially relevant for the interpretation of sociocultural interventions. Second, as I will argue, reflection on the relation between action's association with novelty and with the cultural context in which it occurs will yield useful insights for the kind of sociocultural interventions that I am particularly interested in: those that take place in the context of emancipatory movements that explicitly draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making.

I will begin by situating my own approach to Arendt's work to existing interpretations of her thought (3.1.1). Although my main interest is to examine how her account can elucidate the workings of sociocultural interventions, my argument also speaks to and builds on several points of debate in existing Arendt scholarship, including the relevance of her work to contemporary issues of political debate, the relation of her account to issues of political exclusion, and, especially relevant for the first part of this chapter, the

354 Arendt, *The Human Condition.*
355 Arendt, *On Revolution.*

evaluation of her concept of action as 'appearance.' Whereas several of her interpreters see this 'aestheticizing approach' as an anti-rationalist shortcoming that threatens the relevance of her theory for contemporary political practice, others see it as a helpful starting point for an agonistic view of politics that does not presuppose that the legitimacy of an act of political communication is exhausted by the extent to which it contributes towards a consensus or agreement among the citizens. While I mainly build upon insights from the agonistic camp, my use of Arendt differs from both approaches in the sense that I am not primarily concerned with the question of whether politics should be conceived of as consensus- or struggle-oriented; rather, I want to show how her conceptualization of politics enables us to make sense of the experiences involved in the engagement with sociocultural interventions.

In my view, Arendt's account of action helpfully highlights that political utterances should be valued, first, for their performative character;[356] second, for their connection to appearance, or, put differently, for their aesthetic character; and third, for the fact they provide political actors with an avenue to experience their own existence as meaningful – an aspect that I will refer to as action's existential character. For Arendt, the significance of political expressions lies in their power to reveal novel, unanticipated perspectives that enable a transformation of the social reality in which they occur, and in their related quality of enabling political actors to experience their existence as meaningful (3.1.2). Arendt thus provides us with a phenomenological language that aptly describes some of the experiences that are involved in sociocultural interventions, such as the ones that took place in the context of the emergence of Idle No More (3.1.3-3.1.4).

In 3.2, I turn to the relation between action as Arendt theorizes it on the one hand and the sociocultural constellations in which action occurs on the other. Doing so will enable me to develop an interpretation of action as the performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements. My usage of Arendt in this second regard represents a form of what Seyla Benhabib described as 'to think with Arendt against Arendt'[357] in the sense that it proceeds from the view that while Arendt's theory indeed encompasses conflicting impulses, it is precisely the reflection upon the tension between these impulses that may yield fruitful insights for political theory. The conflicting impulses under consideration here are, on the one hand, Arendt's often re-iterated idea of the public realm where political

356 Regarding this point, I will build on Bonnie Honig's interpretation of Arendt in Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, esp. 76-125.

357 Seyla Benhabib, "Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt's Thought," *Political Theory* 16, No. 1 (February 1988), 31.

action takes place as radically novel and distinct from everything that goes on in the non-political private and social realms, and on the other, her less explicit acknowledgment that political action is by definition undergirded by and embedded in social and cultural realities, which entails that politics cannot avoid dealing with those issues that she often describes as inherently non-political.[358]

To lay the foundation for this part of my argument, and to simultaneously further cement the connections between Arendt's account of action and my account of sociocultural interventions, I begin with a consideration of Bonnie Honig's interpretation of Arendt to demonstrate that the changes that are brought about by action are best understood as changes in the social imaginary (3.2.1). I subsequently consider the relation between 'work' and 'action,' two central concepts from *The Human Condition* that I view as shorthand terms for two conflicting impulses underlying cultural and political life, namely a desire for permanence on the one hand and a taste for novelty on the other (3.2.2). I then argue that Arendt's reflections on authority and augmentation in *On Revolution* help us to resolve this tension, and that these reflections simultaneously enable us to appreciate how political actors stand in a dual relation to the perceived authority of cultural elements of the social imaginary: the authority of cultural elements is part of the motivation that spurs their contributions, but these contributions themselves simultaneously involve novel interpretations of these same cultural elements (3.2.3), and conclude that consequently and paradoxically, these authoritative cultural elements simultaneously provide political actors with a sense of transhistorical continuity as well as a sense of empowering agency (3.3).

3.1. Arendt's concept of action exemplified by sociocultural interventions

3.1.1. Interpretations of Arendt

In this section, I will indicate how my use of Arendt relates to other interpretations of her thought. Multiple, mutually conflicting ways of interpreting Arendt have currency, in part because of her distinctive, somewhat eclectic style (a blend of phenomenological analysis, historical interpretation and political theory) and in part because over the years, her work has been used in different, highly polarized philosophical debates: liberal-communitarian, deliberative-agonistic, modern-postmodern.[359] I will concentrate on three

358 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*.

359 For a discussion of the reception of Arendt's work and how it was affected by such debates, see Borren, *Amor Mundi,* 1-9.

interrelated topics of debate among her critics: first, the meaning and evaluation of her non-cognitivist or 'aestheticizing' approach to politics; second, the oft-doubted relevance of her work to contemporary issues of political debate; and third, the problematic relation of her account, with its strong criticism of the rise of the social realm and its insistence on rigid boundaries between private and public matters, to issues of (both formal and informal) political exclusion. While my project of using Arendt's account of action to bring out the distinctive features of sociocultural interventions is primarily intended as a contribution towards the development of an interpretive model to approach political actors' public expressions of their core existential commitments within the political sphere, it simultaneously draws on and contributes to these debates.

Whereas many contemporary normative theories approach political life in terms of the rational evaluation by the citizens of various conflicting political claims relating to truth and justice, for Arendt this is not the focus. Instead, she sees political action first and foremost as an endeavour by which human beings freely appear to one another, each revealing their unique distinctiveness through words and deeds that, as their outcomes are radically unpredictable, have the character of miraculous beginnings.[360] In *The Human Condition*, she distinguishes action, thus conceived, from two other fundamental activities which characterize human life on Earth, each of which corresponds to a fundamental human concern: labour (encompassing activities that are guided by the need for biological self-preservation, such as the gathering of food) and work (encompassing activities that are guided by the desire to create lasting artifacts from which one can derive a sense of permanence, stability, and identity).[361] As she holds that action requires a separate public sphere that can serve as the 'space of appearances,'[362] Arendt frequently laments the erosion between private and public matters that, in her view, historically corresponds to the politization of concerns that more properly belong to the private sphere, notably including issues to do with socioeconomic justice.[363]

This distinctive perspective on action as 'appearance' is at the core of several long-standing discussions surrounding Arendt's work: there is considerable disagreement

360 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 175-181.
361 Ibid.
362 Ibid., 198-212.
363 Ibid., 22-78, esp. 38-49; Arendt, *On Revolution,* 59-114. I will have more to say on these activities and their corresponding concerns and dispositions in following subsections.

among her interpreters on how central this feature is to her thought and on whether it should be evaluated positively or negatively. For deliberatively oriented authors such as Seyla Benhabib and Jürgen Habermas, it is among the least helpful aspects of her work. While they prize Arendt's contributions as an early theorist of the public sphere and her communicative concept of power, they distance themselves from what they see as her unfortunate tendency to aestheticize politics and to sever the tie between the public exchange of opinions and their rational evaluation.[364]

Other readers, by contrast, evaluate her 'aesthetic' approach far more positively as capturing important but frequently overlooked dimensions of political life.[365] These include authors like Dana Villa and Bonnie Honig, who focus on aspects of Arendt's account of action that appear to anticipate some of the views on identity, power and reality that have developed in the context of postmodern thought,[366] and who argue that she rightfully shows that political action can have legitimate and valuable goals other than the bringing about of a rational, enduring consensus among the citizens on what political claims and arrangements are most just.[367] Consequently, a further difference between the two sides of the debate is that those who subscribe to

364 Habermas, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power;" Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt;* Wellmer, "Hannah Arendt on Judgment."

365 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*; Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Dana R. Villa, "Hannah Arendt: Modernity, Alienation, and Critique" in Beiner and Nedelsky, *Judgment, Imagination and Politics*; Linda M.G. Zerilli, "'We feel our freedom': Imagination and Judgement in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," *Political Theory*, 33 No.2 (April 2005); Jane Monica Drexler, "Politics Improper: Iris Marion Young, Hannah Arendt, and the Power of Performativity" *Hypatia* 22, No. 4 (Autumn 2007).

366 Tuija Pulkkinen, in an article that criticizes Honig's and Villa's 'postmodernizing' approach to Arendt, defines 'postmodernism' as 'a non-foundational orientation in thinking. More precisely, unlike the modern, the postmodern does not aspire to uncover the origin, the basic level, the true essence, or the pure core of the phenomena that it studies. While modern thought is motivated by the aim of exposing some authentic level of reality, the postmodern, on the contrary, adopts the view that there is no foundation to be unveiled. Instead of concentrating on the possibility of unveiling, a postmodern thinker in this sense pays attention at the constructed nature of the layers in phenomena and the decisive role that action and power plays in the construction.' Tuija Pulkkinen, "Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Philosophy," *Alternatives*, 28 (2003), 215; also see Borren, *Amor Mundi*, 4-9. Pulkkinen argues that while there are indeed elements in Arendt that read as postmodern in this sense, there are modernist themes in her work as well. A more recent work that relates Arendt's reflections on action and appearance to postmodern themes, so understood, is Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

367 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*; Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger.*

postmodern interpretations have also tended to present the public sphere in Arendt's theory as a site of agonistic struggle, whereas the modernists instead have favoured a more 'deliberative' or 'discursive' view, presenting it instead as a site of reasoned co-operation between citizens.[368]

For Arendt, action is ultimately not about the citizens engaging in a collective practice of rationally evaluating competing claims pertaining to truth or justice; for that reason, her view of politics and of the public sphere is evidently quite different from the ones advanced by thinkers such as Rawls and Habermas. The distinctiveness of her approach bears on two further issues that have been the topic of intense debate, namely, first, the question of how her theory relates to issues of political exclusion and injustice, and second (but closely related to the first), the question of how relevant her theory is to contemporary political issues.

Arendt is notorious for her insistence on strict boundaries between labour, work and action, and between the private and the public sphere. She derives these boundaries from the experiences of the Greek polis, which of course excluded a great deal of people, such as women, slaves and foreigners, from participation in political life.[369] In her defense of these boundaries and her lament for their erosion, Arendt tends to treat the distinctions that have historically served as a basis for political exclusion – such as gender, race and socioeconomic class – as belonging outside of the realm of politics, properly conceived. Her tendency to insist upon strong analytical distinctions has led many of her readers to question the applicability of her theories to actual political life. To insist that whatever is connected to what she terms the private and the social realms, or to labour and work, has no proper place in politics, raises the question what politics, in her view, *can* be about; moreover, barring issues like class, gender and race seems to foreclose any attempts to resist the exclusion of groups on such grounds.[370] The

368 Borren, *Amor Mundi*, 6. For a critique of this division among Arendt's interpreters, see Shmuel Lederman, "Agonism and Deliberation in Arendt" *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* Vol. 21 Issue 3 (September 2014). Also see Deveaux, "Agonism and Pluralism" for a critical discussion of Arendt's 'agonistic' interpreters.

369 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 81.

370 As Hannah Pitkin writes, in a phrase that is frequently cited in this context: 'What is it that they talk about together, in that endless palaver in the agora?' Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," 336. Many of Arendt's interpreters agree that her strict separation between the social and the political is not tenable (Benhabib, *The reluctant modernism of Hannah Arendt,* 138-155; Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 82; Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 177-184).

exclusionary implications of Arendt's strong distinctions have been criticized by feminists as well as by theorists of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.[371]

Note that these criticisms of the applicability of Arendt's theory for social movements that seek to counter forms of exclusion may equally well be applied to my application of her theory for understanding the sociocultural interventions of Idle No More. After all, this is a movement centered on the issues of clean drinking water, poverty, health and environmental preservation – topics, in other words, that, given their close relation to the basic need for survival, within Arendt's theory could easily be relegated to the private or the social sphere. A rejection of racism was also at the core of Idle No More, which seems hard to square with Arendt's belief that race is a fundamentally unpolitical matter. Finally, Arendt's insistence that action be concerned only with 'worldly' or 'secular' considerations[372] casts doubts upon the applicability of her concept of action to the public actions of Idle No More, which in its public manifestations drew so heavily upon religious/spiritual traditions and rituals.[373] These considerations might seem to cast doubt on the usefulness of her account for my purpose here – to build on it a theoretical model to interpret emancipatory movements that draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making.

However, various other interpreters have sought to apply Arendt's conceptualization of action to the analysis of emancipatory movements.[374] I agree with the view, proposed by feminist interpreters like Hanna Pitkin and Bonnie Honig, that in Arendt's work, 'the

371 See Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public;" Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*; Allen, *Talking to Strangers*; see also Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, esp. 44-51 and 75-81. For an account of Arendt's failure to understand the perspective of African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement, see Michael D. Burroughs, "Hannah Arendt, 'Reflections on Little Rock,' and White Ignorance" *Critical Philosophy of Race* 3, No. 1 (2015). I will return to the matter of Arendt's response to the Civil Rights Movement in 3.2.2.

372 Arendt used the terms 'secular' and 'worldly' interchangeably.

373 On Arendt's secularism, see Daniel Moyn, "Hannah Arendt on the Secular," *New German Critique* 105, Vol. 35, No. 3, (Fall 2008).

374 Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* is a notable example. There have been illuminating efforts to apply Arendt's framework to the interpretation of a variety of instances of emancipatory social movements, including AIDS activism in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s (Keith Topper, "Arendt and Bourdieu between Word and Deed" *Political Theory* 39, No. 3 (June 2011)), feminist action and the anti-globalization movement around the turn of the millennium (Drexler, "Politics Improper") and the large-scale demonstrations for immigrant rights that occurred in the United States in 2006 Cristina Beltrán, "Going Public: Hannah Arendt, Immigrant Action, and the Space of Appearance" *Political Theory* 37, No. 5 (October 2009)).

private,' 'the social,' 'labor' and 'work' are most usefully interpreted, not as referring to particular issues or social groups that Arendt thought ought to be excluded from politics, but rather as denoting particular *dispositions* that can pose a threat to the concern with freedom and the taste for novelty and self-disclosure that Arendt takes to be central to action.[375] Arendt developed her account of action in order to recover and make visible aspects of political life that have been obscured because, in her view, the Western tradition, out of an overriding concern with stability and predictability, has long exclusively interpreted politics from the perspective of 'work.'[376] Consequently, one major thrust of her work has been that in politics, the intrinsic hazards of action, its unpredictability, novelty and boundlessness, are to be welcomed rather than to be overcome because they constitute an invaluable dimension of human existence.[377]

Arendt understood this mentality to be embodied by the Greeks and by the American revolutionaries. For the purposes of interpreting specifically the political action of emancipatory movements, it is interesting to note that she also locates it in the history of the labour movement.[378] What set this movement apart was that its manifestation marked the entrance of a group of citizens in the public domain that previously had been excluded from it.[379] For Arendt, it was precisely this step from obscurity to public appearance that gave the labour movement its 'pathos for novelty' and therefore its specifically 'political' character.[380] A similar experience emerges from the testimonies of Idle No More participants that I discussed in the previous chapter.[381]

Arendt's agonistic interpreters, I believe, are correct when they argue that in contemporary democratic societies, the type of action that Arendt described seems

375 See Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public" and Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*.

376 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 220-230.

377 For this reason, Bonnie Honig characterizes Arendt's project, which she approaches in Nietzschean terms, as 'animated by enmity towards (too much) order.' Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 76. Arendt associates the eagerness for novelty with the revolutionary spirit, while noting that it paradoxically is apt to turn into an eagerness for preservation. Arendt, *On Revolution,* 41.

378 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 215-220.

379 Ibid., 218.

380 Ibid., 215-220.

381 'We were told that our communities are as strong as the sound of our drums. Then "they" came. And many of our drums went silent. Completely silent. Our songs were banned. Torn from our lives. Forcefully. Violently. But, although they were silent for a time, our old people kept their bundles. Some hid them. Some buried them. Then, slowly, the sound of our drums re-emerged. They started to spread through our communities again. They signalled hope. They signalled our return.' McMahon, "The Round Dance Revolution," 100. I will work out this observation in more detail in subsection 3.1.4.

to be especially exemplified by the spontaneous, unpredictable and at times radically transformative action of emancipatory social movements. In contrast to Arendt's more 'associationist'[382] interpreters, they argue that there are acts of political expression that are legitimate and valuable, even if they cannot be said to contribute to the achievement of a shared perspective amongst the citizens – which is a central goal in both Rawls' and Habermas' accounts. On the other hand, the associationist authors are no less correct when they point out that Arendt did not blindly dismiss concerns with political stability and the achievement of mutual understanding amongst citizens.

As her thought on political action centers on action's capacity to establish new identities, to transform whatever social constellation it is performed in, and to make available unanticipated, new perspectives, it provides a promising starting point for how groups within society that do not subscribe to the dominant referential frameworks might achieve a new, shared understanding of reality by means of sociocultural interventions. Moreover, it is in these respects that the relevance of her account to contemporary issues of political debate, especially issues relating to political exclusion, can be located. In the following sections, I will bring out these insights.

3.1.2. The performative, aesthetic and existential aspects of action

In this subsection, I will elaborate on Arendt's account of action as appearance and as the making of new beginnings to bring out three distinctive features that are most relevant to my discussion of sociocultural interventions. In this and in the following subsection, I highlight these features to argue that Arendt's notion of action provides us with a fruitful model to interpret sociocultural interventions.

Arendt seeks to recover and foreground the experiences underlying political action because she believes that these experiences and their meaning are misrepresented in the ways that they are customarily expressed in the Western tradition of political thought.[383] As touched on in the previous subsection, in *The Human Condition* she does this by contrasting these experiences to those that correspond to 'labour' and 'work.' The activities that Arendt classifies as 'labour,' which are governed by the necessity to maintain life as exemplified in the gathering of food or in the earning of a wage, have cyclical

382 Benhabib uses this term as a counterpoint to 'agonistic.' Seyla Benhabib, "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas," in *Habermas and the public sphere,* ed. Craig. Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1992).

383 Arendt's attention to the experiences underlying human activities, and to the meaning of these experiences, is a reflection of her phenomenological approach to political theory. See Borren, *Amor Mundi*, esp. 15-54.

temporal structure, as the products that they bring forth typically do not outlast their consumption, at which point the labour process has to repeat itself from the start. 'Work,' referring to those activities by which people create a stable artificial home in an unstable, natural environment,[384] has a linear temporal structure: starting with an idea or blueprint before the mental eye of the maker that guides the fabrication process from beginning to end,[385] the end results – whether use objects such as furniture, or works of art – stand out because of their relative stability, potentially even outlasting the lifetime of their own maker.[386] It is by virtue of this quality that work products serve as stabilizing orientation points from which people can derive a sense of security and identity.[387]

Whereas labour and work can easily be engaged in by an individual in isolation, and revolve around the subjects' relation to non-human objects, the third activity, action, is 'the only activity that goes on directly between men and without the intermediary of things or matter.'[388] For Arendt, action is intimately connected to the human condition of plurality: the fact that 'we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.'[389] In other words, action requires the presence of an audience of peers that are simultaneously similar and distinct from us; for this reason, action is 'the political activity *par excellence*.'[390]

Action presupposes speech, to which it is so closely related that Arendt uses the two terms almost interchangeably.[391] By speaking, one typically conveys information regarding the objective reality that we hold in common, or as Arendt calls it, the 'in-between.'[392] However, Arendt argues, it would be a mistake to locate the significance of either speech or action merely in this transference of cognitive content;[393] rather, it lies in the 'web of human relationships' which inevitably overlays and overgrows the worldly in-between

384 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 136-174.
385 Ibid., 140-141.
386 Ibid., 167-168.
387 'Men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table.' Ibid., 137.
388 Ibid., 7.
389 Ibid., 8.
390 Ibid., 9.
391 Ibid., 178-179.
392 Ibid., 182.
393 Ibid., 179-182. In one explicit statement of the matter, she claims: 'It is true that speech is extremely useful as a means of communication and information, but as such it could be replaced by a sign language, which then might prove to be even more useful and expedient to convey certain meanings, as in mathematics and other scientific disciplines or in certain kinds of teamwork.' (179).

and that consists of the relations, stories and common identities that emerge wherever people live and act together.[394] So whereas labour and work both result in objective, tangible products, the consequences of action are far less tangible, though no less real, being located on the intersubjective level; they consist of lasting effects on the relations between actors, repercussions for future further actions, and the coming about of new stories, identities and communities. On a political-institutional level, moreover, action brings forth 'new institutions, public spheres, higher constitutional-legal structures, and regime forms.'[395] The first feature of action, then, is that it *performatively transforms* the social constellation in which it makes its appearance.

