# Introduction

In the last three decades, religion has been at the center of political discourse and life.[1] Reference to religion and, in many cases, to its violent manifestations and the urgent necessity of responding to it, has often been associated with political events, situations, and contexts. These have included ethno-religious conflicts in the Balkans; the attack of September 11th in the United States; bombings in Madrid and London, the assassination of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands; the Danish cartoon controversy in the early 2000s; Islamophobic legislation and policies, especially in France and in the United States, justified in the name of security and secularism against 'terrorism'; decades of wars against Muslim majority countries the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia waged in the name of secular freedom and democracy; the continued strength of Evangelical politics in North America and of Pentecostalism in Latin America and Africa; the ongoing Israeli settler colonialism justified by ethno-religious nationalism against Palestinians; and, most recently the Arab Spring in North Africa, the affirmation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, terrorist actions of Islamist groups in Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia and France, and also a variety of anti-Muslim violence perpetrated by a mix of terrorism and state policies in India, Myanmar, and China. This situation raises a series of questions about how to now respond to what is widely considered the problematic relationship between the theological and the political.

But, first of all, what exactly is the problem associated with this nexus? And what is distinctive about it in the current situation? While it is difficult to provide a precise definition, due to the changing forms and conditions in which the relationship between the theological and the political has taken and continues to take place, some definition can, nevertheless, be provided. This problem can be taken as referring to how the dynamic

connection between religion and politics is implicated in the foundation of political authority, community, and knowledge. In spite of its generality, this definition is precise enough to emphasize two of its persisting features: the encircling of central philosophical questions about politics and the sources that structure institutions, practices, and ethical orientations of communal life.

Yet, to capture what is distinctive about the theological-political today, a closer look at the contemporary predicament is required. The renewed public significance of religious movements across the globe has led many to talk about the "return of religion," a formulation that points to the theoretical and political problems connected to the global hegemony of modern secular discourse. While recent events signal that religion is not in decline in modern society, they do not by themselves indicate that a "return of religion" has really occurred. Indeed, in its recurrent use and abuse in secular discourse, the expression "return of religion" appears problematic for at least two reasons.[2] First, it presupposes the epistemic horizon of modern theories of secularization and secularism it challenges, both of which are informed by a *separatist* and *hierarchizing logic* that represents the "secular" domain as severed from and epistemically superior to the "religious," especially with regard to the sources regulating public life.[3] As Talal Asad has argued, the modern category of the "secular," naming an epistemic space allegedly "free of religion" and traditionally represented as opposed to the "religious," is not the result of a rational process of maturation and progressive emancipation of reason from religion that is to be seen as both universally valid and necessary to human freedom. If considered through a genealogy of its historical formation as a modern concept, the "secular" so conceived appears intrinsic to the formation of the epistemological regime of the modern discourse of the West, as well as the development of the modern nation-state and its colonial expansion.[4] Thus, it is only because religion was thought to have disappeared from the public sphere, as modern theories of secularism and secularization informed by the "secular" have argued, that it can "return," which is another way to say the historicization of these categories allows for the visibility of separation and hierarchization as effects of modern discourse.

Second, as scholars of religion have pointed out, the term "religion" has a Christian origin and its definition is inscribed in Christian history, whose mark has been globally extended through the world-wide spread of processes of secularization connected with colonialism.[5] Thus, the general applicability of "religion" to a variety of non-Christian religious traditions—for example, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, or Islam—raises questions about geopolitics, classification, and ordering of human life that

regard the formation of epistemological and political orders informed by Orientalism, whose colonial and racial formations can be traced back to the fifteenth century.[6]

Despite the epistemic problems that give rise to the so-called "return of religion," scholars have nevertheless attempted to grasp what is peculiar about the contemporary religious phenomena to which this formula refers. For example, in a recent volume entitled *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, Hent de Vries suggests that contemporary religious movements do not simply point to the central role played by religions in contemporary politics. For religions often inform the responses and resistance to the global spread of Western modernization and secularization. Such movements also signal that religions are active participants into the modern processes of globalization, which tends to radicalize the importance of local identities by multiplying the links of religious belongings, thereby displacing the center of communitarian bonds. As a result, de Vries notes, it becomes extremely difficult to grasp the elusive and disparate role religions play in contemporary politics.[7] At the very least, this suggests that contemporary religious phenomena are not susceptible to universally valid systematizations.

Acknowledging the limits of the current theoretical grammar, this book examines the contemporary nexus between religion and politics and redescribes it as "theological-political complex." The choice of this composite term is not accidental: the notion of "theological-political," first used by Spinoza, and explored by Derrida in one of his seminars on philosophical nationalism in the 1980s, indicates right from the start a certain cautiousness about the possibility of a simple separation of religion and politics, as both the hyphenation and the persistence of religion in politics suggest; [8] "complex" emphasizes the complexity of the modern predicament as overdetermined by the separatist schema, one that, in its epistemological and political dimensions, somewhat *already* precedes and thus informs modern reflection and institutions, and yet does not offer adequate resources to account for the social realities it addresses, but forces them under its theoretical grid.[9] As such, the "theological-political complex" is a conceptual device that performs three important functions: first, it acknowledges the world-wide persistence of public religions and the difficulty of providing universally valid explanations about the nature and political significance of religious phenomena; second, it manifests a self-critical awareness of the need and difficulties connected to transcending the modern schema, given its ubiquitous and somehow prereflective reality; third, it highlights that attending to the peculiarity of the current predicament requires rethinking

not simply the relationship between the theological and the political, but also *how, whence*, and from *which* cultural tradition that relationship, and more generally the question of difference, is approached. Attentive to the interconnected genealogies of colonialism, religion, and race, such a rethinking is mindful of the hegemonic role played by the Western Christian inflected horizon that informs the modern discourse of religion and of the epistemological and political implications such a hegemony has had and still has for other traditions. As such, it is a rethinking that is attentive to the crisis of the modern paradigm and the need of moving past Western-centric modes of inquiry in order to more adequately respond to the complexity of the current predicament.

Viewed this way, the "theological-political complex" appears in all its philosophical relevance and political urgency. The persistence of religion in politics is then not a return to a premodern religious order. It is a contemporary global phenomenon that challenges conventional modern convictions and the political forms that embody them and that calls for new ways of understanding and responding to cultural and religious pluralism. Indeed, that religions are operative both on the side of modernity and on the side of its critics does more than complicate the traditional division between religion and politics. It questions the fundamental philosophical and cultural assumptions underlying secular reason and normativity that have allowed that stark separation to be conceived as possible and desirable in the first place on the basis of an allegedly universal standpoint.

From what geopolitical site is the current discourse about religion and politics articulated? What are the linguistic, epistemological, and ontological presuppositions, securing the normative center from which to effect the opposition and separation of the theological and the political, reason and faith? What cultural values inform them? And how are these presuppositions implicated in the powers instituting and justifying political arrangements informed by a binary schema that produces spiritual, ethical, racial, sexual, and cultural hierarchies and exclusions?

This book is a study of the contemporary "theological-political complex" through the lens of Jacques Derrida's political thought, which is used to critically reflect on the foundations of modern secular discourse. It aims to offer a theoretically critically informed response to the empirical significance of public religions and to the challenge they pose to modern conceptions and institutions, while also offering a systematic account of Derrida's thought on the theological-political predicament. To expand the understanding of the matter investigated, this book examines the complex

interaction between religion and politics as it relates to the formations of epistemic and political orders. It does so by paying particular attention to the role that questions of language and epistemology play in political thinking, as well as the ways in which their conceptualizations affect the normative and institutional responses to cultural and religious diversity.[10]

The book's central claim is that Derrida's thought offers powerful resources to critically rethink the theological-political nexus beyond the secular paradigm. On the one hand, Derrida questions the oppositional modern logic that separates religion and politics by exposing its Western Christian, racialized, and sexualized presuppositions and the role they play in generating discriminatory hierarchies and practices. On the other hand, he points to the complex interconnection between reason and religious sources and to the democratic potential of thinking about them as interrelated. By articulating a relational approach that challenges the binary and racialized features of modern Western epistemology and politics, and one that resists the translation of the theological into a secularized political, his perspective clears an analytical space for new political grammars to emerge. In pursuing this argument, I do not aim to either suggest that Derrida engaged consistently, equally, or thoroughly with the racial, sexual, and religious character of modern secular discourse's key presuppositions or to spare him from criticism on his treatment of some of these issues. For example, while my later chapters emphasize Derrida's attention for the exclusion of sexual difference in several of his works (*PF*; GES I; *GES III*; CHO), I also endorse criticisms pointing to his lack of substantive engagements with authors other than white European males.[11] Similarly, while I highlight and develop his, not always explicit, remarks on the connection between the theological-political and race (FK; *PF*; *R*; RLW; WRT), I raise questions about why he did not develop such an important topic further and more explicitly, especially in connection to colonialism and religion, which he nevertheless addressed (FK; BB; WRT), or to capitalism.[12]