For Arendt, the emergence of the web of human relationships is causally connected to the fact that through speech and action, an actor discloses 'who' she is: that is, her unique distinctness from anyone else, in contradistinction to any definable qualities that together encompass 'what' she is, and that they inevitably shares with someone else like her.[396] The distinction between 'who' and 'what' someone is in turn stems from Arendt's belief that it is impossible for human beings to define themselves as unique persons in the same way that they define all other entities.[397] All definitions are distinctions, she argues; it is impossible for us to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something else. The drawing of distinctions enables us to name and order the worldly objects that we encounter, including ourselves in the sense that we, too, are physical objects.[398] However,

394 Ibid., 198.

395 Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 202. Kalyvas sees these institutional 'products' of action as characteristic for a later phase in Arendt's career, namely when she wrote *On Revolution* and *Between Past and Future*. He argues that earlier on, for instance in *The Human Condition*, Arendt's approach was more individualist and more existentialist, as indicated by her reflections on 'natality.' Although I agree that there is a shift in emphasis, I do not see Arendt's early 'existentialist' and later 'institutional' observations as mutually incompatible; furthermore, note that in her later writings, passages with an existentialist flavour, characterized by an emphasis on 'natality' and the 'miracle' of new beginnings, are intertwined with 'institutional' ones, rather than being fully replaced with them; see for example her reflections on Virgil's Fourth Eclogue in Arendt, *On Revolution,* 209-211.

396 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 181.

397 The unique distinctness of the individual actor, which is disclosed through words and deeds, is sharply distinguished by Arendt from group characteristics such as race or economic standing, which can certainly serve to distinguish one actor from another, but that are simultaneously always shared with yet other actors. For Arendt, 'who' someone is as an individual is undefinable, and unknown even to themselves, but manifested to others through their words and deeds, and it is from this feature that action derives its great importance for a meaningful human life. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 179-182.

398 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 176.

when we interact with others, we cannot help but also disclose our unique identity which is implicit in anything we do or say. The unique distinctness of the acting person, interestingly, is not disclosed to the actor's own consciousness, but only to that of his audience.[399] One of the distinctive ways in which action performatively transforms the social constellation in which it makes its appearance, then, is through the disclosure of unique identities.

The condition of possibility for this kind of revelation or disclosure to occur is the presence of a public sphere, which for Arendt means a space of appearance: a sort of shared stage, as exemplified by the Greek polis, 'where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.'[400] Here, actors make their appearance explicitly out of their 'urge toward self-disclosure'[401] or alternatively, their 'passion for distinction.'[402] In word and deed, political actors innovatively articulate and reveal their singular, individuating perspectives on the common world, and by doing so, simultaneously disclose their own distinctive, unrepeatable identity as unique individuals to one another.[403] 'Revelation,' 'disclosure' and 'appearance' are all examples of Arendt's quite consistent use of visual metaphors in her descriptions of action, illustrating how she conceives of politics in *aesthetic*, rather than auditory or discursive terms.

Arendt also frequently uses evocative language to emphasize the contrast between the experiences of the private realm (associating them with darkness, invisibility, violence and necessity, although also with love and intimacy) and those of the public realm (appearance, 'the shining brightness we once called glory,'[404] and 'public happiness',[405] the empowering experience of freedom that stems from making unprecedented new beginnings). As these examples indicate, the positive experiences that she associates with political action have their counterpart in that particular type of deprivation that might be felt by those who are deprived of possibilities to act, and who live a life deemed not worthy to be seen by others.

399 'It is more than likely that the 'who', which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the *daimon* in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters.' Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 179.
400 Ibid., 198-199.
401 Ibid., 194.
402 Arendt, *On Revolution,* 69-70, 119-120.
403 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 176-181.
404 Ibid., 178.
405 Arendt, *On Revolution,* 72, 119, 123, 126-128, 130-138.

Because Arendt thinks that human beings depend on the presence of others for their sense of reality – 'for human and political purposes, reality and appearance are the same' – a human life lived in isolation 'comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality.'[406] The space of appearance also guarantees that the selves that are disclosed in action are not forgotten: it 'is a kind of organized remembrance,' assuring the actor 'that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men.'[407] For these reasons, Arendt believes that appearing through action has a unique significance among the other human activities, stating emphatically that without it, no meaningful human existence is possible.[408] This *existential* dimension – the fact that political action provides actors with an avenue to experience their own existence as meaningful – is the third distinctive feature that Arendt ascribes to action.

In conclusion, for Arendt, in marked contrast to the prominent accounts of the public sphere that were discussed in chapter one, the public sphere is not primarily the site of deliberative argument, just as speech is not in the first place about the transference of cognitive content; instead, it is the space of appearance where actors disclose to one another who they are in their unique distinctiveness. Through action, people affect the relationships between themselves, add to the polity's collective memory, disclose their own identities as well as unprecedented perspectives on the common social world, and make available courses of action that could not have been anticipated before. The public sphere is the site of collective remembrance, a repository of stories and images that presupposes a relative stability as well as the possibility of radically unpredictable

406 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 199. She also writes that 'our sense of unequivocal reality is so bound up with the presence of others that we can never be sure of anything that only we ourselves know and no one else.' Arendt, *On Revolution,* 96.

407 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 196.

408 Ibid. 176-181. While this is clearly her own view, she ascribes it to the founders of the American republic; Arendt, *On Revolution,* 33-34. For the Founding Fathers, she argues, 'public happiness' was simply an alternative name for freedom, and it 'consisted in the citizen's right of access to the public realm.' She further writes that 'The very fact that the word "happiness" was chosen in laying claim to a share in public power indicates strongly that there existed in the country, prior to the revolution, such a thing as "public happiness," and that men knew they could not be altogether "happy" if their happiness was located and enjoyed only in private life' (ibid., 128). She sharply contrasts this mentality from the one that she believes to have been dominant in the Western, or more specifically, the Christian tradition, which identified freedom with inner freedom, and proclaimed 'the freedom from politics.' (ibid., 124; 280).

transformations. Action transforms the social constellation in which it makes its appearance; it is conceived in aesthetic and experiential terms, and it is through action that human beings experience their existence as meaningful.[409]

3.1.3. Beyond words: action as appearance

The performative, aesthetic and existential dimensions of action in Arendt's account which I just identified are, in my view, highly relevant for an analysis of sociocultural interventions. Before I continue to examine what else Arendt's theory of action has to offer for my purposes, I want to draw out one more difference between my use of Arendt and the interpretations that have been offered by other authors: namely, that unlike them, I do not focus on the spoken and the written word alone.

For Arendt, speech and action are closely interrelated, so much so that she frequently uses the two terms interchangeably. Nevertheless, she ascribes a revelatory character to them both. But Honig, likely as a result of the influence of Derrida on her reading of Arendt, focuses far more exclusively on words *rather than* deeds. For Honig, Arendt's words and deeds are performative 'speech acts,' or, better yet, 'acts of writing.' The written word exemplifies the distinctive traits of action better than the spoken one, she argues, because the physical absence of the author, which writing permits or even presumes whereas speaking does not, better fits the 'force of rupture' that lends an utterance its character of novelty and unpredictability.[410]

By contrast, as Seyla Benhabib notes, Arendt's concept of 'acting as appearing' actually presumes 'a model of face-to-face human interaction.'[411] Benhabib contrasts this model with another one which, she argues, emerges in Arendt's later, more Kantian writings, and which formed *in nuce* the more discursive model of the public sphere that Habermas later developed in greater detail. One of the main innovations was a shift from an 'ocular' to an 'auditory,' more decorporealized model, a change that Benhabib evaluates positively because it in her view enables the establishment of a link between political communication in the public sphere and the achievement of democratic legitimacy through processes of deliberative justification by which citizens collectively come to agree upon legal norms.

409 Lederman gives a convincing account of the importance of the existential dimension in Arendt's concept of freedom and action: Lederman, "Agonism and Deliberation in Arendt," 333-335.

410 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 94-95.

411 Benhabib, "The Embattled Public Sphere," 5.

So while Honig and Benhabib each identify a very different element in Arendt's account as useful (for Honig, the speech acts' emancipatory capacity to performatively subvert established identities and frames of reference, thus making room for agonistic contest; for Benhabib, the public sphere which becomes the non-localized site of deliberatively building consensus and establishing democratic legitimacy), both of their interpretations move away from appearance to discourse and from face-to-face interactions to decorporealized texts. One consequence of this more discursive approach to action is that the strong connection that Arendt posits between action and appearance is largely lost.

My concern here is not whether or not these interpretive moves are mandated by Arendt's texts or programme, or that they do not result in helpful insights in the dynamics of political discourse (as I believe that they do); it is merely that they do not exhaust the illuminating potential of Arendt's theory. I think it will be beneficial to take seriously Arendt's aesthetic approach, summed up by her definition of 'action as appearance,' because it corresponds to the experiences of citizens who engage in or bear witness to instances of political communication that seek to effect a shift in perspective by non-argumentative means; it harbours insights that are of direct importance for the analysis of sociocultural interventions.

Recall that one feature of sociocultural interventions as I defined them is that although they are instances of public communication, they come in a variety of concrete forms (like paintings, cartoons, sculptures, plays, publicly performed rituals, etc.) that withstand an evaluation in terms of deliberative argument. My use of the label 'aesthetic' refers to the *type of form* that sociocultural interventions take; but beyond that, and perhaps more importantly, it also refers to the *type of agreement* that these interventions solicit. This agreement also is located on an aesthetic, non-theoretical level: if successful, sociocultural interventions bring about a change in the way that the audience *perceives* and *feels* about the issues under consideration.

As indicated by Arendt's consistent reliance on visual terms to describe action and its properties ('self-display,' 'disclosure,' 'realm of appearances,' and the lines of comparison that she draws between the realm of politics and the performing arts, especially theatre), the type of agreement that action solicits is located on the aesthetic level as well. The condition of possibility for the disclosure through action, after all, is the presence of an audience of spectators that perceives, judges and responds to the action, interpreting and preserving its meaning and the meaning of its disclosed realities in the form of stories that can be remembered and handed down to future generations. It will be helpful to briefly return to my prior example of Idle No More to demonstrate the relevance of these dimensions.

3.1.4. Action and Idle No More

One of the advantages of applying Arendt's theory to sociocultural interventions is that it provides us with a phenomenologically rich vocabulary that seems to do a remarkable job of capturing the experiences of those who engage in them. Arendt evocatively describes political action in terms such as 'public happiness,' the 'shining brightness we once called glory', and a pathos for novelty. As Beltrán demonstrates, the phenomena expressed by these terms were at the heart of the 2006 immigrant marches in the United States,[412] and Allison Weir argues that the same can be said for the gatherings of the Idle No More movement in Canada during the Winter of 2012.[413] Likewise, the terms that Arendt uses to describe an absence of opportunities to engage in political action (darkness, invisibility, violence and necessity) are arguably apt expressions for the particular type of deprivation that may be felt by those who are politically disenfranchised or who are disqualified by social or legal norms from public visibility.

If we are to adequately appreciate the meaning of emancipatory social movements, it is important not to dismiss these experiential dimensions of deprivation and 'public happiness' as merely subjective or inconsequential. This is the case because, as argued in the previous chapter, the political activities through which citizens exercise their political agency depend on psychological resources such as a sense of confidence, efficacy and initiative, which cannot be presumed to be equally available to all citizens in the light of historical and persisting inequalities. For political actors who are members of groups with a history of political disenfranchisement, sociocultural interventions can represent an important way to build and sustain these resources; moreover, these experiences can also explain how social movements draw in outsiders.

Idle No More exemplifies both these internal and external aspects. As Weir points out, when the Indigenous organizers welcomed 'non-Indigenous people of all classes, genders and ethnicities' into their round dances which took place in some of Canada's most visible urban spaces, most of the latter were probably unfamiliar with the history and

412 Beltrán, "Going Public."

413 Weir, "Collective Love as Public Freedom." Also compare Jasper: "Virtually all the pleasures that humans derive from social life are found in protest movements: a sense of community and identity; ongoing companionship and bonds with others; the variety and challenge of conversation, cooperation, and competition. Some of the pleasures are not available in the routines of daily life: the euphoria of crowds, a sense of pushing history forward with one's projects, or simply of making the evening news, of working together with others, of sharing a sense of purpose. And, perhaps most of all, the declaration of moral principles." Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 220.

cultural meanings of this storied 'ritual of collective love' – originally a funerary ceremony that, after being banned by the Canadian government in 1880, was handed down from mother to daughter as an act of resistance, gradually becoming more celebratory in tone so that it now simultaneously marks loss and grief as well as the celebration of community and perseverance.[414] Despite their lack of background information, Weir continues, many participants were consciously mourning 'the devastating effect of colonization on Indigenous peoples, the commodification of land and water, the violence that has diminished all of us—and yet celebrating a possible future that would involve nation-to-nation relations of mutual recognition and collaboration between Canada and First Nations communities.'[415] By grieving, protesting and celebrating together, the diverse participants collectively entered into a 'practice of freedom' that performatively subverted and transformed antecedent relations to establish 'equal and inclusive relations' in their place.[416]

Sociocultural interventions such as Idle No More's round dances, then, exemplify action as envisioned by Arendt because they performatively disclose new, meaningful perspectives in an aesthetically impactful way. Their impact exemplifies the 'revelatory character,' without which, as Arendt writes, 'action and speech would lose all human relevance.'[417]

Note that this interpretation of sociocultural interventions as instances of what Arendt terms 'action' has something to offer to both the agonistic and the associational interpreters of Arendt. Honig, who together with Connolly is among the prominent examples of the agonistic side, ascribes an emancipatory potential to utterances that (intentionally or not) do not 'fit' the supposedly common, antecedent framework on which they rely, because through them, allegedly pre-theoretical and self-evident notions are unmasked as the contingent, and ultimately alterable, products of human agency. Sociocultural interventions have this critical capacity too. At the same time, they also, no less than deliberative argument, have a capacity to creatively bring about of a shared, new understanding where there previously was none, which plays a key role in Benhabib's associational reading. Sociocultural interventions, then, have critical as well as constructive functions.

414 Weir, "Collective Love as Public Freedom," 31.
415 Ibid., 32.
416 Ibid., 32.
417 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 182.

3.2. Sociocultural interventions as performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements

3.2.1. Action and the social imaginary

Having argued that Arendt's account of political action, due to its aesthetic, performative and existential dimensions, makes a promising starting point for a theoretical model to approach sociocultural interventions, I will now show that the changes that are brought about by action are best understood as performatively established transformations in the social imaginary, and that sociocultural interventions, in that respect, exemplify political action as theorized by Arendt. I will build on Bonnie Honig's reading of Arendt to make these points.[418]

As discussed, Arendt believed that the political significance of words and deeds does not primarily lie in their ability to convey cognitive content, but rather in their repercussions in the web of relationships; they disclose new realities, identities and relations. These effects led Honig to draw illuminating links between Arendt's account of action and John Austin's speech-act theory, which turns on the distinction between 'constative' and 'performative' utterances.[419] A constative utterance is any act of communication by which a sender describes an existing state of affairs to an audience; in other words, the sender employs the expression in order to transmit semantic content that is antecedent to the expression itself – for instance, 'It is half past two' or 'The streets are empty.' By contrast, a performative utterance, like a promise or an apology, is employed by the sender to produce or transform a situation.[420] Consider a medical doctor taking the Hippocratic Oath, the signing of adoption papers by prospective parents, or of a peace treaty by warring nations; these are all instances of communication that are set apart by their ostensible capacity for creating a new social constellation.

The distinction between constatives and performatives should not be overstated; Honig accepts Derrida's objection to Austin that each act of communication actually combines both a constative and a performative moment, and the ambiguity between the two is a structural feature of language in general.[421] When one person informs another of the time, this can be read as the statement of an antecedent truth, but it is simultaneously a courtesy that affects the relation between the two of them. Similarly, the signing of a contract, while

418 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 76-125.
419 Ibid, esp. 89-115; John Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*.
420 John Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*.
421 Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context" in: Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988); Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 89-96.

it can be said to bring about new relations and realities, also necessarily implies and involves the reference to an antecedent, shared frame of reference and a common set of conventions; it is not an altogether new act, but also and simultaneously an act of repetition.

Honig argues that speech acts that do not 'fit' the supposedly common, antecedent frames of reference on which they rely have the capacity of unmasking allegedly pre-theoretical and self-evident notions as the contingent, and ultimately alterable, products of human agency, and that this capacity harbours an emancipatory potential. What she prizes in Arendt's political thought, which forms 'the spiritual and conceptual heart' of her book,[422] is that it locates action's most significant political impact in its capacity to performatively alter the shared, antecedent frame of reference upon which social interactions always rely. In other words, Honig's interpretation of Arendt's notion of action as performative illuminates how the transformations that are brought about by words and deeds concern the implicit grasp of social space that I referred to above as the social imaginary. From this perspective, sociocultural interventions can be said to exemplify action as envisioned in Hannah Arendt's work.

In the previous chapter, I referred to political sociologists who approach citizenship, not as a status that is bestowed top-down by a government, but rather as the outcome of past and ongoing struggles by particular social groups, especially disenfranchised ones, and added that citizens, through their face-to-face interactions with one another, co-define who is entitled to the civil, political and social rights and the recognition that are associated with full membership of society; through them, they aim to augment the collective grasp of social space, the social imaginary that guides their everyday interactions and determines who counts as a citizen. Now, through the interpretation of Arendt's view of action as performative transformations of the social imaginary, we can interpret these everyday interactions by which citizens informally maintain or challenge established boundaries and norms.

In order to further clarify this point, it is helpful to also briefly consider Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, which is among the most influential existent works on identity, performativity and emancipatory politics, and also an important influence in Honig's interpretation of Arendt.[423] Drawing in part upon the work of Foucault and Derrida, Butler argues that we have gender and understand what gender is, not because

422 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 10.

423 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge 1999). For Honig on the connection between Arendt and Butler, see Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 123-125. Also see Butler's reflections on Arendt and Honig in Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly,* especially 45-51.

it is a natural 'given,' but because it is culturally (re-)produced by means of a sustained set of imitable acts. For Butler, the understanding of identity categories as performative constructions is of political interest because it enables the de-authorization of dominant views of reality that present themselves as self-evident and universal, by unmasking them instead as historically contingent productions with exclusionary consequences, thus disclosing the possibility of transformation through human agency.

It is for this reason that Butler draws attention to phenomena that destabilize or subvert established sociocultural norms, and gender norms in particular. Butler argues that an encounter with someone who does not readily fit the categories of male or female as they have conventionally been understood puts the viewers' received gender presumptions into question; the encounter makes us realize that that 'what we understand to be "real", what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality.' This realization, they further argue, is an important step in achieving political change, as 'no political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one's notion of the possible and the real.'[424]

The connections between the sort of political activity that is described by Honig and Butler and what I call 'sociocultural interventions' now become evident. The kind of shift that Butler describes is located on the level of largely implicit knowledge, of the tacit expectations that govern our social world and help us make sense of it. In other terms, Butler is describing practices by which those whose identities or actions are outside the implicit norms that govern our social order might effect changes in the social imaginary – precisely the kind of shifts in perception, then, that sociocultural interventions seek to effect. Furthermore, the requisite change of perspective is effected by 'certain kinds of practices that precede their explicit theorization, and which prompt a rethinking of our basic categories: what is gender, how is it produced and reproduced, what are its possibilities?'[425] When these untheorized practices become more intentional, yet still non-deliberative efforts to affect the basic categories that implicitly govern our social world, they would fall under my definition of sociocultural interventions.[426]

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424 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiii.

425 Ibid., xxiii. Note, however, that in the introduction to the 1999 edition, Butler emphasizes that she did not intend to lay down a blueprint for subversive practices; such a blueprint cannot be given, she argued, because there is no context-transcendent way to determine when a practice is subversive or norm-reinforcing.

426 In this respect it is also interesting that Butler's book achieved a remarkable popularity outside of academic circles, especially among feminist and LGBTQ+ activists who are themselves engaged in practical emancipatory action.

3.2.2. Action and novelty

The above-described relation between action and the cultural constellation in which action occurs is especially important for the purposes of my project because, rather than in action or sociocultural interventions in general, I am particularly interested in those sociocultural interventions that incorporate cultural elements that are drawn from historical traditions of existential meaning-making. I will now elaborate on this relationship through an examination of the contrast that Arendt draws between 'politics' and 'culture,' which she respectively associates with novelty and permanence; eventually, her reflections on the tension between these concepts led her to articulate a notion of 'augmentation' that, in my view, aptly describes the interaction between political actors and the historical traditions of existential meaning-making that they draw upon in their political action. As a starting point, I first need to address one more aspect of Arendt's thought that has met criticism from many interpreters: her emphasis on the radical novelty and unpredictability of action.

Arendt frequently describes action as the making of radically new beginnings: 'It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and all origins. […] The new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle.'[427] To act is to take initiative, to begin something or 'to call something into being, which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known.'[428] Because action discloses the unique identity of the actor, because the realities that it brings about cannot be known prior to the act itself, and because every word and deed can be responded to with equally unpredictable actions by others, action is inherently associated with novelty, unpredictability, and uncontrollability.

Action has these characteristics because it corresponds to the human condition of plurality; new, uniquely distinct agents continuously enter our common world where they make their presence felt, articulating unprecedented perspectives and interacting with one another in ways that no one can fully anticipate. Action furthermore takes place in the presence of other agents who will respond by acting themselves. For that reason, the web of relations, in which the repercussions of each word and deed can be felt, has

427 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 178.

428 Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, 151.

a tendency to turn acts into chain reactions, so that 'the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation.'[429] Action has a marked potential for opening up possibilities, perspectives and political relations that cannot be determined by antecedent causes, it cannot be unilaterally controlled by any single individual, and it is potentially unlimited in scope.[430] This unpredictability, stemming from the simple fact that action by its very nature takes place between agents who are similar in the respect that they are radically distinct from one another, sets it apart from the other human activities of labour and work.

In her later work, in a move that has been widely criticized by her interpreters,[431] Arendt turned to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, seeking to turn his account of aesthetic judgment into the basis for an account of political judgment, arguing that for all their differences, taste in art and judgement in political affairs are similar in the sense that they consider the evaluation of the unprecedented, of appearances *qua* appearances, without subsuming them under an antecedent theoretical framework, as happens in cognitive or logical judgements.[432] Corresponding to her view of action as inherently unpredictable, Arendt locates political wisdom in the ability to appreciate new situations in terms of their novelty and particularity, rather than in their subsumption to antecedent standards.

Notably, Arendt failed to exercise precisely this kind of ability herself when she responded to the previously discussed events in Little Rock in 1957.[433] While, as Danielle

429 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 190.

430 Ibid., 191-192; Arendt, "What is Freedom?" 167-171; Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, 202.

431 These critics view this move as problematic because it fails to address the importance of 'validity' in politics. Habermas, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power;"; Ronald Beiner, "Interpretive Essay: Hannah Arendt on Judging," in Hannah Arendt, Ronald Beiner (ed.), *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, paperback edition 1989 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), "Interpretive Essay: Hannah Arendt on Judging;" Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, and various contributions in Beiner and Nedelsky, *Judgment, Imagination and Politics.* For evaluations and responses to these criticisms, see Linda M.G. Zerilli, "'We Feel Our Freedom;'" Linda M.G. Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*; D. N. Rodowick, *An Education in Judgment*; and Josefson, *Hannah Arendt's Aesthetic Politics*.

432 Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. As Jim Josefson points out, Arendt's affirmation of 'the uniqueness or particularity of phenomena […] has been a central concern of the phenomenological tradition since Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.' Josefson, *Hannah Arendt's Aesthetic Politics*, 252.

433 Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," in Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jeromy Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 193-213. In this essay, Arendt

Allen argued, the impact of Will Count's photos of the Little Rock Seven on many in the wider American public was that it placed antecedent social constellations in a radically new light, Arendt herself was unable to appreciate how her own antecedent evaluative framework was put into question by the events that she was witnessing.[434] Michael Burrough insightfully analyzed the complex role that her personal life experiences and social identities played in her response to Little Rock;[435] one of the insights we can gleam from these complexities is that Arendt's stronger claims that the beginning that is introduced by action is radically new and distinct from whatever preceded it, that it 'has nothing to hold onto'[436] and that it 'always appears in the guise of a miracle'[437] stands in need of nuance: personal and collective antecedent experiences, assumptions and expectations, including 'structural, group-based form of ignorance that [resist] certain forms of knowing,'[438] play an unextractable role in how any given action is perceived and interpreted. This is the case because any act of communication by necessity relies upon a social imaginary that enables the political actors as well as their audience to interpret what they witness. Following Allen, we may say that the 'epiphanic,' 'reconstituting' and 'miraculous' potential that Arendt attributes to action does not emerge *ex nihilo*, without any relation to the sociocultural constellation that preceded it, but that, on the contrary, it is precisely located in their ability to innovatively bring about unanticipated changes *in that given setting*. In what follows, I will elaborate on the relation between action and the cultural setting in which it occurs in order to further develop my account of sociocultural interventions as the performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements within the social imaginary.

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responded to Will Counts' photo of Elizabeth Eckford (discussed in 2.1.3, above) in a manner that was very critical of the school desegregation movement. Drawing on her theoretical distinctions between private, social and public spheres, she argued that the integration of schools was not an appropriate aim for political action, properly conceived; moreover, she faulted the parents in Little Rock for making their children fight out adults' political battles.

434 Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, esp. 25-36; Burroughs, "Hannah Arendt, 'Little Rock,' and White ignorance."

435 For a detailed and convincing discussion of the interrelated factors involved in Arendt's inability to appreciate the political significance of race and racism in the United States and to overcome, see Burroughs, "Hannah Arendt, 'Little Rock,' and White ignorance."

436 Arendt, *On Revolution,* 206; Honig, for whom this aspect of Arendt's theory forms the starting point of her criticism, attributes this to her need to protect the political from the intrusion of the private and the social domains; Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 87.

437 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 178.

438 Burroughs, following Charles Mills' concept of 'white ignorance,' in: "Hannah Arendt, 'Little Rock,' and White Ignorance," 69.

3.2.3. Grounding action: 'work' and 'action' as alternative perspectives upon meaning construction

Having introduced action's relation to the social imaginary as well as action's relation to 'novelty,' I will now elaborate on how Arendt sees the relation between 'action' on the one hand and 'culture' on the other, first through a consideration of her distinction between 'work' and 'action,' and then through a discussion of her concepts of 'tradition' and 'augmentation.' Doing so will allow me to develop a concept of political action as the performative augmentation of authoritative elements of the social imaginary, which is one key effect of sociocultural interventions as I understand them.

While Arendt affirms a mentality characterized by a taste for novelty and cautions against a mentality that is centrally concerned with stability in politics, at other points she acknowledges that, if words and deeds are not to be rendered futile by subsequent words and deeds, and if any public sphere is to exist at all, some measure of permanence is necessary. The question of how to reconcile the taste for new beginnings and for self-disclosure through action on the one hand with the need for a measure of durability in the public realm on the other in such a manner that precisely the possibility of durable novelty is preserved is the central dilemma in much of Arendt's work, and particularly in *On Revolution.* In her efforts to answer this question, she develops an account of the type of mentality from which political action arises in which the very sources of permanence simultaneously guarantee continued innovation. I argue that this account helps to understand the authors of political action, and sociocultural interventions in particular, as standing in a relationship of dual causation towards authoritative cultural elements: these elements co-determine their actions (by prescribing what is intelligible and legitimate) while they themselves are continuously reshaped and reinterpreted by these actions as well. Political action can be understood as a practice of *augmentation* by which authoritative principles that have become manifest in historical deeds and events are preserved and carried forward in ever novel ways.

Arendt believed that historically, for political thinkers who despaired of the uncertainties of political life, work's affinity with stability, control and predictability made it an attractive alternative model for understanding politics, and that this approach grew to be so dominant that in her own time, it had become hard to see politics in a different light. She refers to this development as the 'traditional substitution of making for acting;' and notes that the effects of the concern with stability and reliability in human affairs included, in the first place, a bluntly utilitarian approach to politics, and as a further

consequence, authoritarian rule culminating in totalitarian violence in her own lifetime.[439] Taking this in conjunction with Arendt's tendency to draw strong distinctions and her affirmations of radical novelty, one might misunderstand her to be arguing that a concern with stability simply has no place in politics, properly speaking.

But on closer reading, Arendt actually recognizes that a concern with permanence is not *necessarily* detrimental to the making of new beginnings through action, arguing that without a stable, durable public sphere, no meaningful action can take place. While foregrounding action and the disclosure of the new that it makes possible, and while endeavouring to protect it from attempts to stabilize the public realm, she also sees that actors' words and deeds are futile if they have no lasting effects and can be undone by any subsequent action.[440]

Arendt describes political freedom as the capacity to make new beginnings *that may subsequently be remembered*. It thus encompasses two seemingly contradictory moments: on the one hand, it involves the capacity of making new beginnings through words and deeds, often described by Arendt in terms of radical novelty, boundlessness and unpredictability. Although this is one of the more prominent aspects of action in much of Arendt's work – partly as a result of her conviction that it has historically been ignored – a measure of permanence is necessary for meaningful political action to be possible. It is precisely because she attempts to think both of these aspects of political freedom – novelty and permanence – together that her phenomenological account of action is useful for my purposes, for it indicates that particular historical events, principles and traditions can serve as crucial psychological resources for subsequent political participation.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt suggests that some of the stability that is needed for a political realm to exist is in fact derived from the products of work; this is illustrated by the fact that, among its examples, Arendt includes the city wall and the law of the polis, which frequently functions as her ideal of the political community. Both lend the public realm the durability and stability that is requisite for the polis to serve its purpose as an organized remembrance in which the disclosure of unique selves through action is possible.[441]

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439 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 220-230.

440 'If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men.' Ibid., 55.

441 'It is as though the wall of the *polis* and the boundaries of the law were drawn around an already existing public space which, however, without such stabilizing protections could not endure, could not survive the moment of action and speech itself.' Ibid., 198; see also Arendt, *On Revolution,* 186. Interestingly, while she maintains that the Greeks

All products of work, taken together, are referred to by Arendt as the human artifice or simply 'the world,' a term that she contrasts with nature, which is unstable and not shaped by humans.[442] She makes this point explicitly in her essay 'The Crisis in Culture,' in which she relates the word 'culture' to the ability to create a lasting home in the world, and states that an 'object is cultural to the extent it can endure.'[443] Because of their durability, the products of work can function as the stable features by which people orient themselves in an ever-changing nature; this characteristic, furthermore, allows people to derive a sense of identity from them.[444]

An overlooked, but in my view crucially important aspect of Arendt's concept of the products of work is that it can also include *non-material* entities and concepts, such as stories, song, and in an ultimate case, articulated thought, insofar as their articulation serves to give them an existence more durable than mere thought. Consider religious and mythological texts such as the works of Homer, which remained in an intangible state before they were finally written down – but even before that point, had served as a source of stability, meaning and identity for generations of people.[445] Another type of intangible products of work is formed by philosophical systems, which, according to

had no need for authority, and that this was a Roman invention (Arendt, "What is Authority?" 104), even on her own account this cannot have been true; for the laws of the polis (even when seen as the result of work, rather than action, as Arendt argues) could scarcely have served their purpose if the Greeks had not acknowledged them as binding for future actions.

442 And vice versa, she defines 'worldliness' as 'the capacity to fabricate and create a world.' Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance" in Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future,* 209.

443 Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture," 206-208.

444 'From this viewpoint, the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that—in contradiction to the Heraclitean saying that the same man can never enter the same stream-—men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table.' Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 137.

445 Even those works of that are almost or entirely intangible, such as music or orally transmitted poetry in cultures without written records, are aimed at bestowing durability upon thoughts and experiences, for instance through meter or rhyme that facilitate memorization. This intangibility, however, is only of a temporal nature; because Arendt sees the desire for imperishability as one of the most important motivations for the creation of art, she thinks that '[e]ven a poem, no matter how long it existed as a living spoken word in the recollection of the bard and those who listened to him, will eventually be "made", that is, written down and transformed into a tangible thing among things, because remembrance and the gift of recollection, from which all desire for imperishability springs, need tangible things to remind them, lest they perish themselves.' (Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 170).

Arendt, are better understood as products of work than as products of thought.[446] This brings us to a far broader understanding of work, one that can encompass, for instance, the creation, maintenance, and reinterpretation of religious and philosophical worldviews; when we try to bestow durability on our thoughts – which I think, in an ultimate case, can include the simple articulation of these thoughts, be it in the form of theory or in the form of stories – we are already making a step from the purely contemplative life to the active life, and have, in that sense, started to engage in a form of what Arendt terms 'work.'

Recall that in the previous chapter, I used the term 'meaning construction' to refer to people's endeavours to make sense of their experiences by relating these to intersubjective and conventional cognitive models that can serve as explanatory frameworks and that assist them in orienting themselves in various domains of life. As we saw, Arendt's concept of work denotes the creation and maintenance of durable human culture, in both its material and its non-material forms, which provides the political realm with the stability that is necessary for meaningful action to be possible. These cultural elements produced by work also give context and content to the interactions that go on between citizens; Arendt refers to them as the 'inter-est,' that which, like a table, exists 'in between' the citizens, simultaneously drawing them together and separating them, and that enables their interactions because it allows them to share their distinct perspectives on it with each-other. Without the medium of the inter-est, no meaningful political interaction could take place.[447] Finally, as noted, stable cultural elements enable people to orient their actions and provide them with a sense of identity.

Given all of this, I draw two conclusions. First, Arendt's concept of 'work' can be understood to encompass this same endeavour of meaning construction. Second, the products of work can be understood to represent the shared cultural meanings that result from it and that in turn form the point of departure for subsequent attempts at meaning construction. In response to the objection against Arendt's concept of politics that it 'has nothing to hold onto,' or to put it differently, that she fails to account for the relation between the radical novelty of that what is disclosed through words and deeds on the one hand and the antecedent given from which every instance of action necessarily proceeds, this interpretation suggests that we can actually understand her discussion of

446 Ibid., 170-171.
447 Ibid., 182-183.

the products of work as an account of the cultural background in which action occurs and from which it proceeds.

If we accept that attempts to bestow permanence to thought through its articulation in a memorable and lasting manner count as instances of work, what does this mean for work's relation to action? After all, it is Arendt's position that of all three basic human activities, it is not work, but rather action that has the closest affinity to speech, as it is through speaking that human beings make their appearance as unique individuals, so that every word and deed has the potential of bringing something startingly unexpected and novel into the world.

Yet, words and deeds have an affinity with permanence, and hence stability, as well as with novelty. As Bonnie Honig has noted, it is interesting in this respect that the exemplary instances of action that Arendt celebrates, such as Pericles' Funeral Oration,[448] the American Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution[449] can equally be argued to represent instances of work. Paradoxically, Arendt describes the Declaration of Independence as a 'perfect' instance of action, precisely *because* of its remarkable permanence;[450] and it is the Constitution's quality as an 'endurable objective thing' to which she attributes the remarkable stability of the American polity.[451] In my view, this strongly argues in favour of the point that action and work are not best seen as two separate activities, but rather as two distinct, complementary perspectives through which one can look at any given act of meaning construction.

An attempt to bring the two perspectives together, to account for both the cultural setting in which political action arises and the changes in that cultural setting that action can bring about, and to understand political action as simultaneously innovative and stabilizing, can be found in Arendt's essay 'What is authority?' and in *On Revolution*. It is here that she develops her account of augmentation as a practice of performatively amending and building upon an authoritative beginning or principle.[452] It is this account that I will concern myself with in the next subsection, arguing first that augmentation is

448 Ibid., 197, 205-207.

449 Arendt, *On Revolution,* esp. chapters 3 and 4.

450 Ibid.*,* 130; this important point was signalled by Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 94-95.

451 Arendt, *On Revolution,* 157.

452 'Authority, resting on a foundation in the past as its unshaken cornerstone, gave the world the permanence and durability which human beings need precisely because they are mortals the most unstable and futile beings we know of,' Arendt, "What is Authority?" 95.

best understood as a kind of synthesis of her previous accounts of work and action, and second, that in conjunction with the interpretation of non-material meanings as products of work provided above, it provides us with an appropriate interpretive model to make sense of sociocultural interventions that draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making.

3.2.4. Grounding action: performative augmentation

In *Between Past and Future* and *On Revolution*, Arendt further developed her thought on the dual relation of politics to novelty on the one side and to permanence on the other that she had originally laid out in *The Human Condition*. In addition to the two perspectives outlined above, she developed a third, unifying perspective in which politics is understood as a practice of performative augmentation of lasting, authoritative beginnings. In this third perspective, which Arendt imagined to have manifested itself in ancient Rome as well as in the founding days of the United States, political action proceeds from an attitude of being inspired by and bound to a 'foundation', that is, an antecedent deed that makes manifest a principle that subsequently inspires and guides later deeds, which in turn, by emulating and adding to the foundation, preserve it in innovative ways. The connection between the novelty that each action potentially introduces and the relatively stable cultural setting that gives it content and meaning is one of creative, innovative emulation.

Arendt argues that Roman political thought, from the start of the Republic to the end of the Empire, was centered on 'the sacredness of the foundation,' the idea that 'once something has been founded it remains binding for all future generations.'[453] The foundation of Rome was seen as a singular, authoritative act from which all subsequent political acts derived their legitimacy.[454] Political actors strove to preserve the political community that had been founded by augmenting it, that is, by adding their own, new actions to the original act of its foundation. The legitimacy of these new actions consisted in them being inspired by the same principle that had originally become manifest through the initial act. By thus keeping the foundation alive, political

453 Arendt, "What is Freedom?" 120. For the beginning to play this role, it is not decisive whether or not this beginning is historical or mythological; Arendt, *On Revolution,* 205-207.

454 In order to stress the intimate relationship between augmentation and authority, thus conceived, Arendt repeatedly points to the etymological links between the Latin roots for the word 'authority', *auctoritas,* and the verb for 'to augment,' *augere;* Arendt, "What is Authority?" 120-124.

actors themselves became 'augmentors' of the city and its empire, joining the ranks of their ancestors, Rome's initial founders or authors (*auctores)*; to be in authority meant precisely to be part of the 'unbroken line of successors' that handed down the inspiring principle through time.[455]

As the spirit of the founders and the augmenters was thought to remain present within the city and its buildings, the authoritative past was 'no less present in the actual life of the city than the power and strength of the living.'[456] The spirit of the foundation is the inspiring force of the principle that was first made manifest in that foundation. The legitimacy of the actions that followed the foundation consisted in them being inspired by the same principle that had originally come to light in the initial act. Political action consists in the actor performatively making manifest a principle (such as honour, distinction, equality, fear or hatred) which may subsequently inspire emulation by future generations (who in that sense remain 'bound' to the original act).[457] Foundations, similarly, are initial actions that manifest principles, which continue to inspire subsequent political actors to emulate it, to add on to the foundation through new deeds that are in line with this same principle, thus preserving and augmenting that which has been founded. Freedom, Arendt states, appears wherever principles are actualized through action.[458]

The political importance of the past to the Romans was also reflected in two related concepts, namely tradition and religion, which together with authority are referred to collectively by Arendt as 'the Roman trinity.'[459] It was through tradition that those endowed with authority derived it from their ancestors: 'Tradition preserved the past by handing

455 'Through the Roman senators, the Founders of the City of Rome were present, and with them the spirit of the foundation was present, the beginning, the *principium* and principle of those *res gestae* which then formed the history of the people of Rome. For *auctoritas,* whose etymological root is *augere*, to augment and to increase, depended upon the vitality of the spirit of the foundation, by virtue of which it was possible to augment, to increase and enlarge, the foundations as they had been lain by the ancestors. The uninterrupted continuity of this augmentation and its inherent authority could come about only through tradition, that is through the handling down, through an unbroken line of successors, of the principle established in the beginning. To stay in this unbroken line of successors meant in Rome to be in authority, and to remain tied back to the ancestors in pious remembrance and conservation meant to have Roman *pietas*, to be 'religious' and 'bound back' to one's own beginnings.' Arendt, *On Revolution,* 202.

456 Arendt, "What is Authority?" 122.

457 Ibid., 120.

458 Arendt, "What is Freedom?" 152-153.

459 Arendt, "What is Authority?" 125.

down from one generation to the next the testimony of the ancestors, who first had witnessed and created the sacred founding and then augmented it by their authority throughout the centuries. As long as this tradition was uninterrupted, authority was inviolate.'[460] And religion was part of this political trinity because for the Romans, 'religion literally meant *re-ligare*: to be tied back, obligated, to the enormous, almost superhuman and hence always legendary effort to lay the foundations, to build the cornerstone, to found for eternity.'[461] Whereas to 'be engaged in politics meant first and foremost to preserve the founding of the city of Rome,'[462] to 'be religious meant to be tied back to the past' through tradition and in this sense 'religious and political activity could be considered as almost identical.'[463]

Action, according to this view, was simultaneously limited by and made possible by a beginning that, by the same token, was both limiting and empowering. Arendt claimed that this originally Roman idea of action as augmentation of an authoritative beginning or foundation had been rediscovered by the Founding Fathers of the United States.[464] For them, the dilemma of reconciling the need for stability on the one hand and the empowering experience of making new beginnings on the other was acute. Wishing to preserve for subsequent generations the possibility of public happiness, the experience associated with making new, lasting beginnings through public action in concert, they found themselves in need of a source of stability for the republic that they had founded.