Instead, my argument seeks to highlight that his thought displays a critical awareness of the structural role that racialized, sexualized, and religious presuppositions play in modern secular discourse's discriminatory and hierarchical schema. As such, his intervention points to the epistemic salience of addressing such presuppositions not simply thematically, but at the level of the epistemological grid from which, and through which, sociopolitical life is approached. It is this critical awareness, and decolonizing potential, that I thus seek to mobilize in terms of resources for rethinking the "theological-political complex," and I do so with and beyond what

Derrida did or did not do with it. Specifically, I aim to contribute to an understanding of race in relation to the "theological-political complex" and seek to do so by addressing questions race, and its derivatives, in the general and yet restricted sense of race as an historical construct that refers to a structure of power used to ordering public life through epistemic and political exclusionary hierarchies.[13] While there is much more complexity to the nature and history of race than what this definition can capture, and much has been written about it, my hope is to show that this understanding helps illuminate the political and philosophical unconscious of racial thinking that I seek to bring to the fore; that is, mentalities and practices that consider it epistemically possible and politically desirable to set up hierarchies and divisions on the basis of pure thinking, as well as secularized and sexualized political teleologies to be deployed through assimilative translation practices.[14]

Central to the proposed reading is an appreciation of the lived experience of margins as significant to the formation of Derrida's thought, sensibility, and interests, as well as insights and philosophical practice.[15] There is no doubt that his philosophy remains in many ways linked to the Western tradition, given the European focus of his work and the special, yet not-Eurocentric, place he accords to Europe (AI; *OH*; *R*),[16] as well as his limited engagement with traditions (Islamic or Kabyle)[17] and places (Algeria)[18] that nevertheless had an impact on his writings. Yet such a philosophy also defies categorizations into such boxes as Western or non-Western. Indeed, Derrida also draws from places, experiences, traditions, and heritages that cannot be located within Europe, as testified, for example, by his understanding of "religion" through the figure of, and *as*, an Arab Jew and also through Islam, in addition to Christianity and Judaism, as part of the "religions called 'Abrahamic' " (ATI, 21; FK, 44/13), which he experienced in French Algeria.[19] Attesting to his fidelity to more than one identity (FAPU, 221), and describing himself by using an interweaving of racial, ethnic, and religious features as "a little black and very Arab Jew" (C, 58/57) and an explicit reference to "Africa" and to his retaining of "that heritage" (G, 204), Derrida recognizes, especially in his later writings, his cultural debt to Algeria, highlighting the profound impact his lived experience in such a complex context had on his thought. As it emerges from these writings, Derrida was both a colonized and a minority subject, who was exposed but excluded from Berber, Arab-Muslim, Arab-Jewish and, to a certain extent, French culture. As a Jew, he temporarily benefited from citizenship status granted to Algerian Jews, but not to Arabs and Berbers, by

the 1870 Crémieux decree—a status that was violently revoked and replaced with anti-Semitic legislation by the Vichy regime in the 1940s (*MO*, 14/ 31–32; *IW*, 34–35/53).