One of the reasons that the American Revolution, in contrast to the French Revolution, actually did result in a stable and enduring body politic, Arendt argues, was the particular attitude that the Founding Fathers adopted towards the Constitution, which could subsequently be augmented, and thus preserved, by successive generations through its interpretation by the Supreme Court, thus enabling both a possibility for change and for the stability without which a political realm cannot survive; key to this survival is the inspiring force of the principle made manifest in the original foundation.[465]

Viewing sociocultural interventions as practices of performative augmentation brings into focus how contributors to public debate stand in a dual relation to the perceived authority of cultural elements of the social imaginary; on the one hand,

460 Ibid., 124.
461 Ibid., 121, 124.
462 Ibid., 120.
463 Ibid., 120-121; Arendt, *On Revolution,* 198.
464 Arendt, *On Revolution,* esp. 196-199.
465 'The uninterrupted continuity of this augmentation and its inherent authority could come about only through tradition, that is, through the handing down, through an unbroken line of successors, of the principle established in the beginning.' Arendt, *On Revolution,* 202.

their contributions are grounded in an antecedent, authoritative meanings; on the other, because their contributions also involve interpretative moves, these meanings are not static. As I will work out in more detail in the next chapter, this perspective suggests that political action offers political actors the opportunity to simultaneously experience a sense of belonging to a transhistorical community and an empowering sense of creativity and agency. This goes some way in explaining why cultural elements drawn from historical traditions of existential meaning-making are ubiquitous in the political life of democratic societies.

3.3. Conclusion

My application of Arendt's reflections on action, the public sphere, authority and augmentation to the interpretation of sociocultural interventions has yielded the following insights for my purposes. For Arendt, the significance of political action lies in its closely related abilities to reveal novel, unanticipated perspectives, to performatively transform the web of human relationships, and to enable political actors to experience their own existence as meaningful. By highlighting these performative, aesthetic and existential dimensions of action, her reflections form a useful point of contrast to cognitivist theories that view the evaluation of political utterances primarily or even exclusively in terms of their ability to transmit objective cognitive content that is antecedent to the utterances themselves. Building on a further examination of the relation between novelty and permanence in Arendt's account of action and her later account of augmentation, I argued that the effects that she ascribes to action are best understood as changes in the social imaginary that underlies and structures the political reality that political actors inhabit. Sociocultural interventions, in that respect, exemplify action as it was envisioned by Hannah Arendt.

The main result of this chapter is an account of sociocultural interventions as the performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements. This account brings into focus how political actors stand in a dual relation to the perceived authority of the cultural elements that their sociocultural interventions draw upon: on the one hand, the authority of cultural elements is part of the motivation that spurs their contributions, while on the other, these contributions themselves forward novel interpretations of these same cultural elements. This dual relation makes it possible for these authoritative cultural elements to simultaneously provide political actors with a sense of transhistorical continuity as well as a sense of empowering agency.

In the following chapter, I will argue that this account is especially useful when we seek to interpret sociocultural interventions that incorporate cultural elements that are drawn from historical traditions of existential meaning-making, including but not limited to religious traditions. I will also argue that it provides us with a useful basis to reconsider, first, how sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument can be thought together, second, what the relation between the two types of contribution entails for our general picture of the public sphere, and finally, how all this in turn relates to our view of the public, political interactions and collaborations between political actors across religious or philosophical divisions.

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4

The relation between sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument

4.0. Introduction

Political theorists who are committed to democratic equality have compelling reasons to look beyond deliberative argument alone when they consider the role of historical traditions of existential meaning-making in contemporary political life, and to take what I have called 'sociocultural interventions' into explicit consideration. However, this still leaves us with an array of important open questions: how do deliberative argument and what I have called sociocultural interventions relate to each other, and how does this relation impact our more general picture of the public sphere? What, if anything, can the insights gleaned from a consideration of sociocultural interventions tell us about deliberative argument itself? And, finally, regarding the debate on 'post-secularism:' how can a consideration of politics as performative augmentation aid us in our efforts to interpret instances of political co-operation between political actors across religious and philosophical dividing lines? These questions will be central to the present, final chapter.

I will start (in section 4.1) with an examination of how the political effects of sociocultural interventions, the internal as well as the external effects, may be accommodated within Rawls' and Habermas' systems. I show that both thinkers recognize the kinds of perspective shifts that I have connected to sociocultural interventions as helpful from the vantage point of a commitment to democratic equality, and that they both identify social settings and situations in order to accommodate such shifts – non-public social settings in Rawls (4.1.1) and the 'informal' public sphere in Habermas (4.1.2). Importantly, both locate these social settings and situations *outside* the realm where deliberative argument takes place. These findings point to the possibility of conceptualizing deliberative argument

and sociocultural interventions as two distinct classes of political communication, each guided by its own set of criteria, rules and social settings.

However, as I will argue in 4.1.3, the situational and institutional thresholds upon which such conceptual arrangements rely seem hard to justify in absence of a consensus on whether or not the requisite conditions for deliberative argument have already been sufficiently realized at any given time. An additional reason to be wary of a neat separation between various spheres, each with its respective sets of norms and expectations, is presented by the arguments by an array of political thinkers, including Bonnie Honig, Iris Marion Young and William Connolly, who are wary of overly rigid distinctions between rhetoric and 'pure' argument or between performative and constative speech acts, and who caution against the potentially exclusionary effects of such distinctions.[466]

A final downside of a strict distinction between deliberative argument and sociocultural interventions is that it forecloses fruitful possibilities to rethink the public sphere more radically. As I will argue in section 4.2, if, instead of merely adding additional components to our picture of politics and the public sphere while leaving these pictures otherwise intact, we regard sociocultural interventions *as well as* deliberative argument as instances of performative augmentation, we will be in a better position to also take note of what happens performatively once political actors set out to engage in deliberative argument, especially with an eye to the role of persisting power differences amongst them. Moreover, such a perspective can aid us in making sense of instances of political collaboration between political actors adhering to a variety of different historical traditions of existential meaning-making that are poorly captured by the metaphor of 'translation.'

After a brief introduction of the second section, I will connect the concept of performative augmentation to what scholars of religion have termed 'inventive tradition' (4.2.2). I do this in order to show that the features of politics that I have singled out through a consideration of Arendt's perspective on politics as an innovative, existentially meaningful practice by which political actors performatively augment historical traditions are also structural features of religious thought and practice, and that these features make themselves particularly manifest in those historical moments when the participants in religious traditions turn their attention to pressing social issues, as is common in the context of religiously motivated emancipatory movements

466 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*; Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*; Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*.

such as the Civil Rights Movement. Importantly, these religiously inspirated political movements manifest these characteristics *both* through sociocultural interventions *as well* as through deliberative argument – as is illustrated, for instance, by the words and actions of Martin Luther King.

As I will show in 4.2.3, these features are also at work in Rawls' and Habermas theoretical contributions. Their work can fairly straightforwardly be interpreted as constituting exemplary instances of deliberative argument which aim to uphold the prioritization of a particular form of public political discourse (one that is conceived in a highly cognitivist manner) over others in the name of justice, democracy and reason. Notably, both explicitly place their own argument in a culturally authoritative historical narrative[467] regarding the roots of secularism and the public sphere in Early Modern Europe – a narrative the authority of which they performatively affirm at the same time as they re-elaborate its normative consequences. In this sense, these very sophisticated instances of deliberative argument themselves also form examples of performative augmentation.

Performative augmentation, understood as an innovative, existentially meaningful practice by which one simultaneously affirms the authority of one or more historical traditions and creatively re-shapes them, can be observed to manifest itself in religiously inspired political action and argument as well as in prominent theoretical contributions to the (post-)secularism debate. It occurs, not *only* in the form of sociocultural interventions, but *also* in the form of deliberative argument; not *only* in the form of religious thought and practice, but *also* in the form of secular thought and practice. This perspective, I will conclude in 4.3, enables us to make sense of many avenues of co-operation between political actors across ideological and religious divisions – avenues which the cognitivist focus on 'translation' does not adequately encapsulate.

4.1. Deliberative argument and sociocultural intervention as sharply separate

4.1.1. Accommodating sociocultural interventions: Rawls

In order to appreciate how sociocultural interventions might 'fit' within Rawls' account of politics, first consider that he is in effect engaged in an exercise of making explicit the implicit rules and expectations of a communicative practice in which the citizens of

467 I use 'authoritative' here in the sense I described above: namely, as being regarded with grounding reverence and as having lasting normative consequences.

constitutional, democratic societies already participate. Much of the citizens' knowledge of these rules and expectations may not be consciously held or explicitly articulated, but their practical understanding does sufficiently equip them to comply with them; in these respects, this communicative practice fits with Wittgenstein's well-known description of 'language-games.'[468] The 'rational debate' language-game that Rawls describes is a very prominent one within the public, political life of contemporary democracies, but as we have seen, it is not the only one that is available; for instance, when participating in a politically inflected religious ceremony such as a public vigil, participants will likewise draw upon a great deal of largely implicit, practical knowledge, arriving at the event with a sense of what kinds of actions will count as appropriate (observing silence, lighting candles, singing hymns) or inappropriate (shouting profane slogans). In what follows, it is helpful to think of both the communicative practices that I have contrasted in previous chapters, deliberative argument as well as sociocultural interventions, as two types of language games, the rules of which political actors tend to grasp in implicit, practical and not necessarily fully conscious ways.

Now note that while both of the two types of language games depend on implicit knowledge shared by the participants, this dependence takes a markedly different form in each case. Rawls describes a practice of justification by means of explicit reference to truths that are antecedent to and independent of the communicative act itself; for instance, in the Canadian context, one citizen might justify their opposition to the government-funded construction of an oil pipeline by making reference to environmental concerns or the government's constitutional obligations to respect the rights of Indigenous peoples, whereas a proponent of the pipeline would likely refer to the project's supposed economic benefits. Insofar as both citizens engage in an exchange of justifications by means of reference to realities which they deem relevant to, but which themselves precede and exist independently of this particular debate, the language game under consideration is characterized by a central role of the *descriptive dimension* of their utterances. This places it in direct contrast to the practices that I referred to as sociocultural interventions, in which the *performative force* of communication plays a more central role.[469]

468 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

469 Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*; Raoul Moati, *Derrida/Searle: Deconstruction and Ordinary Language,* trans. Timothy Attanucci and Maureen Chun (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 17-21.

Despite the centrality of the constative dimensions of speech in his account, Rawls does detail a range of social conditions that need to be met for the kind of deliberative argument that he envisions to be possible. After all, he specifies that his account of justification in the public sphere is designed for modern, constitutional, democratic, well-ordered societies inhabited by citizens who already recognize one another as reasonable and equal, and who, moreover, share a common familiarity with the public culture, including of the ideas and principles of justice that, in Rawls' view, are implicitly present in that society's political institutions, public traditions of interpretation, and historic documents. This account is thus premised upon the presence of a great deal of institutions, dispositions, relations and cultural knowledge, all of which themselves are the outcome of a society's particular political and cultural history – a history which evidently encompasses many communicative acts, importantly including sociocultural interventions, that are much more saliently performative in character than the deliberative argument that takes central stage.[470] To use an illustration from U.S. history, consider how the many sociocultural interventions that the Civil Rights Movement engaged in (sit-ins, prayer and rallies, culminating in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom) performatively contributed to the establishment of the requisite social conditions for the passage of historic anti-discriminatory laws in the 1950s and 1960s – laws which are now firmly established as part of what Rawls would consider American 'public culture.'[471] So while it is true that the Rawlsian account of politics does not specifically address sociocultural interventions, the social conditions under which the type of political interaction that he focuses on becomes possible do in practice require more obviously performative types of communication, including sociocultural interventions, to be brought about.

This would seem to suggest that Rawls' account of deliberative argument and my account of sociocultural interventions are not at all contradictory, but instead might be seen to complement one another. One possibility to conceptualize such a complementary relationship, enabling an integration of the two accounts into an overarching account of political action in the public sphere, is by imagining each language game to be concerned with a particular type of moment in the political life

470 I write 'much more saliently' here, because the distinction is not so much between performative acts of communication on the one hand and constitutive acts of communication on the other – it is a difference of degree, as I will discuss in greater detail later on.

471 Remember that for Rawls, 'public culture comprises the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation (including those of the judiciary), as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge.' Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* 13-14.

of contemporary liberal democracies; in this view, sociocultural interventions can be expected to occur whenever the requisite conditions for deliberative deliberation to take place have not yet been fulfilled, and thus represent a necessary step towards their fulfillment.[472]

Such a perspective would be analogous to Rawls' own approach when he reflects on the situations in which his 'proviso' applies, and indicates that at times when society is not yet 'fully well-ordered,' political actors should be permitted to make discursively rendered appeals to their comprehensive doctrines in order to contribute to the establishment of a society that is more just and well-ordered.[473] To return to the previous example, Rawls indicates that the US prior to the Civil Rights Movement, at a time when African-Americans were not widely viewed as fellow citizens with an equal claim to participation in collective decision-making processes, was not a well-ordered society, and recognizes that deliberatively rendered appeals to comprehensive reasons (such as those by Martin Luther King) were necessary to enable the passage of laws that then enshrined previously controversial understandings of justice and equality into law.[474] In light of the aforementioned historical role of sociocultural interventions in this process, it is not a great leap to say that Rawls' sequential arrangement, in which the proviso applies at a stage in the decision-making process that precedes the stage in which deliberation can proceed by means of public reason alone, should be applied to sociocultural interventions as well: first, sociocultural interventions, much like deliberatively rendered appeals to comprehensive reasons, foster conditions of discursive equality; then, second, this discursive equality enables deliberative argument to take place as envisioned by Rawls.

However, there are a variety of problems with such a 'sequential' view of political communication. The first of these is familiar from the first chapter, where I referred to it as the problem of Rawls' 'finalism:' it is a perspective that seems to presuppose that an uncontroversial distinction can be drawn between that stage in which society is not yet sufficiently just and well-ordered for deliberative argument to occur under the conditions outlined by Rawls, and the subsequent stage in which these conditions have been firmly fulfilled (so that other forms of political communication than deliberative argument

472 Objections to this way of understanding of the relationship between the sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument, as well as alternative approaches, will be discussed shortly.

473 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 249-250.

474 Ibid.

would no longer be required). In practice, contemporary constitutional democracies are rarely if ever free from deep and ongoing disagreement on whether society is sufficiently just, on who should be recognized as an equal, and what concrete arrangements such a recognition should entail. In light of the historical reality that the public life of democratic societies appears to be characterized by an ongoing succession of emancipatory movements challenging the political status quo in the name of justice and equality, it is doubtful that a stage in which political actors no longer need to engage in sociocultural interventions to achieve political change, and instead can exclusively stick to deliberative argument, will ever be realized. Moreover, rather than concluding political conflict, the legal outcomes that result out of deliberative argument seem to frequently invigorate social movements that engage in sociocultural interventions (such the events involving the Little Rock Seven, which, as described in chapter two, were preceded by a court order). In light of this, it makes more sense to understand the interaction between deliberative argument and sociocultural interventions as an ongoing back-and-forth than as a neat, linear progression from sociocultural interventions to formal policy by means of deliberative argument – with the caveat that both forms of political action also occur simultaneously. In the following subsection, I will argue that Habermas' account of a more differentiated public sphere presents us with a promising model for such a non-linear understanding.

4.1.2. Accommodating sociocultural interventions: Habermas

Rather than thinking about the relation between sociocultural intervention and deliberative argument sequentially, we might instead allocate each of these activities, not so much to a specific *moment* within political life, but rather to a distinct *social setting* (or range of social settings). Doing so would enable us to understand the relation between sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument as one between two forms of political action that work in tandem. In this subsection, I will show that Habermas' model, with its distinction between a variety of social settings within the public sphere, and especially his distinction between the 'informal' and the 'formal' public spheres, is particularly well-suited for such an arrangement.

In order to see how the accommodation of sociocultural interventions within Habermas' model might be accomplished, it is useful to first remember that to Habermas, public deliberation is not merely a way for the citizens of a pluralistic, democratic society to arrive at laws that they all can accept as just and fair despite their deeper existential

disagreements; more ambitiously, it is also a practice by which these citizens, all their differences notwithstanding, can forge the ties of civic solidarity that are necessary to guarantee social stability under contemporary conditions of deep pluralism, rapid technological development, and global capitalism.[475] In the light of the aforementioned point that Rawls describes a language game that foregrounds the *constative* dimensions of the citizens' utterances, it is noteworthy that Habermas' more ambitious view of what deliberation is meant to accomplish entails more explicit attention to the *performative* dimensions of these utterances – that is to say, the citizens' acts of political expression are not evaluated exclusively in terms of their capacity to transmit information that precedes the utterance itself, but *also* by their capacity to performatively foster relations that are characterized by mutual respect and social integration.

Habermas' envisioning of a more expansive role for deliberation, not merely as the activity by which official policy is debated, articulated and codified into law, but also as a crucial activity for citizens to build relations of civic solidarity, is part of what brings him to subdivide the public sphere into 'formal' and 'informal' portions (a division prefigured by his earlier distinctions between the centre and the periphery of the public sphere).[476] Like sociocultural interventions, the communicative interactions that go on in the latter of these two have the important function of guaranteeing the citizens possibilities to collaboratively engage in the creation of meaning and identity and of fostering mutual understanding and respect. Thus considered, the informal public sphere is a very promising setting for my effort to determine how sociocultural interventions might be accommodated within Habermas' model of political life.

Perhaps, then, we could expand upon Habermas' descriptions of the informal public sphere as 'polyphonous' and as a 'Babel of voices,'[477] by also explicitly including those political expressions that are not so deliberative in character. Once we think, with Habermas, of the public sphere as encompassing a varied multitude of settings and situations, and then additionally decide to explicitly include those settings outside the formal public

475 Brink, *The Tragedy of Liberalism*, 94.

476 For these earlier distinctions, Habermas built on Bernhard Peters' model of democratic communication and decision-making. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans., by William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 354-359; Bernhard Peters, *Die Integration moderner Gesellschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993). I benefited from Bert van den Brink's discussion of these earlier distinctions: Brink, *The Tragedy of Liberalism*, 87-125.

477 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 10.

sphere in which the citizens meet to share their perspectives through means of art, rallies, public ceremony, etc., this enables us to think of the ensuant meaning-making, learning and solidarity-building practices as taking place *alongside and in dialogue with* ongoing rational discourse.

Doing so has several advantages. First of all, not unlike the Rawls-derived sequential arrangement discussed above, this 'spatial' arrangement enables us to give many of the political effects of sociocultural interventions a recognized place in our overall picture of the public sphere (for instance, we can recognize the political effects of music within the Civil Rights Movement, as well as its many sit-ins, rallies and marches, as productive moments of political life in the sense that they helped to lay the foundation for a greater measure of democratic equality). Moreover, in comparison to the sequential arrangement, the spatial arrangement has the additional benefit of fitting a wider range of temporal orders, thus acknowledging the reality that sociocultural interventions may well occur simultaneously as, or can even be preceded and sparked by, deliberative argument in the formal public sphere. Whereas the sequential view suggests that sociocultural interventions (and those forms of argument that do not conform to the standards met by argument in the formal public sphere) are merely a prelude to "proper" debate, a spatial view acknowledges that the reverse temporal order is also possible, and reminds us that the adoption and implementation of new policy does not equal the conclusion of ongoing societal debates.[478]

The spatial view acknowledges that at any given time, political life is comprised of a multitude of language-games, each with their own sets of expectations and criteria by which contributions are evaluated. It also acknowledges that many political actors will spend much or all of their time in some of these settings and little or none in some others. Such a perspective seems persuasive in light of observations that at present, political life in many constitutional democracies appears to be characterized by increasing degrees of polarization and fragmentation; conditions under which the predicaments

478 That such a reminder is important can be illustrated through Bonnie Honig's remarks on abortion debates in the U.S. She notes that the proponents of Roe vs. Wade mistakenly assumed the debate was over with the ruling, whereas its opponents understood it as an opportunity for further organizing: 'My point is that there is a lesson to be learned from the experience of those who misread Roe as the end of a battle and later found themselves ill equipped and unprepared to stabilize and secure their still unstable rights when they were repoliticized and contested by their opponents. In their mistaken belief that the agon had been successfully shut down by law, pro-choice citizens ceded the agon to their opponents and found, years later, that the terms of the contest had shifted against them.' Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 15.

of pluralism – how to guarantee social integration and stability in a manner that all citizens can see as just and fair? – takes on ever more urgency and salience.[479]

Each of the communicative practices and social settings within this multifaceted public sphere may have its own rules and expectations, but they also need to somehow be in communication with each other (as well as with the formal public sphere) if they truly are to collectively function as a public sphere. This raises the question of how Habermas' understanding of the communication between the various portions of the public sphere needs to be changed if sociocultural interventions are to be explicitly included. After all, for Habermas, one of the key roles of the informal public sphere is that it is here that, through collaborative efforts, citizens identify how their concerns and perspectives can be 'translated' into a language that is fit for deliberative argument in the formal public sphere. At minimum, the inclusion of sociocultural interventions would require us to reconsider Habermas' metaphor of 'translation,' which is still suggestive of a heavily discursive endeavour dominated by the transmission of communication-antecedent cognitive content, and therefore ill-suited to describe the effects of a poster, a pilgrimage, a round dance or a ritual fast on public opinion. Later on in this chapter, I will argue why 'augmentation' seems a more promising alternative to me.

So far in this chapter, I have explored possibilities to accommodate sociocultural interventions in Rawls' and Habermas' models of the public sphere. We have seen that even though Rawls does not have a lot to say on what I called sociocultural interventions, he does specify a range of social conditions that need to be met in order for deliberative argument to function as envisioned in his theory of the public sphere; we have also noted that the 20th century history of democratic societies offers many instances of sociocultural interventions playing a critical role in bringing those conditions about. Consequently, my account of sociocultural interventions may well be viewed as complementary rather than incommensurable with Rawls' account of deliberative argument. So understood, it indicates some of the preliminary steps that are required to make Rawls' ideal of rational argument in the public sphere a possibility.

479 Consider how many constitutional democratic societies face ongoing conflicts regarding the way in which the collective past is told, taught and remembered, in which monuments and commemorative holidays frequently serve as flashpoints – as evidenced by the controversies regarding colonialist and slave-owning statesmen in Canada, the United States, the Netherlands and elsewhere. Sociocultural interventions loom large in these debates – be it through the removal or alteration of monuments, through public art, or through alternative commemorations and celebrations - and the internal as well as external effects of these need to be accounted for in our political theories.

In a similar manner, Habermas' more ambitious, comprehensive and multifaceted model of the public sphere envisions an array of relatively unstructured, 'informal' public spheres which collectively play essential roles in bringing about the social conditions that democratic societies require to thrive, to which in my interpretation, we can justifiably add the various social settings in which sociocultural interventions take place – especially in light of these interventions' ability to provide citizens with opportunities for the creation and maintenance of meaning, identity and social cohesion, all of which are functions which Habermas explicitly associates with the informal public sphere.

In the next subsection, I will argue that despite the abovementioned opportunities for the accommodation of sociocultural interventions in Rawls' and Habermas' models of the public sphere, there are also convincing reasons to doubt whether this strategy of accommodations is the best one to pursue.

4.1.3. Against sharp distinctions: deliberative argument and sociocultural interventions as subcategories of performative augmentation

Notwithstanding the above-described possibilities to accommodate sociocultural interventions in prominent liberal and deliberative democratic models of the public sphere, I ultimately do not believe that the strategy of identifying separate times and/or locations for sociocultural interventions outside of the domain where deliberative argument takes place is the most satisfying one. Instead, I will argue for a reconsideration of the public sphere as a site where political actors engage in the performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements, and that we understand deliberative argument as one of many particular, not always easily distinguishable shapes that this practice can take. Before making this latter point (which I will do in the next section), I will use the present subsection to explain why I think the strategy of accommodation through sequential or spatial arrangements within the public sphere is not satisfying. My argument here is informed by two interrelated strands of thought, the first of which relates to theories on the nature of communication and the second of which concerns matters of sociopolitical exclusion and inequality. A third reason, dealing with the possibility of fruitfully revising our general picture of political interactions more radically, will be explored later on.

In the previous two subsections, I examined two strategies to accommodate sociocultural interventions within Rawls' and Habermas' models of the public sphere, both of which involved the relegation of performative communicative practices to a

designated place and/or time outside of the more narrowly conceived public sphere.[480] One result of these arrangements is that much of Rawls' and Habermas' theories of the public sphere as the site of deliberative argument remains unaffected.

Oddly, however, such arrangements are vulnerable to a line of criticism that is the exact mirror image of the objections that Bonnie Honig developed against Arendt's account of action, and which I already discussed in the previous chapter: namely, that demarcations between constative and performative utterances, and between the respective settings where those utterances are 'at home,' are inevitably porous and unstable.[481] Remember how, in Honig's interpretation, Arendt resisted theoretical efforts to locate the significance of political actors' words and deeds in the action-antecedent realities that justificatory arguments make reference to, and thus to represent political expression in the public sphere as a predominantly constative affair, because she believed that to do so would threaten the performatively-effected disclosures, new beginnings, and unanticipated new relationships and identities that were at the core of her own view of political action.[482] Where Rawls and Habermas, in the interpretations that I offered above, would relegate overtly performative acts of political expression to times and spaces outside of the (formal) public sphere, Arendt in Honig's perspective takes the opposite position by banishing constatives from the political sphere, which thus becomes the space where performatives – associated with radically new beginnings, relationships and realities – can reign supreme.[483] However, drawing on arguments from the debate between Searle and Derrida on Austin's theory of speech acts, Honig argues that neither of these two diametrically opposed options can succeed, and for the very same reason: namely, that every communicative action inherently combines performative with constative elements.[484]

In this line of reasoning, it is a shared feature of communicative acts that, beyond any explicitly named content, they also implicitly reference an indeterminate range of

480 Or 'formal' public sphere in the case of Habermas.

481 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 89-96.

482 In Honig's interpretation, Arendt 'banishes rational, foundational truths from the public realm for fear that their irresistible compulsion will shut down the agon whose security, maintenance, and perpetuity she seeks.' Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 9.

483 Note that it was precisely because of Arendt's affirmation of the extraordinary, performative quality of action that I found her theory of the public sphere helpful for my account of sociocultural interventions.

484 Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 89-109. For helpful accounts of this debate and its implications, see Jesús Navarro Reyes, *How to do Philosophy with Words* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2017); Raoul Moati, *Derrida/Searle*; James Loxley, *Performativity* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2007).

communication-antecedent social conditions and conventions which aid the author as well as their audience in determining to what degree any given communicative act is intelligible, relevant and/or acceptable.[485] For instance, it is a premise of instances of deliberative argument that the author and their audience are familiar with the social scripts involved in a public, political debate, that both have a sense of what arguments might be considered valid in this context, and that all the participants have a set of preconceptions on how they relate to one another. In these respects, deliberative argument is not altogether different from other communicative acts, including what I have described as sociocultural interventions.

More importantly, it is also a shared feature of communicative acts that they are not merely *premised upon* these communication-antecedent conditions and conventions, but that they also *performatively affect* whatever constellation they make their appearance in – be it by affirming the way in which this constellation is understood, by subtly reinterpreting this understanding, or by more radically challenging it altogether. This phenomenon has, of course, been an important part of my definition of sociocultural interventions: these can be meaningfully understood as expressions by which authors performatively invite or provoke their audience to imagine their social surroundings, their identity and their relations to others in new ways; it is precisely because they have this capacity that I argued that sociocultural interventions deserve more theoretical attention from political philosophers.

Now, consider how this capacity to performatively alter the implicit grasp of social reality is *also* a feature of instances of deliberative argument (in addition to their more obvious constative characteristics). For instance, if you respond to my arguments with an argument of your own, in a way that demonstrates that you have given my contribution serious consideration, I can read this as an affirmation that you recognize my status as a legitimate and competent contributor to the debate, whereas your refusal to listen to me may be understood as a denial of such recognition.[486] In either case, your response is not *only* a discursively-rendered, explicit description of a communication-antecedent reality, but *also* a performative intervention in the sociopolitical relation that exists between the two of us. Furthermore, it is possible for your response to (be it subtly or more overtly) disclose an alternative perspective on the authoritative cultural elements that inform the context of

485 In chapter 2, drawing upon Charles Taylor, I previously referred to this indeterminate range of implicit conditions and conventions as the social imaginary.

486 This point draws upon Paul Weithman's reconstruction of Rawls' arguments, which I presented in more detail in chapter 1. Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*.

our debate (as happens in those practices that are commonly termed 'framing'), or to implicitly encourage yourself, and those who occupy a similar social and/or ideological position as you do, to remain engaged in democratic decision-making processes regardless of my opposition and prejudice. So, through your participation in deliberative argument, you do much more than merely referencing communication-antecedent realities: you also insert yourself into the public sphere as a claimant to a certain status and to certain rights, you promote particular perspectives upon authoritative cultural elements (which may be in conflict with other perspectives), and you signal to those who bear witness to your actions, and who may share your perspective and group identities, that your perspective and identity are worthy of being voiced and heard. In short, instances of deliberative argument can exhibit the very same external and internal effects that I ascribed to sociocultural interventions in previous chapters.

To be sure, this is not to say that the two categories of political expressions that I have distinguished are analytically identical: after all, sociocultural interventions include political statements such as posters, graffiti, publicly performed religious ceremonies, etc., which are clearly not identifiable as deliberative argument. Neither do I mean to argue that different social settings, each with their respective set of expectations, do not exist. Rather, my point here is that statements that take the form of deliberative argument offered in the context of political debate are by no means performatively neutral: much like sociocultural interventions, they can affirm, subtly alter or more radically challenge the power dynamics that exist between political actors in important ways.

Another helpful way to illustrate this point is by considering the role of figurative language and framing in everyday political rhetoric, especially in those cases where the status of socially marginalized minorities is concerned. For example, both the Canadian 2015 controversies around the government's proposed ban on so-called 'barbaric cultural practices'[487] and the American 2016 controversies around the proposed travel ban for citizens of Muslim countries[488] involved proposed legal measures that were not just criticized for their direct legal implications, but *also* for the manner in which the political office-holders who first made these proposals rhetorically framed minorities within these countries as dangerous and illiberal outsiders, using viscerally resonant language to

487 Deepa Mattoo and Sydele E. Merrigan, "'Barbaric' Cultural Practices: Culturalizing Violence and the Failure to Protect Women in Canada" *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 12, No. 1 (2021).

488 Discussed in chapter 2.

perpetuate stereotypes that are harmful for the ability of affected citizens to participate in democratic societies on a basis of discursive equality.

One might respond to these cases by claiming that such rhetorical framings have no place in the formal, political sphere because this sphere is properly the forum of reasoned argument. Such a response would certainly correspond with the above-described relegation of those communicative acts that are more ostentatiously performative in character to spaces outside of the (narrowly conceived) public sphere. However, in this context, it is useful to remember Iris Marion Young's arguments (discussed in the first chapter) that rhetoric is an aspect of virtually *all* political discourse, even if it tends to be recognized as such more often in some cases (for instance, in the speech cultures of women, racialized minorities and working-class people) than in others (such as in the speech cultures associated with educated, white, middle-class men). The corollary is that attempts to uphold a sharp distinction between rhetoric (associated with performative effects) on the one hand and pure argument (associated with 'classical' referential, descriptive or constative utterances) on the other, and relegate each form of speech to a domain of its own, risk sharpening existing inequalities in terms of access to political power between citizens. Moreover, attempts to performatively challenge implicit, systemic prejudice are arguably more likely to be culturally constructed as rhetorical and unreasonable than affirmations of this prejudice, precisely because of the prejudice being widespread, not fully conscious, and hence apparently more common-sensical.

The unavailability of a neat, stable, non-porous distinction between constative and more performative acts of political expression, together with the conviction that efforts to firmly uphold such a distinction in the public sphere are likely to threaten democratic equality, form my first two reasons to be sceptical of the strategy of relegating more performative forms of political expression to separate times and/or locations within the public sphere. A third and final reason is that I see the performative qualities of deliberative argument, brought out in this subsection, as an opportunity to examine in more detail how not only sociocultural interventions, but political action *as such*, including deliberative argument, may be fruitfully re-envisioned as a range of practices by which political actors engage in the performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements. In the following section, I will argue that political theorists, by thinking of deliberative argument and sociocultural interventions as representing two ideal-typical forms of performative augmentation, both of which can constitute fully legitimate courses of political action, and by recognizing that the concrete political action of social

movements typically encompasses a pragmatic mixture of both types, will be much better positioned to appreciate how political action can contribute to democratic equality in a great variety of ways, the criteria for which are not exhausted by those that have been developed only with deliberative argument in mind.

4.2. Augmenting tradition: religious and secular

4.2.1. Towards an alternative view of existential commitments and politics

In the previous section, I suggested that a more fruitful approach to an adequate understanding of the relation between sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument may be to instead examine how my account of political action as the performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements, which I developed in order to facilitate reflection upon sociocultural interventions, can *also* be applied to instances of deliberative argument. In the present section, I want to work this out in greater detail. I will argue that a view of deliberative argument as a practice of performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements provides us with a more complete understanding of what can happen when political actors engage with one another in public debate. This understanding is more complete in two ways: first, it takes into account certain phenomenological experiences that the engagement in augmentation can performatively bring about; second, it more explicitly prepares us to take into account the role of power differentials between debate participants. Finally, I will argue that such an understanding has the additional benefit of bringing into focus promising opportunities for productive co-operation between political actors across religious and ideological boundaries – opportunities which are all too easily occluded when we limit ourselves to the lens of 'translation' and its associated strong focus on the 'accessibility' of constative speech acts. Together, these arguments represent the next steps towards my overall aim in this dissertation: to develop an alternative theoretical vocabulary to make sense of political actors' public expressions of their foundational existential commitments within the political sphere while avoiding a reductive view of these commitments as discursively rendered creeds and of politics as merely a rational exchange of stated opinions.

My argument that deliberative argument, like sociocultural intervention, can be fruitfully understood as a practice of performative augmentation centers on a distinctive and complex experiential phenomenon that is simultaneously important for an adequate understanding of contemporary public life and regrettably undertheorized within cognitivist

theories of the public sphere. The phenomenon I have in mind is a *dual orientation of a grounding reverence and of innovative empowerment towards authoritative cultural elements* that I think can be located in a wide variety of instances where political actors publicly engage in political practices of different types – in sociocultural interventions as well as deliberative argument, in religiously inspired as well as secular political action. These cultural elements are authoritative (that is to say, political actors are inclined to regard them with grounding reverence and as having ongoing normative implications) in part by virtue of their being embedded in historical traditions of existential meaning-making. Due to this embeddedness, those political actors that performatively incorporate these cultural elements into their political expression can derive a sense of purpose, orientation and meaning from them. Simultaneously, in this process of incorporation, the meanings associated with these elements do not remain precisely the same, as they are innovatively applied in ever new contexts and new narratives, so that the actors who engage in political action that draws upon these elements can also experience themselves as having creative agency. The concept of 'augmentation,' as developed in the previous chapter on the basis of Arendt's political theory, is a fitting concept to describe this kind of political action because it combines precisely these two experiential, performatively achieved dimensions of reverential awe and innovative empowerment.

In previous chapters, I already gave examples of participants in emancipatory social movements which display such a dual orientation towards the authoritative cultural elements that they draw upon in their political action, including the participants in the early Idle No More movement, who described their participation in round-dances, drumming circles, and other ceremonies as existentially fulfilling and politically empowering – in part because their actions drew upon traditional Indigenous worldviews emphasizing relationships to the land, thus evoking the presence of a valued past, but *also* because this action disclosed previously unanticipated perspectives on the present and the future in the shaping of which these participants are active agents.

At this juncture, I want to elaborate this idea of a dual orientation towards cultural elements and make two broader claims that both bear upon the role of political actors' existential commitments in the public sphere. First, it is my claim that such an orientation presents us with a more general feature of religious practice that can be expected to make itself especially manifest when the participants in religious traditions turn their attention to pressing issues resulting from societal change (a claim I will support in the following

subsection by means of a consideration of the concept of 'inventive tradition' that has been developed in religious studies). Second, it is my claim that this orientation is a potential feature of *any* political action and political theory that implicitly or explicitly places itself in a historical tradition of existential meaning-making, regardless of whether this is a 'religious' or a 'secular' one, and notably including the political theories forwarded by Rawls and Habermas which take inspiration from the authoritative[489] history of twentieth-century emancipatory movements (a claim I will defend in subsection 4.2.3).

This account of how 'augmentation' is at work in religious as well as secular political action and theory does not only provide us with a more sophisticated phenomenological understanding of political interactions in the public sphere, but also better enables us to make sense of what productive interactions between political actors subscribing to a variety of distinct 'comprehensive doctrines' or historical traditions of existential meaning-making are possible in practice. This claim I will defend in subsection 4.2.4.

4.2.2. Augmenting narratives: religion as 'inventive tradition'

In this subsection, I will draw upon the concept of 'inventive tradition,' which has been formulated in the field of religious studies, in order to further develop my account of performative augmentation. The 'inventive tradition' account highlights that a grounding reverence towards the past on the one hand and creative agency in the present on the other together form an important dimension of religious practice. As I will argue, this dimension is especially likely to manifest itself when adherents of religious traditions turn their attention to pressing issues resulting from societal change, as happens in religiously inspired social movements.

The concept of 'inventive tradition' was coined by Stefania Palmisano and Nicola Pannofino as a critical adaptation of historian Eric Hobsbawm's winged phrase 'the invention of tradition.'[490] According to Hobsbawm's well-known argument, many contemporary 'traditions,' although characterized by their capacity to performatively evoke a sense of continuity with a more or less distant past, actually tend to be the product of far more recent innovation, typically in response to moments of social, cultural and political upheaval

489 I use 'authoritative' here in the sense I described above: namely, as being regarded with grounding reverence. I will have more to say on how these movements are authoritative to Rawls and to Habermas in subsection 4.2.3.

490 Stefania Palmisano and Nicola Pannofino, "Inventive Traditions: Sacred Creativity in the Spirituality of The Secret," *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 7, No. 1 (2016): 3–21; Stefania Palmisano and Nicola Pannofino (ed.), *Invention of Tradition and Syncretism in Contemporary Religions: Sacred Creativity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

that provoked a crisis in a given society's collective self-understanding.[491] Hobsbawm's phrase and the theory encapsulated by it assume a relatively clear distinction between 'genuine' traditions (which Hobsbawm associates with 'traditional,' pre-modern societies and refers to as 'customs') on the one hand and 'false' traditions (for Hobsbawm, a typically modern phenomenon that is in no small degree the result of the constant, rapid change that characterizes modern societies) on the other.[492] By contrast, Palmisano and Pannofino persuasively argue that all traditions, 'modern' or not, are best understood as *constitutively inventive*: those who participate in any given tradition are in fact *always and by definition* involved in creative acts of the imagination, acts that don't create *ex novo* but instead take the form of constant rediscovery, reformulation and re-elaboration of pre-existent material.[493] Correspondingly, whereas Hobsbawm's perspective is predominantly concerned with a distinction between historical accuracy and inaccuracy, and an associated distinction between modern and premodern societies, Palmisano and Pannofino are much more centrally concerned with the *axiological* dimensions of tradition: the values that the traditions under consideration embody to those who participate in them and carry them forward through time by continuously creatively elaborating them.

Palmisano and Pannofino delineate two practices by which this process of creative re-elaboration typically takes place, namely, first, invention, a term that for them denotes 'the re-elaboration of traditional discourse in relation to one's origin, understood as both the beginning in time of tradition and its fundamental value,' and, second, syncretism, by which they mean 'the re-elaboration of traditional discourse based on cultural analogy, which is to say in consonance with others' discourse.'[494] For my present purpose (to show how for religious practitioners, the experience of reverence

491 Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For example, one might think of the ceremonial trappings of royalty (crown, throne and sceptre), designed to be evocative of Medieval and Early Modern times, even in countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands where the institution of kingship was a 19th century development, or, to use one of Hobsbawm's own examples, the selection of a neo-gothic style for the rebuilding of the British parliament (Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 1-2).

492 Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 2.

493 Stefania Palmisano and Nicola Pannofino, "Changing the Sacred: Creative Paths of Religious Experience" in Palmisano and Pannofino, *Invention of Tradition and Syncretism in Contemporary Religions*, 14. A similar argument that Hobsbawm's 'simple opposition between "genuine" and "invented" traditions is unworkable' (6) is made by Mark Salber Phillips, "Introduction: What Is Tradition When It Is Not Invented? A Historiographical Introduction" in Mark Phillips and Gordon Schochet, eds., *Questions of Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3-29.

494 Ibid., 12.

for an authoritative past can coincide with the experience of creative agency in the present), the practice of invention is of central interest as it concerns the authoritative stories and ideas that religious people share about the origin or their community and tradition - stories and ideas that have performative effects on the meaning of these communities and traditions in the present.

Religious traditions commonly feature very prominent objects, images, places and practices referencing the events surrounding the tradition's origin, such as sacramental bread and Communion in various Christian traditions or the Kaaba and the Hajj in Islam. The lasting importance of the tradition's origin story to its adherents is also evidenced by how new developments in religious traditions (such as the emergence of a new denomination, a new ceremonial practice or a new doctrine) tend to involve an account of how this development is to be justified in light of the value that this origin has to the religion's adherents.[495] In reference to these features, Marianna Zanetta concisely describes religion as 'the field par excellence where legitimation derives from an appeal to the authority of ancient tradition.'[496]

This characterization may be suggestive of an understanding of religious traditions as inherently conservative, but it is important to bear in mind, first, that like all cultural traditions, religious traditions evolve over time, so that the history of religious thought is also characterized by ongoing adaptation and innovation; and second, that there is a distinction between resistance to change and a sustained effort to understand change in relation to what came before.[497] A general characteristic of religious thought and practice,

495 James Lewis and Olav Hammer, *The Invention of Sacred Tradition* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

496 Marianna Zanetta, "The *Itako* of Tōhoku: Between Tradition and Change" in Palmisano and Pannofino, *Invention of Tradition and Syncretism in Contemporary Religions*. In making this point, Zanetta draws upon Hammer and Lewis, *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*. In order not to overgeneralize, note that such appeals to ancient tradition can be a *very common* feature of religion without being a *universally present* feature of religion.