> Of all the cultural wealth that I have received, that I have inherited, my Algerian culture has sustained me the most . . . The cultural heritage I received from Algeria is something that probably inspired my philosophical work. *All* the work I have pursued, with regard to European, Western, so-called Greco-European philosophical thought, the questions I have been led to ask from some distance, a *certain exteriority* (*certaine extériorité*)*,* would *certainly not have been possible* if, in my personal history, had I not been a sort of child in the *margins* of Europe, a child of the Mediterranean, who was not simply French nor simply African, and who had passed his time traveling between one culture and the other feeding questions out of that instability—all of which cause the earthquake of my *experience* that I just mentioned. Everything that has interested me for a long time, regarding writing, the trace, the deconstruction of Western metaphysics—which, despite what has been said, I have never identified as something homogenous or defined in the singular (I have so often explicitly said the contrary)—all of that had to have come out of a reference to an elsewhere whose place and language were unknown or forbidden to me . . . A Judeo Franco-Maghrebian genealogy does not explain everything, far from it, but can I *ever* explain anything *without it*? (*mais purrais-je rien expliquer sans elle, jamais*)." (*IW*, 30–32/55–57; my emphasis)

While the cultural heritage of Algeria might have inspired Derrida's philosophy, the latter "would certainly have not been possible . . . without" a "certain exteriority" of his particular and traumatic "experience" in "the margins of Europe." Pointing to the experiential conditions of possibility of his thought, Derrida's lived experience, I suggest, plays a decisive epistemic role in the critical and decolonizing thrust of his philosophy. This is noticeable especially in a series of ideas that expose and challenge hierarchical and separatist ordering typical of modern discourse and its undergirding racial logics. These ideas include his understanding of Western philosophy as a "White mythology" displaying a racialized mode of thinking (WM, 213/254); his resistance to the centering of Europe, and the traditional

discourse of modernity, indeed his efforts to open up Europe to its internal differences but also what is "other than Europe" at its southern shores ("*l'autre que l'Europe*"), while denouncing Europe for its links to neocapitalist exploitation (OH, 29–30/33, 57/56–57, 69/69–70; FAPU, 229); his critique of the racialized, and specifically Islamophobic undercurrents of modern European understandings of the political (RLW, 290–99/385–99; *PF*, 77/95, 89/109, 91/112–13; FAPU, 229), as well as of the racist and anti-Semitic features affecting European "spirit" and culture (*OS*, 39–40/65; *OH*, 6/13), whose philosophy and rationality have been called into question by twentieth-century totalitarianisms, and by the Holocaust (IPJD, 2); his exposure of globalization and secularization as originally "European-colonial" and then "Anglo-American" and "Christian" forms of "hyper-imperialist appropriation" of the public sphere supported by processes of massive land expropriation and extraction (FK, 79/66, 66/47; AI 122); his recognition of the links between the "European concept and history of the state," "the European discourse on race," and "the Judeo-Christian ideology" on the one hand, and South African apartheid on the other (BB, 165); and finally, his conceptualization of deconstruction as the analysis of "what remains to be thought" which has largely been excluded by the totalizing character of Western discourse (*LI*, 147). These ideas attain further significance if read in conjunction with his affirmation, in a 2003 conference on race, that "deconstruction is through and through a deconstruction of racism" because it questions racism's general conditions of possibility such as the traditional opposition between nature and culture, on which all naturalizations rely, and the idea of origin as filiation, especially when used as a ground for political projects.[20]

The important role of autobiographical elements emerges also by appreciating Derrida's emphasis on the epistemic potency of subjectivity, as he understands it, following Kierkegaard: "subjectivity, the *resistance of existence* to the concept or system—this is something I attach great importance to and feel very deeply, something I am always ready to stand up for" (*TS*, 41; my emphasis). Indeed, Derrida not only stresses that philosophy has always been "at the service of this autobiographical memory," but he enacts this idea through "exemplarity" which is not conceived as a particular example of a universal essence, but, rather, as a form of philosophical witnessing that exemplifies the "exemplarity of the unique" within which the universal inscribes itself without being exhausted by it (41; *OH*, 73/72). This witnessing consists in a mode of reflection from and through a singular lived experience that considers particularity as irreducible to thinking and that points to the

conditions of possibility of theoretical articulations that have universal value, which is not the same as universal validity (*MO*, 19–20/39–40).