497 For a concise articulation of this point, see Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 4-6. Charles Taylor points out that the familiar idea, formulated in its most classic form by William James, that religious traditions tend to start out as innovations that spring from the intense experiences of certain inspired individuals and then, as the tradition's subsequent adherents organize themselves, become more conservative, ritualistic and dogmatic, is the result of culturally specific, Western and post-Romantic developments, and that it underplays the extent to which the intensity of religious feeling can continue within institutionalized religious communities. Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002). Gorski would add that this picture fails to take into account how innovation is an *ongoing* feature of religious traditions and

Palmisano and Pannofino et al. suggest, is not so much a commitment to keeping things ever the same as it is a continuous commitment to relate ever new developments to what came before them in such a way that authoritative beginnings and contemporary developments continue to stand in a meaningful and normative connection to each other.

For examples of how this functions in practice, consider how in the Catholic tradition, general councils from the fourth to the twentieth century have, for all their differences, elaborated on authoritative pre-existent material (Biblical sources as well as later tradition) in order to respond to ongoing societal and political developments. By grounding their conclusions in this material, they simultaneously re-affirmed its authority and advanced particular interpretations of it that were in competition with other then current views, thus shaping the ways in which this material was subsequently apprehended by religious practitioners.[498] Likewise, religious currents of much more recent origin (such as Pentecostalism) frequently link their origin story to ancient precedent even as they innovate to respond to contemporary social developments.[499]

Such a process of 'elaboration' by which religious actors imaginatively apply appeals to an authoritative past to contemporary conditions in such a way that the past as well as the present acquire a new significance, is presented by Palmisiano and Pannofino as a general feature of religious practice.[500] However, it is to be expected that this trait will be particularly manifest when considering religiously inspired social movements, as these are by definition concerned with both religious tradition and the bringing about of social change.[501] Indeed, in chapter 2, we already saw how in the case of Idle No More, Indigenous spiritual teachings were recalled through art and ceremony to protest the Canadian government's dismantling of environmental protections. Examples of religiously inspired social movements combining appeals to authoritative origins with innovative acts of the imagination, thus showing these origins as well as the social situation to which they are applied in a new and meaningful light, are especially plentiful in the political culture of

communities, and that the individuals who stood at the beginnings of religious traditions were themselves shaped by, and engaged in a process of elaboration of, the traditions of their own communities.

498 Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils: A History of the Twenty-One Church Councils from Nicaea to Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010).

499 Cecil M. Robeck, Jr, and Amos Yong (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

500 Palmisano and Pannofino, "Changing the Sacred," 12.

501 Smith, "Correcting a Curious Neglect;" Hutchison "Spirituality, Religion, and Progressive Social Movements."

the United States,[502] as evidenced, for instance, by the role of sermons, ritual, song and religious imagery in the Civil Rights Movement,[503] in the Farmworker's Movement led by César Chávez,[504] or the Sanctuary movement in the 1980s.[505] One particularly notable example of this 'inventiveness' is offered by Martin Luther King's famous sermon "Paul's Letter to American Christians," in which he read a fictional epistle by the apostle Paul to American Christians of the 1950s, whose unjust way of life is concluded to be morally deficient in light of principles that, in King's view, are present in the New Testament.[506]

Note how the peculiar combination of novelty and permanence encapsulated in this idea of inventive tradition is also a distinctive aspect of the account of politics as performative augmentation that I developed in the previous chapter. There, on the basis of a particular interpretation of Arendt's account of the relation between action and authority, I argued that political action is fruitfully understood as a practice of performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements: it is by means of their engagement in political action that political actors performatively place themselves in a relationship of dual causation towards the authoritative cultural elements of the social imaginary that their political action simultaneously draw on, incorporate and add new meaning to. What 'dual causation' signifies here is that while these cultural elements co-determine political actions (by prescribing what is intelligible and legitimate), these actions at the same time alter how these elements are understood going forward. As memories of the past

502 Gorski, *American Covenant*.

503 Aldon Morris, "The Black Church in the Civil Rights Movement: the SCLC as the Decentralized, Radical Arm of the Black Church" in Smith, *Disruptive religion,* 29-46; Gary J. Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018). The example of the Civil Rights Movement is of particular interest for my purposes, not only because this is a very well-known case of a religiously motivated, emancipatory movement that exemplifies the traits of inventive tradition, but also because its import was part of what motivated Habermas' and Rawls' projects of revisioning the role of religion in the public sphere. Thus, this example will allow me to show in the next subsection (4.2.3) that Rawls and Habermas themselves participate in an 'inventive tradition' in which believers and non-believers collaboratively and performatively augment authoritative foundations – a process that can only be reductively understood as 'translation,' and in which 'accessibility' is not the only criterion at work.

504 Alan J. Watt, *Farm Workers and the Churches: The Movement in California and Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2010); Luis D. León, T*he Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez: Crossing Religious Borders* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

505 Randy Lippert and Sean Rehaag (eds), *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013).

506 Martin Luther King, Jr, "Paul's Letter to American Christians," in Martin Luther King, Jr, *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran (London: Abacus, 2000).

are transmitted through time, they are performatively re-inscribed in ever new frames, thus acquiring meanings that are culturally relevant to the ever-changing present.[507] By virtue of the defining feature of dual causation, my understanding of political action as performative augmentation maps quite neatly unto the model of 'inventive traditions' that scholars of religion have developed to describe religious traditions. In view of this, we may say that *both* religious practice *and* political action are fruitfully understood as practices of augmentation by which authoritative principles that have become manifest in historical deeds and events are performatively preserved and carried forward in ever novel ways.

It is to be expected that the combination of novelty and permanence that is present both in religious practice and in political action is especially apparent in the case of religiously motivated, emancipatory social movements, given the latter's inherent commitment both to an ongoing engagement with historical traditions of existential meaning-making (which involve an effort to meaningfully relate oneself to some authoritative past) as well as to practical endeavours to resolve contemporary social concerns. Historically, religiously motivated emancipatory movements like the Civil Rights Movement have demonstrated such an ongoing commitment to relate an authoritative past to contemporary issues so that past and present appeared together in a meaningful constellation with clear normative implications. Moreover, it is noteworthy that they did this not only through the kinds of actions that I have described as 'sociocultural interventions' (song, marches, vigils) but *also* through the kinds of actions that seem to present us with rather straightforward examples of deliberative argument (such as in Martin Luther King's speeches, letters and sermons, which are characterized by a highly imaginative and moving incorporation of Biblical themes of prophetic justice as well as the founding principles of the United States).[508]

This emphasizes the point, made by Derrida and Butler, and to which I have referenced previously,[509] that it is a structural feature of *all* expressive actions, deliberative argument *as well as* sociocultural interventions, that they simultaneously involve the repetition as well as the transformation of whatever antecedent meanings they make reference to. So while I have presented my account of politics as performative augmentation as particularly suited for the interpretation for sociocultural interventions (as both Arendt's account of action on the basis of which it is constructed and sociocultural interventions are characterized by their aesthetic, performative, and phenomenological character), those instances of

507 For this turn of phrase I am indebted to Zanetta, "The *Itako* of Tōhoku," 32.
508 Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy*.
509 In chapter 3 as well as earlier in this chapter.

political expression that we might classify as 'deliberative argument' represent examples of performative augmentation as well. Deliberative argument, no less than sociocultural interventions, involves a creative elaboration of antecedent material, the significance of which is performatively affected by the very act of referencing it.

For instance, consider the similarities between Martin Luther King's written and verbal invocations of the Biblical idea of a 'promised land' and of the principles articulated in the American Declaration of Independence on the one hand, and the idea, visually referenced in Shepard Fairey's *We the People - are greater than fear* poster, that the United States was founded as a haven of religious freedom, which Fairey reinscribed with the image of an Hijab-wearing American Muslim woman in order to repudiate islamophobia. Both, to my mind, exemplify acts of augmentation that performatively seek to alter our largely implicit grasp on social space by drawing upon authoritative elements of the social imaginary, soliciting an agreement that is located not merely on the cognitive, but also on an experiential/aesthetic level, and the effectiveness of which lies in the extent to which they bring about a change in the way that the audience *perceives* and *feels* about the issues under consideration. Both acts of augmentation are salient examples of how social constellations can be transformed by acts of communication that disclose new and potentially framework-transforming perspectives upon antecedent authoritative material; as such, they exemplify the 'revelatory character' without which, as Arendt writes, 'action and speech would lose all human relevance.'[510]

Thus, several of the main advantages of applying the lens of performative augmentation to sociocultural interventions that I previously identified also seem to apply to instances of deliberative argument that draw on authoritative cultural elements associated with a collective past. Once again, this does not mean that sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument are not analytically distinct – but it does suggest that both are usefully understood as performative augmentation, and that the cognitivist lens that sees religion and politics almost exclusively as a matter of debates and creeds, that sees 'translation' of stated positions as the central aim of co-operation across religious and ideological boundaries, and that understands 'accessibility' as the main criterion by which contributions to public life are to be evaluated is problematically reductive.

Another advantage of connecting the idea of inventive tradition to that of performative augmentation is that it helps us to understand that this phenomenon, far from exclusive to those political actors, actions and movements that consciously place themselves into

510 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 182.

the kind of tradition of existential meaning-making that we conventionally describe as a 'religion' may in fact be viewed as a feature of political actors, actions and movements more generally. Notably, the findings of my account of augmentation, as developed above, can also be applied to Rawls' and Habermas' contributions to the debate on the role of religion in the public sphere. As I will argue in the following subsections, seeing the work of these thinkers as instances of performative augmentation helps to identify interesting lines of comparison between their philosophical projects on the one hand and the political activities of religious citizens that these projects seek to accommodate on the other.

4.2.3. Augmenting narratives: the inventive tradition of Rawls and Habermas

For all their differences, Rawls and Habermas both participate in the same broad and dominant tradition within political philosophy – a tradition that consciously elaborates the legacy of Kant and that is characterized by a prioritization of a relatively universalist and cognitivist mode of public reason over other types of discourse, in no small part because it credits public reason, thus conceived, with an extraordinary emancipatory and democratizing potential. Like the religious traditions discussed in the previous subsection, this philosophical tradition encompasses a *historical narrative* regarding its own origins that, to participants in the tradition, is authoritative in the sense that it has lasting normative consequences (even if both the narrative itself and its consequences are subject to revisions over time). William Connolly, in the course of his 'non-theistic' critique of 'liberal secularism,' offers a brief retelling of this traditional narrative as well as its lasting normative consequences that has the double merit of being clear and succinct:

> Once the universal Catholic Church was challenged and dispersed by various Protestant sects a unified public authority grounded in a common faith was drawn into a series of sectarian conflicts and wars. Because the sovereign's support of the right way to eternal life was said to hang in the balance, these conflicts were often horribly destructive and intractable. The best hope for a peaceful and just world under these new circumstances was institution of a public life in which the final meaning of life, the proper route to life after death, and the divine source of morality were pulled out of the public realm and deposited into private life. The secularization of public life is thus crucial to private freedom, pluralistic democracy, individual rights, public reason, and the primacy of the state. The key to its success is the separation of church and state and general acceptance of a conception of public reason (or some surrogate) through which to reach public agreement on nonreligious issues.[511]

511 Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 20.

Versions of this 'dominant story of secularization,' as Connolly terms it,[512] surface in both Rawls' and Habermas' late writings on religion in the public sphere. Rawls supports his case for political liberalism with a historical account that highlights how, in the 16th century, Catholics and Protestants considered it the duty of the ruler to defend the one true religion against the spread of heresies,[513] how the resulting religious wars eventually gave way to an initially reluctant acceptance of religious toleration,[514] and how this acceptance then enabled the emergence of the fact of 'reasonable pluralism' in contemporary democracies, which now both enables and requires citizens to abide by his proposed 'duty of civility.'[515] The case is similar for the later Habermas,[516] who places his own as well as Rawls' work very explicitly in the context of this history:

> The self-understanding of the constitutional state has developed within the framework of a contractualist tradition that relies on 'natural' reason, in other words solely on public arguments to which supposedly all persons have equal access. The assumption of a common human reason forms the basis of justification for a secular state that no longer depends on religious legitimation. And this in turn makes the separation of state and church possible at the institutional level in the first place. The historical backdrop against which the liberal conception emerged were the religious wars and confessional disputes in early Modern times. The constitutional state responded first by the secularization and then by the democratization of political power. This genealogy also forms the background to John Rawls's *Political Liberalism*.[517]

512 Ibid., 22.

513 Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 796n75.

514 John Rawls, "Introduction: Remarks on Political Philosophy" in John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 11.

515 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxiv-xxxii.

516 Habermas' early account of the development of public reason in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* did not place quite as great an emphasis on the role of the Wars of Religion as such, focusing instead more on the socio-cultural circumstances of the bourgeoisie in Early Modern Europe (as reflected in the book's subtitle). Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry in a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989). Seventeenth-century religious conflict does play a significant role in his later contributions to the debate on the public sphere, as I will discuss below. This difference in emphasis notwithstanding, the prioritization of a universally accessible form of public reason - conceived in a cognitivist manner - remains a characteristic of his work throughout his long career.

517 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 2.

To be sure, Habermas' advocated move from a 'narrowly secularist' to a '*post*-secularist' self-understanding involves several accommodations in how precisely this story is told. The first of these involves the beginning: there is now an increased emphasis on the religious origins of the secular and liberal normative ideals associated with the Enlightenment. Second, the outcome is also envisioned differently: rather than presuming an eventual, complete dissolution of the content of religious traditions into universally accessible propositional terms, Habermas affirms that in religious traditions, there remains an 'opaque core' that is unintelligible and non-universal yet supremely valuable to all – hence the importance of the collaborative task of 'translation.'[518] Notably, however, as the term of 'translation' also indicates, the insistence on the priority of a universal, highly cognitivist mode of public reason in the name of its democratizing and emancipatory potential remains firmly in place, and Habermas continues to support it with direct appeal to the historical narrative regarding religious conflict in Early Modernity.[519] In this important sense, Habermas' work on 'post-secularism' clearly represents an innovative contribution to, rather than a break with, the tradition within political philosophy that I described above.

It is worth noting, as Connolly also notes, that this is not the only historical narrative that could be told about the Early Modern roots of public reason.[520] For instance, consider the narratives put forward by those feminist critics of Habermas' early work who argued that, at least since the Early Modern Age, political ideals of 'universal reason,' 'truth' and 'objectivity' were construed in deliberate opposition to cultural notions of domesticity, particularity and privateness which themselves were increasingly associated

518 Ibid.; for a helpful discussion of Habermas' adaptations to the historical narrative or genealogy underlying secular and post-secular reason, see Amy Allen, "Having One's Cake and Eating It Too: Habermas' Genealogy of Postsecular Reason' in: Calhoun, Mendietta and VanAntwerpen, *Habermas and Religion*, as well as Habermas' response: Habermas, "Reply to My Critics."

519 For instance, in 2013: 'Let us recall the point of departure. Historically speaking, the upheavals caused by the clashes between militant "powers of belief" necessitated the secularization of political authority. Until then, the conflicting parties had not been able to find a shared basis within their political community for resolving the pressing problems in ways convincing to all. It was only with the translation of the universalistic core of each religious community's fundamental convictions into the principles of human rights and democracy that they discovered a shared language bridging irreconcilable religious differences. It was only under the assumption of a "natural" human reason shared by all that the parties to the dispute were able to adopt a shared standpoint in political controversies beyond the social boundaries of their respective religious communities. This *transgression of limits* marked a shift in perspective that later generations – ourselves included – can no longer ignore.' (Habermas, "Reply to My Critics," 652-653).

520 Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 20.

with femininity;[521] or consider post-colonial critiques that similarly aim to identify exclusionary dimensions of how 'rationality' has been conceived in the West since Early Modern times.[522] So Rawls' and Habermas' substantially shared account of the historical origins of liberal-secular public reason exists in competition with other historical narratives that likewise circulate among scholars as well as among a more general public, and that have normative implications of their own.

It is in the context of their support and defense of the prioritization of a particular form of public political discourse over others that Rawls' and Habermas' select this particular historical narrative or 'genealogy.'[523] As they incorporate it in their theories, they performatively re-affirm its authority for their reader while at the same time innovatively rearticulating and elaborating its normative implications for contemporary circumstances. In the case of Rawls, such innovative elaboration is manifested through the incorporations of his 'duty of civility' and his 'proviso;' in the case of Habermas, it is manifested through the distinction between the 'formal' and the 'informal' public sphere, through the 'modified proviso,' and through the proposed collaborative task of 'translation.'

Now, from this vantage point, to compare these aspects of Rawls' and Habermas' work with the participants in the various religious 'inventive traditions' studied by the scholars I discussed in the previous subsection is to render the following features of their projects salient. First, their work participates in a tradition that encompasses a shared narrative regarding its own historical origins. Second, this narrative is, at least

521 Examples include: Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); Linda Martín Alcoff, "Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?" *Philosophical Topics* 23, No. 2 (Fall 1995). For a brief discussion of feminist critics who argue that Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* "uncritically accepts the model of the Western public sphere and its male political subjectivity" (184), see Amy M. Baehr, "Feminism," in *The Habermas Handbook,* ed. Hauke Brunkhorst, Regina Kreide and Cristina Lafont, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 183-187. Note that the normative consequence of these narratives is not necessarily the outright dismissal of contemporary invocations of these ideals in the public sphere, but rather, that where we see these ideals publicly invoked, we should critically examine their exclusionary as well as their democratizing potential.

522 See Allen, "Having One's Cake and Eating It Too" for a concise discussion of Habermas' response to postcolonial as well as other critiques of his genealogy of public reason.

523 As Jan-Werner Müller puts it, the genealogy offered by Rawls (and, I would add, endorsed by Habermas) is "a highly stylized history which picks and chooses the 'facts' according to a present day normative argument." Jan-Werner Müller, "Rawls, Historian: Remarks on Political Liberalism's 'Historicism,'" *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 60, No. 237 (3) (2006), 31.

to those who participate in the tradition, *authoritative*; it illuminates the situation of its contemporary participants in a manner that sanctions some courses of action while declaring others illicit. Third, this narrative is not the only one that is culturally available, but exists in competition with other origin stories about its subject matter that would have alternative normative consequences. Fourth, by means of their contributions, the contemporary participants performatively affirm the lasting authority of their favoured narratives and traditions at the same time as, fifth, they innovatively re-elaborate it. In light of all this, we may say that, through their respective contributions to the debate on religion in the public sphere, Rawls and Habermas, much like the religious participants in the inventive traditions described by Palmisano, Pannofino *et al*, are engaged in a practice of *performative augmentation*.

Approaching these philosophical valorizations of a highly cognitivist conception of public reason as instances of the performative augmentation of a tradition, one which now has a history of several centuries,[524] has several advantages. The first is that doing so can help us to bring into view in what sense Habermas' astute observation about religious traditions – namely, that they are not merely believed doctrine, but function as performatively tapped 'sources of energy' that sustain the lives of those who participate in these traditions[525] – may also be applied to political actors who are existentially invested in the traditional Enlightenment narrative that centers secular commitments to justice, reason and democracy.[526] As I have argued, political action, whatever its direct objectives might be, additionally has the capacity to provide political actors with opportunities to engage in collaborative efforts of existential meaning-construction and thus to experience a sense of agency and belonging, and that as a result, the concepts, symbols, practices and narratives that are involved in these efforts tend to evoke strong associations and evaluations in terms of identification, authority and respect.[527] Now consider how this might apply to political actors who are existentially invested in Enlightenment narratives that valorize secular and cognitivist conceptions of public life. Not unlike the participants

524 As discussed, the philosophers in this tradition tend to name the Wars of Religion in the seventeenth century as well as the writings of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers (notably Kant) as starting points.

525 Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" [2006], 8.

526 As a reminder, I am using the phrase 'existentially invested' here to denote that these commitments provide a sense of orientation and a sense of meaning to the lives of those who are invested in them. This usage, as explained in the second and third chapters, builds on Charles Taylor's concept of 'evaluative frameworks' as well as on Arendt's reflections on culture, authority and augmentation.

527 See chapters 2 and 3.

in religiously motivated social movements, they can experience themselves through their efforts as active and creative participants in a transhistorical narrative that has important, ongoing, normative implications. Secular commitments, like religious commitments, then, are not merely a matter of consciously held belief, but also potential sources of meaning and self-understandings which can be performatively sustained through the engagement in a variety of cultural practices, including but not limited to the engagement in rational debate. This may lead us to appreciate how political actors can relate to these foundations, not *exclusively* in terms of conscious cognitive assent, but *also* in terms of affective investment.[528] By focusing on the narrative self-understandings that provide orientation and meaning to citizens, we can bring into clearer focus the affective dimensions of ostensibly cognitivist endeavours, thus potentially disclosing avenues for understanding and co-operation across religious and philosophical dividing lines.

This approach also sheds a different light on the performative dimensions of deliberative argument. As we have seen, deliberative argument shares the internal as well as the external effects of sociocultural interventions: if I provide you with a rational argument in favour of some political position or other, this involves not only the transmission of communication-antecedent information; the interaction may also be seen to constitute a performative intervention in the sociopolitical relation that exists between the two of us, in the way that I perceive myself, and/or in the way we both perceive the authoritative cultural elements that are referenced by my argument. Now, if we apply this to the tradition and narrative discussed in this subsection, we can also see that with my rational argument, I may performatively establish myself in my own eyes as well as in yours as a participant in a culturally authoritative (because associated with reason, democracy and justice) practice of reasoned debate, align myself with a widely shared and authoritative transhistorical narrative regarding reason, Enlightenment and emancipation, and performatively emphasize the authority of this particular cultural practice in which we both participate. To engage in deliberative argument, no less than engaging in other public political practices, such as rallies, sit-ins, vigils, fasts, pilgrimages and public prayer, is not performatively neutral. This is especially important to recognize once we remember, as argued in the first chapter, that the vast diversity in religious, philosophical and political views that exist among citizens of contemporary democratic

528 Such an affective investment can be especially powerful when someone comes to understand their own life experiences of struggling with religious constraints, indoctrination and trauma through the lens of a transhistorical narrative about secularization, rationality and emancipation – as William Connolly retrospectively describes was the case for him in an earlier phase of his life: Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, 1-3.

societies is causally connected to the reality that, the powerful ideal of equality in the public sphere notwithstanding, we do not all occupy the same socioeconomic position, that complex formal and informal power differentials continue to exist, and that one's social position is a significant factor in what public, political practices they will be exposed to and be able to develop skills for.

4.2.4. Beyond 'translation:' augmentation as a corrective lens

All of the above serves to remind us, once again, that constative and performative aspects of expression, and 'pure argument' and 'rhetoric,' can be difficult or even impossible to distinguish in practice. This has historically not been adequately appreciated by political theorists who engaged in the traditional prioritization of relatively ahistorical and universal modes of public reason over political practices of expression that rely more heavily on the 'visceral register' (Connolly), on more situated knowledge, and on communicative acts that cannot as readily be described as 'deliberative argument.'

Importantly, to recognize this point does not imply a rejection of the emancipatory and democratizing potential of those forms of discourse that aspire to high standards of logical consistency and universal accessibility. The emancipatory potential of such forms of speech is easily illustrated through the long history of scholars, political thinkers and actors involved in social movements who did phrase claims to justice and equality in these registers. Given the undeniable authority of the register of 'reasoned debate' in the political culture of contemporary democracies, it seems doubtful that efforts to prioritize the role of 'pure argument' in the public sphere will cease to play an important role in the foreseeable future; but simultaneously, it seems doubtful that they will become uncontroversial.

In political practice, the long history of successive emancipatory social movements suggests that more localized knowledge and sociocultural interventions play a seemingly intractable role in the advancement of public discourse on issues of justice. This history also illuminates that deliberative argument and sociocultural interventions may well proceed in tandem, as evidenced by Martin Luther King's famous 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail,' which he wrote after being arrested for his participation in a demonstration (a type of sociocultural intervention) and in which he defends his actions by means of deliberative argument, making references to what Rawls would call 'public culture' (writings and speeches of Abraham Lincoln as well as Thomas Jefferson) as well as religious narratives and epistles (the 'prophetic' tradition, Jesus, Paul, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther and later

theological writings).[529] My point here is not merely that King in his sermons, speeches and letters referenced comprehensive reasons, as Rawls noted.[530] The point is that, no matter how logically convincing the arguments in the 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail,' without the circumstances that are reflected in that letter's title as well as in its content, it is hard to imagine that it would have had the same impact; put differently, the *performative force* of King's efforts against segregation cannot be divorced from the sociocultural interventions in which King also took part, the injustices that these sociocultural interventions made manifest, and his acute understanding of the responses that these interventions would draw from various groups within the American public.[531]

In light of the above, what is needed is not so much a resolution to the question whether a universal, purely deliberative register is possible or needed; instead, it seems most productive to take a view of sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument as two not strictly distinct categories of performative augmentation, in the sense that they represent culturally powerful practices by which authoritative cultural elements are performatively invoked and altered by political actors who collaboratively seek to bring about political change. The 'performative augmentation' perspective that I have proposed has several important advantages over the 'translation'-focused approach that is dominant in political philosophical discussions of the role of religion in the public sphere.

First, it incorporates a theoretical vocabulary that facilitates explicit reflection on and discussion of non-cognitive aspects of political action, thus importantly expanding our view of how political actors draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making to contribute towards democratic equality. It acknowledges that historically, the efforts of political actors whose status as equal citizens and legitimate contributors to public debate was not widely acknowledged have frequently sought to overcome this obstacle through sociocultural interventions drawing upon religious or spiritual registers. Insofar as the engagement in sociocultural interventions promises to modify elements of the social imaginary, it represents one important avenue for citizens to influence the

529 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From a Birmingham Jail (1963)," in Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: HarperOne, 1991).

530 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 250-251.

531 For an account that focuses on the many layers of the performative dimensions of King's activism, see Jonathan Riedler, *The Word of the Lord Is Upon Me: The Righteous Performance of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). One of the points made by Riedler is that the "Letter from Birmingham Jail," while famously addressed to King's "Fellow Clergymen," was composed with the goal of publication as an open letter in mind (257).

political structure in which they live, and consequently, it enables citizens to exercise their political agency, which is a central dimension of their citizenship. Because these interventions represent an important way in which individuals can exercise political agency and hence actualize their citizenship, political philosophers need to take explicit account of them in their accounts of public, political action. The theoretical vocabulary that supports the account of politics as performative augmentation makes explicit distinctions between 'internal' and 'external' effects of sociocultural interventions. Moreover, it acknowledges that deliberative argument is one (very important) category of political practices amongst other ones, and that none of these practices can be assumed to be equally accessible to all citizens regardless of social position.[532] Due to these characteristics, the performative augmentation perspective is intentionally designed to facilitate explicit reflection on and discussion of power differentials among the political actors in ways that the 'translation' perspective, with its presumption of equal partners who merely need to agree to the same set of propositional truth claims in order for justice to be achieved, is not.

Moreover, the augmentation perspective incorporates Arendt's important insights in the phenomenology of political action through highlighting the process by which inherited, authoritative cultural elements on the one hand inspire and structure contemporary political action, while these actions in turn renew and reshape the elements that inspired them. This brings into focus that the relation between political actors and the cultural elements by which they orient themselves in life has important, affective dimensions that more cognitivist accounts tend to ignore. People tend to care about those ideas, stories, concepts and images, especially those from which they derive a sense of personal or collective identity and of ultimate purpose in life; the cultural elements that we regard as most authoritative tend to be the ones in which we are emotionally invested. Viewing the citizens' engagement in politics as the augmentation of authoritative cultural elements is to understand that political actors are bound back to and emotionally invested in cultural elements that precede, inspire, guide and motivate their political actions, and that these cultural elements consequently have a motivating power that can be a useful empowering resource that makes political participation possible.

532 Consider Iris Marion Young's argument, discussed in the first chapter, on how the cultural norms and largely implicit expectations that are associated with what we might broadly refer to as 'civilized, rational debate' reflect the habitus of white, middle class, male academics. The concept of sociocultural interventions invites explicit consideration of alternative forms of political communication, such as round-dances, street art and rap, thus enabling a more expansive view of active citizenship.

Notably, this process is not limited to political actors who explicitly draw inspiration from religious traditions, or who engage in sociocultural interventions. It can also be observed in the endeavours of 'secular' political actors, and in the contributions of political actors who engage in deliberative argument; for instance, in so far as Rawls and Habermas participate in a Kantian tradition of validating the emancipatory possibilities of public reason, they too are engaged in an 'inventive tradition' that evolves as they innovatively contribute to it.

The affective dimension of performative augmentation is particularly important when the tradition that is drawn upon represents a source of motivation that is specifically available to otherwise politically marginalized minorities. By taking the affective dimensions and motivational power of cultural elements seriously as motivating factors in their own right, we can better grasp what motivates political actors to engage in political action in the face of considerable obstacles; they regard their commitments to particular cultural symbols, narratives or values as key components of their identity and their purpose in life, which is to say that they perceive these cultural elements as authoritative. Consequently, understanding the perceived authority of cultural elements as a motivational factor for actors to participate in democratic politics is useful for understanding the conditions of political inclusion.

In pluralistic societies that are characterized by persisting issues of inequality, a plurality of such empowering resources is available without any of them being necessarily equally accessible to all members; whether or not a given individual has access to a given potentially empowering principle or tradition depends upon their social position. In other words, members of a particular religious or ethnocultural community can be motivated and equipped by their particular tradition to engage in political advocacy, even if other, possibly more socially prestigious traditions, such as the one that Rawls refers to when speaking of 'public culture,' remain relatively inaccessible to them, for instance due to a history of political marginalization. To insist upon the usage of a unifying, universally accepted register like 'public culture,' then, may not in all situations be the most inclusive move.

Finally, a view of political action (be it a form of sociocultural intervention or of deliberative argument) as performative augmentation of authoritative cultural elements can disclose fruitful avenues of political collaboration between political actors across religious or philosophical divisions that may otherwise remain obfuscated. For instance, political actors who adhere to a variety of worldviews can collaboratively join collective practices in support of a political cause, such as a silent vigil or a pilgrimage, and engage in collaborative efforts of meaning-making that do not necessarily take the shape of the 'translation' of religious or philosophical doctrine.

4.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the wider implications of my overall project – the development of a theoretical vocabulary for the interpretation and discussion of expressions of political actors' core existential commitments in the public sphere. My consideration of the questions of how sociocultural interventions and deliberative argument can be thought together, what this implies for our picture of the public sphere in general, and how this impacts our picture of political interactions between political actors across religious or philosophical divisions in particular, has yielded the following results.

I have demonstrated that both Rawls and Habermas recognize the kinds of external and internal effects that I associated with sociocultural interventions as helpful from the vantage point of a commitment to democratic equality. Moreover, both authors identify a range of social settings and situations where such shifts in political perception can take place. While these findings point to the possibility of envisioning deliberative argument and sociocultural interventions as two strictly separate classes of political communication, each with its own set of criteria, expectations and social settings, I found that such accommodations depend on spatial and situational thresholds that are hard to justify in absence of a consensus on whether or not the requisite conditions for deliberative argument are already in place; moreover, these thresholds are also hard to justify in light of a long line of philosophical arguments against the possibility of a neat and stable separation between rhetoric and rational argument or between performative and constative speech acts.

Efforts to accommodate sociocultural interventions by merely adding more spaces and moments onto inherited, strongly deliberation-focused conceptions of the public sphere also do not address the reductively cognitivist views of deliberative argument upon which these conceptions themselves are founded. Instead, it is much more productive to consider how the internal and external effects that I described in previous chapters as aspects of sociocultural interventions that are closely related to issues of ongoing democratic inequalities can also be located in deliberative argument.

This is especially helpful when we return to the post-secular debates on the place of religion in the public sphere that were the starting point of this dissertation. In view of how the dual orientation towards authoritative cultural elements that on my account is a defining feature of political action (conceived as performative augmentation) neatly maps onto the idea of 'inventive traditions' that religious scholars have developed to describe religion, I concluded that *both* religious practice *and* political action are fruitfully interpreted as endeavours of augmentation by which authoritative principles that have

become manifest in historical deeds and events are performatively preserved and carried forward in ever novel ways. Doing so has the distinct advantage that it enables us to highlight performative, aesthetic and existential dimensions of political as well as religious life which more cognitivist lenses are likely to obfuscate.

Moreover, through an extension of this perspective to the liberal and secularist theories of the public sphere that were proposed by Rawls and Habermas, I identified interesting lines of comparison between their philosophical projects on the one hand and religions, understood as 'inventive traditions,' on the other. I argued that these authors, not unlike the adherents of religious traditions whom they seek to accommodate, participate in a tradition that encompasses a historical auto-narrative that is authoritative to the tradition's participants – that is to say, the narrative determines what actions are intelligible and legitimate for them while these actions simultaneously innovatively re-inscribe the narrative's contents and normative implications with new meaning, thus altering how the narrative is understood going forward. Viewed as participation in a historic tradition with roots in the historical Enlightenment, the traditional valorization of public reason is not just a matter of doctrine, but also a potential, performatively tapped source of meaning that sustains the tradition's participants. This perspective brings into view that the engagement in deliberative argument can entail similar aesthetic, performative and existential experiences as participation in religiously motivated political action.

The view that deliberative argument that aspires to high standards of logical consistency and universal accessibility has a great democratizing and emancipatory potential is among the most prominent legacies of the historical Enlightenment tradition, and there now is a long history of scholars and political actors involved in social movements whose reasoned efforts to bring about more justice and democracy can attest to this potential. My emphasis in this chapter on the point that the engagement in deliberative argument, like sociocultural interventions, has aesthetic, performative and existential dimensions of its own is not a dismissal of this legacy, but rather, a step towards understanding its ongoing authority in contemporary political life more fully, and with more explicit attention to the ways in which ongoing inequalities between political actors affect what political activities, types of discourse and cultural resources are available to whom. It also serves to establish connections between the activities and experiences of secular and religious political actors, thus disclosing potential avenues of fruitful co-operation for which the metaphor of 'translation' is overly reductive.

5

Conclusion

At the outset of this dissertation, I wrote that it was my aim to contribute towards the development of an interpretive model to approach political actors' public expressions of their core existential commitments within the political sphere that does not take a reductive view of these commitments as discursively rendered creeds and of politics as a rational exchange of stated opinions. It is now time to take stock. In this conclusion, I will list the concepts that constitute the model that I have since developed as well as their definitions. In each case, I will also lay out what features of these expressions they alert us to. Doing so will clarify why this model is a useful additional perspective to the accounts that mine seeks to supplement.

As I demonstrated in the first chapter, such a model is useful because, a range of accommodations in recent decades not withstanding, the most prominent political philosophical accounts of the public sphere continue to exhibit a strong focus on deliberative argument, understood as the reasoned exchange of propositional truth claims, thus neglecting a host of other activities and phenomena that make up the political life of contemporary democracies. This is particularly evident in philosophical debates on 'post-secularism,' which concern the role of religious traditions in the public political sphere, and in which the public manifestation of religion is almost exclusively understood as a repertoire of discursively rendered creeds that can be 'translated' into more universally accessible propositions. As we have seen, this 'cognitivist' approach is not only reductive in its approach to both political and religious life; it is also problematic from the standpoint of a commitment to ideals of democratic equality. This is the case because the power differences that continue to exist among the citizens of contemporary democracies are challenged publicly not only by means of deliberative argument, but also through a host of other activities, many of which draw upon religious or spiritual resources in ways that cannot be easily approached in terms of 'translation.'

My alternative account, like the accounts it seeks to supplement, has its normative bedrock in the concept of democratic citizenship. I have argued that while there are many aspects to this concept, one of its defining elements is political agency: a democratic citizen is someone who has real opportunities to participate in the bringing about of political outcomes that affect the conditions under which they live. It has been my argument that in contemporary democracies, forms of political action other than deliberative argument present crucial opportunities for citizens to exercise political agency in practice and avail themselves of the requisite resources to continue doing so – especially in those all too common social conditions where culturally entrenched, widely shared preconceptions regarding authority and respectability make justification by means of rational argument unlikely or impossible to occur on an equitable footing.

In such circumstances, theories of the public sphere ought to facilitate reflection, not solely on the deliberative justification of law and the rational accessibility of claims regarding truth and justice, but *also* on the ways by which political actors shape and engage with the social imaginary: the largely implicit grasp of social space upon which political activities rely and that has an important role in co-determining the conditions under which citizens live. Note that, in light of these definitions of political agency and the social imaginary, the capacity to effect shifts in the social imaginary through one's acts is by definition part of what constitutes political agency. Put differently, for an account of political agency, and thus of democratic citizenship, to be accurate, it needs to provide us with the conceptual equipment that is required to name and discuss these acts and their effects. But while concepts such as democratic citizenship, political agency and the social imaginary are familiar within political philosophy, such acts are undertheorized.

As my response to this lack, I proposed the central concept of sociocultural interventions: acts of public, political expression other than deliberative argument, such as rallies, public fasts, street art and vigils, that performatively alter elements of the social imaginary that structure political life. The social imaginary encompasses much more than theory and argument alone, as our implicit grasp of social space is expressed in and upheld by a host of cultural elements such as images, narratives, practices, etc. In this light, it is to be expected that acts that affect our grasp of social reality take a multitude of forms beyond theoretical argument, such as visual arts, storytelling, rallies, vigils, etc., rather than deliberative argument. The first benefit of the model I am proposing, then, is that it provides us with the conceptual equipment that facilitates identifying and reflecting

upon sociocultural interventions and their effects, thus enabling a fuller grasp of what political agency and democratic citizenship entail.

The social imaginary enables people to navigate the social interactions that they engage in, including their political interactions in the public sphere: it encompasses their expectations of one another, their understanding of the social roles that they occupy, and their sense of who they are in relation to one another. Because of this importance to questions of orientation, expectations and identity, it is to be expected that those images, narratives, practices etc. that carry our core understandings of who we are and what kind of existence seems worthy of respect or meaningful, in other words, those cultural elements that are directly tied to our existential commitments, play an outsized role in sociocultural interventions. While the term 'existential commitment' closely corresponds to the more familiar term 'comprehensive doctrines,' it explicitly acknowledges that these commitments encompass much more than doctrine alone: prayer, song, dance, commemorative ceremonies, fasts and pilgrimage all present people with opportunities to connect to, draw upon, reinforce and innovatively elaborate on their sense of what is good and meaningful in life. The benefit of the inclusion of the concept of existential commitments is that it helps us to avoid the widespread but reductive political philosophical tendency to view religious or secular commitments as being exclusively or even primarily about intellectually believed propositions alone.

Sociocultural interventions frequently incorporate widely familiar images, narratives and practices that evoke strong associations and evaluations in terms of identification, belonging and esteem. I have defined such cultural elements as markers of authority, using the term 'authority' to refer to their capacity to elicit a wished-for response in a given public, given that public's particular, largely implicit grasp on reality. Given their close connection to identification, belonging and esteem, it is not surprising that many of these cultural elements are drawn from historical traditions of existential meaning-making. My account is aimed at directing our focus to these elements of the political actors' expressions of their existential commitments, rather than focusing exclusively on the issue of 'rational access' or 'translatability.'

Doing this is particularly important in face of the unfortunate fact that in contemporary democracies, not all citizens are in practice regarded with the same kind of esteem; democratic societies have included and continue to include groups of people who are less likely to be seen as capable, trustworthy or respectable by their fellow citizens than others (for instance, due to sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.). Authority, in the aforementioned

sense, is thus not only a quality of cultural elements, such as particular flags, symbols or songs, but also of recognizable groups within the public sphere. I have used the term 'speaker authority' to reflect this. In order to understand the wide variety of practices by which various groups within society challenge establish or affirm established perceptions of authority, we need to take into account not only the logical consistency and accessibility of the arguments by which particular political positions are justified, but also the culturally entrenched images and narratives that inform the power dynamics that exist between those who meet in the public sphere, and on which political actors draw as they publicly express themselves to each other.

As I illustrated in the second chapter, using Fairey's poster, sociocultural interventions frequently employ markers of authority in creative ways to bring about changes of an audience's perceptions about who is and who is not in practice recognized as a competent, trustworthy and respectable equal member of a democratic society. These sociocultural interventions are noteworthy because of what I termed their 'external effects.' Another example, from the other direction, could be efforts to depict Muslims or other minorities as other, threatening or un-American. Sociocultural interventions, much like deliberative argument, can be employed to contribute towards greater political equality as well as to diminish it; what is important in either case is that the theoretical frameworks by which we make sense of such interactions provide us with the conceptual equipment to name and discuss these effects. The language of sociocultural interventions, markers of authority, speaker authority and external effects goes some way in providing us with that equipment.

I have used the term 'internal effects' to refer to public acts of communication that, rather than seeking to alter the views of those who think differently, aim to strengthen the resolve, sense of purpose and collective identity of those who already largely agree with the contributor's point of view – including the contributors themselves. To engage in political action requires skill, motivation, and courage, especially in cases of severe inequality and repression, where differences in power and in speaker authority between different groups are so stark that chances of convincing outsiders are low or absent and risks are high.

As historical examples of social interventions by movements like the Civil Rights Movement, César Chávez' Farmworkers Movement and Idle No More demonstrate, here too there is a crucial role for the political actors' existential commitments. Sociocultural interventions drawing upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making provided the participants in these movements with opportunities to connect with and reinforce collective identities, a sense of community, a sense of common purpose, and shared

understandings of the world. Recognizing that the engagement in collaborative meaning-making through sociocultural interventions drawing upon historical traditions of existential-meaning-making can be an inherently satisfying endeavour equips us to better understand what motivates people to engage in political action despite high risks of frustration, disappointment, and political repercussions.

The model that I propose thus has the additional benefit of shedding a new light on manifestations of the political actors' existential commitments in the public sphere, rendering salient a range of aspects that discussions that focus on discursively rendered doctrine and deliberative argument tend to obfuscate. I have argued that these aspects correspond to the qualities that Hannah Arendt ascribed to action: aesthetic, existential, and performative. The aesthetic aspect lies in the fact that sociocultural interventions transform social constellations by virtue of appearance, disclosing new perspectives by means beyond rational argument alone; the performative aspect lies in the fact that they performatively transform the social imaginary that structures the political dynamics of the situation in which they occur; and the existential aspect lies in the fact that they enable political actors to experience their own existence as meaningful. Sociocultural interventions, in these respects, exemplify action as theorized by Arendt.

The view of politics in this perspective is concerned, not primarily with change and justification of the law directly, but rather, with the social imaginary that underlies political relations, and the performatively brought about transformations in this imaginary that can make new legal change possible. My account thus provides us with a welcome complementary lens to deliberative and politically liberal theories that, insofar as they recognize such dynamics at all, treat them as epiphenomenal at best due to their primary preoccupation with the justification of law in the formal public sphere through the exchange of constative truth claims.

Based on this application of Arendt's theory to sociocultural interventions, I argued that sociocultural interventions are best thought as the performative augmentation of the social imaginary. The term 'augmentation' here reflects the insight that the existential commitments that become manifest in sociocultural interventions do not come out of thin air: political actors frequently draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making. Political actors stand in a dual relation to the perceived authority of the cultural elements that their sociocultural interventions draw upon: on the one hand, the authority of cultural elements is what inspires their contributions, while on the other, these contributions themselves forward novel interpretations of these same cultural elements.

This dual relation makes it possible for authoritative cultural elements to simultaneously provide a sense of transhistorical continuity as well as a sense of empowering agency to political actors.

The political actors' dual relation towards authoritative cultural elements that, according to the view I presented, are an inherent feature of political action, maps very neatly onto the model of 'inventive traditions' that scholars of religion have developed to describe religion. I concluded that *both* religious practice *and* political action are fruitfully interpreted as endeavours of augmentation by which authoritative principles that have become manifest in historical deeds and events are performatively preserved and carried forward in ever novel ways. Doing so has the distinct advantage that it enables us to highlight performative, aesthetic and existential dimensions of political as well as religious life which more cognitivist lenses are likely to obfuscate.

While these dimensions can be expected to be particularly evident in sociocultural interventions by social movements that quite explicitly draw upon historical traditions of existential meaning-making, they can also be located in political acts of communication that take a more deliberative form and that draw upon seemingly more universal registers. As argued in chapter 4, contributions by Rawls and Habermas can be viewed as the performative augmentation of a historical auto-narrative that is rooted in the historical Enlightenment. Understanding that liberal and secular valorizations of public reason can entail similar aesthetic, performative and existential experiences as political action that takes its inspiration from historical traditions of existential meaning-making enables us to extend the account of performative augmentation in such a manner that it does not only encompass sociocultural interventions, but deliberative argument as well.

In post-secular democracies that are marked by persisting forms of democratic inequality, we need to go well beyond viewing the public manifestations of religion or of other historical traditions of existential meaning-making as opportunities to engage in collaborative practices of translation, which at best aim at more propositional clarity; we also need deeper and more explicit reflection upon the aesthetic, performative and existential dimensions of political action, regardless of whether it takes the form of deliberative argument or of sociocultural interventions, and regardless of whether it is religious or secular in inspiration. This is what the model and the theoretical vocabulary proposed in this dissertation have sought to facilitate.

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Summary (in Dutch)

Politiek filosofen die van de 'publieke sfeer' spreken richten zich over het algemeen vooral op deliberatieve argumentatie: de uitwisseling van propositionele waarheids- en juistheidsclaims waarmee politieke actoren hun eigen politieke posities rechtvaardigen en anderen daarvan proberen te overtuigen. Gezien de ontegenzeggelijk grote rol van dergelijke debatten of discussies in het dagelijkse politieke leven is deze bijzondere aandacht zeer begrijpelijk, maar het politieke leven omvat ook tal van praktijken die zich níet eenvoudig als 'deliberatieve argumentatie' laten categoriseren, zoals demonstraties, sit-ins en politiek gemotiveerde kunst. Historische voorbeelden zoals de Amerikaanse Burgerrechtenbeweging laten zien dat dergelijke vormen van publieke actie een groot effect kunnen hebben op de relaties tussen politieke actoren en dat ze de uitkomsten van collectieve besluitvormingsprocessen ingrijpend kunnen beïnvloeden. Desondanks krijgen ze maar zelden de filosofische aandacht die ze verdienen, mede door de grote rol van discursieve modellen van de publieke sfeer binnen de politieke filosofie.

Om deze reden beoog ik in dit proefschrift bij te dragen aan de ontwikkeling van een theoretisch vocabulaire waarmee politieke filosofen dergelijke acties en hun impact beter kunnen benoemen, duiden en bespreken. Daarbij ben ik in het bijzonder geïnteresseerd in niet-deliberatieve politieke acties die inspiratie putten uit wereldbeschouwelijke tradities. De publieke sfeer moet mijns inziens namelijk niet uitsluitend worden gezien als een domein waar burgers elkaar met argumenten overtuigen, maar óók als een domein waar politieke actoren performatief voortbouwen op de historische tradities van existentiële zingeving waarmee ze zich oriënteren en waaraan ze betekenis voor hun eigen bestaan ontlenen – een activiteit die ik met 'performative augmentation' (Nederlands: 'performatieve augmentatie') aanduid. Het vocabulaire dat ik in dit proefschrift ontwikkel moet ons meer inzicht verschaffen in de interacties tussen de existentiële funderingen waaraan politieke actoren zich committeren en de politieke handelingen die zij ondernemen. Deze interacties spelen mijns inziens een belangrijke rol in vraagstukken rond democratische gelijkheid en inclusie.

Ik begin in het eerste hoofdstuk met een reconstructie van het onder politiek filosofen welbekende 'post-seculiere' debat over de rol van religie in de publieke sfeer, waarin John Rawls en Jürgen Habermas beiden een sleutelrol speelden. Daarbij is het niet zozeer mijn doel om de theorieën van Rawls en Habermas over de rol van religieuze argumenten in politieke deliberatie verder te ontwikkelen, maar om het nut van het door mij bepleite theoretische vocabulaire te onderbouwen. Rawls' en Habermas' buitengewoon invloedrijke theorieën van de publieke sfeer, die in de context van dit debat hun meest geraffineerde vorm bereikten, staan aan de basis van veel hedendaagse politieke theorie. Daarmee vormen ze natuurlijke contrastpunten om de meerwaarde van mijn aanvullende zienswijze aan te geven. Daarnaast dienen de verschillende bezwaren die critici tegen deze theorieën hebben ingebracht als nuttige indicatoren van wat er verder nodig is om de existentiële commitments van politieke actoren in de publieke sfeer beter te begrijpen.

In *Political Liberalism* aanvaardt Rawls het als een structureel kenmerk van liberaal-democratische samenlevingen dat er onder de burgers een grote verscheidenheid aan onderling onverenigbare opvattingen over het 'goede' en over de zin van het menselijk leven bestaat. Hij duidt deze opvattingen aan met de term 'comprehensive doctrines' ('omvattende doctrines'). Rawls betoogt dat democratische samenlevingen in het licht van deze verscheidenheid alleen rechtvaardig en stabiel kunnen zijn als burgers bereid en in staat zijn om bij de publieke rechtvaardiging van de door hen voorgestane politieke maatregelen af te zien van verwijzingen naar de omvattende doctrines die ze persoonlijk onderschrijven. In plaats daarvan dienen ze hun standpunten in het openbaar te ondersteunen met verwijzing naar de algemeen toegankelijke ideeën en principes die volgens hem impliciet aanwezig zijn in de publieke cultuur van constitutionele, democratische samenlevingen. In zijn latere essay 'The idea of public reason revisited' stelt hij deze visie bij door te stellen dat omvattende doctrines wel degelijk in openbare politieke discussies kunnen worden ingebracht, maar uitsluitend op de voorwaarde dat daar ter zijner tijd óók redenen bij worden aangevoerd die enkel en alleen naar de publieke cultuur verwijzen.

Een van de meest voorkomende bezwaren tegen dit voorstel van Rawls is het zogenaamde integriteitsbezwaar, dat luidt dat de bovengenoemde vereisten zich niet laten verenigen met verplichtingen die veel religieuze burgers als bepalend voor hun eigen identiteit ervaren. Ik ga met name in op Paul Weithmans versie van dit bezwaar omdat hij een in mijn ogen belangrijk verband legt tussen de verscheidenheid van standpunten die hedendaagse democratische samenlevingen kenmerkt en de aanwezigheid van voortbestaande machtsverschillen tussen de verschillend gepositioneerde burgers van deze samenlevingen.

Weithman beargumenteert op basis van sociologisch onderzoek dat religieuze tradities en organisaties voor politiek gemarginaliseerde sociale groepen van bijzonder belang zijn om hun politieke doelen te verwezenlijken en om de voor de verwerkelijking van effectief burgerschap vereiste vaardigheden, disposities en middelen te verwerven. Onder dergelijke omstandigheden is het te verwachten dat deze burgers tot andere zienswijzen op en benaderingen van burgerschap komen dan burgers die niet tot zulke gemarginaliseerde groepen behoren. Volgens Weithman lopen pogingen om dergelijke zienswijzen en benaderingen aan banden te leggen het risico bestaande vormen van politieke vervreemding en uitsluiting te verergeren, een uitkomst die haaks staat op de liberale en democratische idealen van vrijheid en gelijkheid.

Voor Jürgen Habermas is het integriteitsbezwaar overtuigend. Hij betoogt dan ook dat de verplichting om uitsluitend universeel toegankelijke taal te gebruiken alleen binnen de muren van parlementen, rechtbanken, ministeries, etcetera moet gelden; in de 'informele publieke sfeer' daarentegen meent hij dat religieuze burgers hun wereldbeschouwelijke overtuigingen vrij van dergelijke beperkingen moeten kunnen inbrengen. Vervolgens kunnen ze dan, in samenwerking met hun seculiere medeburgers, tot algemeen toegankelijke vertalingen komen die wèl in de formele publieke sfeer toelaatbaar zijn.

Habermas blijft echter evenals Rawls uitgaan van een zeer cognitivistisch begrip van zowel existentiële commitments als van het politieke leven. De collaboratieve leerprocessen tussen religieuze en niet-religieuze burgers waar hij met zijn voorstel ruimte voor wil maken draaien om expliciet gearticuleerde doctrines die potentieel kunnen worden vertaald naar algemeen toegankelijke waarheidsclaims. Hij bevestigt weliswaar dat religie meer is dan doctrine alleen, maar wat dit 'meer' precies inhoudt en hoe het de publieke sfeer en de machtsverhoudingen tussen verschillend gepositioneerde burgers kan beïnvloeden blijft onduidelijk.

Ik betoog dat een dergelijke cognitivistische zienswijze te reductief is in haar benadering van zowel het politieke als het religieuze leven, en dat ze bovendien problematisch is vanuit een standpunt dat hecht aan het ideaal van democratische gelijkheid. Dit is het geval omdat machtsverschillen tussen de burgers van hedendaagse democratieën in de praktijk niet uitsluitend door middel van deliberatieve argumentatie, maar óók door middel van allerlei andere publieke activiteiten worden aangekaart en tegengegaan. Daarbij denk ik met name aan religieus getinte publieke handelingen zoals politiek gemotiveerde wakes, gebedskringen, bedevaarten, enzovoort.

In het tweede hoofdstuk leg ik daarom een basis voor een alternatief theoretisch vocabulaire dat, naar ik betoog, ons beter in staat stelt dergelijke praktijken te interpreteren

en te bediscussiëren. Als centraal element van dit vocabulaire introduceer ik het concept van 'sociocultural interventions' ('sociaal-culturele interventies'). Daarmee doel ik op publieke, politieke uitingen die een andere vorm aannemen dan deliberatieve argumentatie (zoals demonstraties, straatkunst en politiek gemotiveerde pelgrimstochten) en die over het vermogen beschikken om op performatieve wijze veranderingen binnen de sociale verbeelding te bewerkstelligen. Aan de hand van twee concrete voorbeelden – Shepard Fairey's *We the People - are greater than fear* poster uit 2017 en de Idle No More demonstraties uit 2012/2013 – laat ik zien dat sociaal-culturele interventies voor burgers van hedendaagse democratieën een belangrijk middel vormen om politieke zeggenschap uit te oefenen en om de benodigde vaardigheden, disposities en middelen te verwerven dit te blijven doen.

Evenals de hierboven besproken theorieën ligt de normatieve basis van de door mij voorgestane benadering in het begrip van democratisch burgerschap. Eén van de centrale elementen van democratisch burgerschap is politieke zeggenschap: burgers hebben reële mogelijkheden om invloed uit te oefenen op politieke uitkomsten die de omstandigheden waaronder ze leven beïnvloeden.

Ik betoog dat politieke actoren door middel van sociaal-culturele interventies invloed kunnen uitoefenen op wijdverbreide aannames van wie wel en wie niet als volwaardig en gelijkwaardig lid van de samenleving geldt en als rechtmatige partij in politieke besluitvorming wordt geaccepteerd – anders gezegd, wie wel en wie niet over 'speaker authority' ('sprekersautoriteit') beschikt. Sociaal-culturele interventies stellen gemarginaliseerde politieke actoren bovendien in staat veranderingen te bewerkstelligen in de associaties die resonante culturele elementen binnen het politieke discours ('markers of authority'; Nederlands: 'autoriteitsaanduidingen') oproepen. Deze 'external effects' ('externe effecten') maken het politieke actoren mogelijk om verschuivingen teweeg te brengen in hoe zijzelf en hun politieke acties door anderen worden waargenomen, geïnterpreteerd en beoordeeld.

Sociaal-culturele interventies hebben daarnaast ook 'internal effects' (interne effecten): effecten die niet zozeer andersdenkenden maar medestanders betreffen. Door middel van sociaal-culturele interventies kunnen politieke actoren de vastberadenheid, doelzekerheid en collectieve identiteit van hun medestanders versterken. Dergelijke uitkomsten zijn met name van belang wanneer het gaat om sociale groepen met een geschiedenis van politieke marginalisatie en uitsluiting.

Vanwege deze effecten doen politiek filosofen er goed aan sociaal-culturele interventies in hun beschouwingen van de publieke sfeer te betrekken. Dat is met name het geval wanneer deze beschouwingen zich specifiek richten op de publieke manifestatie van historische tradities

van existentiële zingeving. Dergelijke tradities zijn namelijk rijk aan cultureel resonante beelden, verhalen en praktijken die, wanneer ze in sociaal-culturele interventies worden opgenomen, kunnen helpen om mensen tot politieke actie aan te sporen, ook wanneer omstandigheden van ernstige politieke ongelijkheid deze actie anders zouden ontmoedigen.

In het derde hoofdstuk ontwikkel ik het concept van sociaal-culturele interventies verder aan de hand van een reflectie op het politieke denken van Hannah Arendt. Ik zie dit denken als veelbelovend voor mijn project omdat Arendt precies die performatieve, esthetische en existentiële dimensies van politiek handelen voor het voetlicht brengt die sociaal-culturele interventies nadrukkelijk manifesteren, en die meer cognitivistische theorieën van de publieke sfeer vaak links laten liggen. Arendts perspectief op de fenomenologie van politiek handelen verduidelijkt dat we, wanneer we ons tot doel stellen politieke uitingen adequaat te interpreteren en te beoordelen, ons gezichtsveld niet moeten beperken tot het vermogen van deze handelingen om cognitieve, aan deze uitingen zelf voorafgaande inhoud over te brengen; de politieke sfeer is niet alleen een domein waar waarheidsclaims worden uitgewisseld en geëvalueerd, maar ook een domein waar actoren op performatieve wijze aan existentiële betekenisconstructie doen.

Op basis van een discussie van de productieve spanning tussen vernieuwing en permanentie in zowel Arendts handelingstheorie als in haar latere denken over autoriteit en augmentatie beargumenteer ik dat haar begrip van politiek handelen zich goed laat interpreteren als de performatieve augmentatie van autoritatieve culturele elementen binnen de sociale verbeelding. Politieke actoren staan in dit perspectief in een tweeledige relatie tot de waargenomen autoriteit van de culturele elementen waarop hun sociaal-culturele interventies voortbouwen: enerzijds vormen deze elementen een bron van inspiratie die hun handelen motiveert, anderzijds maken hun handelingen nieuwe interpretaties van deze bron mogelijk. Door deze tweeledige relatie kunnen politieke actoren aan autoritatieve culturele elementen zowel een ervaring van transhistorische continuïteit als van creativiteit en daadkracht ontlenen. Dit inzicht helpt te verduidelijken wat politieke actoren ertoe aanzet om tot politieke actie over te gaan, zelfs onder omstandigheden waarin de risico's op frustratie en teleurstelling groot zijn. Een dergelijk perspectief is van bijzonder nut wanneer we kijken naar sociaal-culturele interventies die voortbouwen op historische tradities van existentiële betekenisgeving.

In het vierde hoofdstuk richt ik mij op de vraag hoe we ons de verhouding tussen sociaal-culturele interventies en deliberatief argument moeten voorstellen, en ga ik bovendien in op de vraag welke inzichten een overweging van sociaal-culturele interventies

ons oplevert voor het debat rond 'post-secularisme' waarmee dit proefschrift begon. Eerst laat ik zien dat het bovenstaande argument aangaande de tweeledige relatie van de politieke actoren ten opzichte van gezaghebbende culturele elementen goed aansluit bij het model van 'inventive traditions' ('inventieve tradities') dat religiewetenschappers hebben ontwikkeld om vernieuwing binnen religieuze tradities te beschrijven. Dit model benadert religieuze tradidies als *zowel* inherent innovatief *als* verbindend met een verleden dat door de beoefenaar van de religieuze praktijk als autoritatief wordt ervaren. Dan betoog ik dat de bijdragen van Rawls en Habermas óók als innovatieve bijdragen binnen een traditie, en daarmee als voorbeelden van performatieve augmentatie kunnen worden beschouwd – namelijk, als de performatieve augmentatie van een autoritatieve geschiedenis die geworteld is in de historische Verlichting. Wanneer we deliberatief argument en sociaal-culturele interventies niet als twee strikt afzonderlijke communicatiepraktijken beschouwen, maar ze eerder zien als twee ideaaltypische vormen van performatieve augmentatie die in de praktijk niet altijd scherp van elkaar kunnen worden onderscheiden, stelt dit ons beter in staat te onderkennen dat deliberatieve argumentatie niet performatief neutraal is, maar integendeel, dat het een praktijk is die vergelijkbare esthetische, performatieve en existentiële ervaringen met zich mee kan brengen als deelname aan religieus gemotiveerde politieke actie.

Ik concludeer dat het loont om zowel religieuze praktijk als politieke actie mede te bezien als innovatieve pogingen om performatief voort te bouwen op autoritatieve principes die zich in historische daden en gebeurtenissen hebben gemanifesteerd. Een dergelijke interpretatie stelt ons in staat de performatieve, esthetische en existentiële dimensies van zowel het politieke als het religieuze leven, die meer cognitivistische lenzen negeren, expliciet in ogenschouw te nemen. Deze dimensies zijn met name verhelderend waar het om de publieke acties van religieus geïnspireerde emancipatorische sociale bewegingen zoals Idle No More en de Amerikaanse Burgerrechtenbeweging gaat.

In post-seculiere democratieën die worden gekenmerkt door zowel wereldbeschouwelijke verdeeldheid als door aanhoudende vormen van democratische ongelijkheid doen politieke filosofen er goed aan de politieke manifestaties van religie of andere historische tradities van existentiële betekenisgeving in het publieke domein niet slechts door de lens van gemeenschappelijk te vertalen doctrines te bezien; we hebben óók baat bij een diepere en meer expliciete reflectie op de esthetische, performatieve en existentiële dimensies van politieke handelingen, of het nu om deliberatieve argumenten of om sociaal-culturele interventies gaat, en of de handelingen nu religieus dan wel seculier geïnspireerd zijn. Daar beoogt het in dit proefschrift ontwikkelde vocabulaire aan bij te dragen.

Curriculum Vitae

Laurens van Esch (1983) received a Bachelor's degree in History (2006) and Master's degrees in History (2007) and in Philosophy (2011) from Utrecht University. He worked in a variety of roles for Christian Peacemaker Teams and the German Mennonite Peace Committee, and is currently employed as an assistant professor at St. Stephen's University, located in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, Canada, on the homeland of the Peskatomuhkoti nation. His research and teaching interests fall in the areas of political philosophy and history, and especially focus on the relationships between peace, social justice activism, religion and the public sphere.

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