My point is that Derrida's lived experience plays an epistemic role in his philosophical work's ability to open up an analytical space to the possibility of pluralism, which modern secular discourse represses. By affirming the theoretical importance of autobiography in this way, I seek neither to fold philosophy into literature nor to hierarchize the sources of Derrida's thought or fix its origins. Nor do I intend to conclusively determine Derrida's identity or reduce the genesis of deconstruction to the historical conditions of French Algeria.[21] Instead, I aim to emphasize the theoretical value and critical potential of a perspective that draws *from* lived experience as *a* powerful epistemic source of "resistance" to "the system"—a lived experience that speaks resistance in the language of what is resisted without, however, speaking its language. Arguably, working through the experience of colonialism and marginality to European modernity through the predicament of the Arab-Jew put Derrida in a position of "epistemic resistance." This enabled him to expose the mirroring effect and logics of domination produced by Western epistemology and politics, without reaching an "outside" that would turn the margin into a privileged position exterior to modern discourse.[22] Such an experience is thus also central to his challenge to the possibility of developing critiques of, or alternatives to, modernity from some epistemic island that has not been affected by Western discourse, a theme consistent throughout his entire *oeuvre* since his early works (*OG*, 24/39).

Emphasizing this point is not to quickly dismiss powerful interventions such as that of Enrique Dussel, who has argued for the critical potential of cultural moments of "Chinese, Hindustani, Islamic, African Bantu, and Latin American Cultures" that not only predated but remained, as it were, "outside" European modernity and thus distinct because they were excluded by it.[23] Nor is it to deny that elements of these cultural moments might have survived Western colonialism, as Derrida's understanding of Islam as being "alien enough" to European modernity suggests (FK, 51/22, 81/69). Rather, it is to highlight that even if such moments can provide sources for transformations, the process involved in reclaiming them remains significantly affected, shaped, and contaminated by dominant Western epistemological and political orders. This means that there are significant limits to the possibility of articulating and grasping cultural meanings that have remained somehow exterior to such orders so as to delink from them from whichever margin, as recent propositions such as that of Walter Mignolo have advanced.[24] The predicament emphasized by Derrida aligns with Valentine Mudimbe's notion

of the "colonial library" and with similar formulations made by Edward Said with regard to the impact of Orientalism on thinking and studying the Orient, particularly Islam.[25]

It is thus with reference to Derrida's positionality and to specific features of his philosophy that I seek to illuminate the decolonizing thrust of his thought, despite the fact that Derrida has hardly used the term "decolonization," and that he is more often associated with postcolonial thought.[26] Specifically, through this term, I seek to connote aspects of his philosophy that contribute to debates about decolonization broadly construed that involve epistemic, political, religious and material dimensions. Indeed, while not remaining insensible to questions of land and the logics sustaining global inequalities (*AF, AL, SM*), Derrida offers a non-Eurocentric analysis and critique of the racial foundations, formations and global hegemony of Western modernity that illuminates its entanglements with the colonial legacy. Concurrently, his reflections open the production of knowledge to non-Western and non-Western-centric traditions, including a thinking of the political beyond the horizon of secularism and nationalism. Starting from the 1960s (*OG*) and 1970s (*MP*), as my discussion will showcase, Derrida critically exposes the Latin Christian, Western-centric, sexualized and racialized character of modern knowledge and political models, as well as ethnocentric teleological conceptions of time and history (*OG*, OG). In his later works, from the early 1990s, he offers epistemic resources to open up a space beyond such conceptions (*SM, R*), as well as beyond the model of the secular nation-state and processes of globalization and secularization that also involve land expropriation (FK, EL, *PF*, *R*). By deconstructing the conditions of possibility of metaphysical binaries, exposing the colonial nature of "religion" and its world-wide extension and subsequent secularization through oppressive forms of translation, and by enacting a relational type of thinking, Derrida offers valuable resources to the decolonization of dominant discourses and approaches that can be used to build culturally diverse forms of knowledge and political life.

Exploring issues as different as translation, time, democracy, secularism, sovereignty, and Islam, the book addresses both the specialized literature on Derrida's later writings[27] and recent discussions on religion and politics in such diverse disciplines as philosophy, political theory, and religious studies.[28] Unlike the mainly philosophical approach to Derrida's perspective on religion, especially in the influential works of John Caputo, Martin Hägglund, and Michael Naas, my project illuminates the distinctively political aspects of his view as well as the centrality of the theological-political to Derrida's critical

project as a whole.[29] Indeed, I aim to show how the theological-political nexus links and charges of political significance his early linguistic and epistemological concerns to his later religious and ethico-political ones, and thus represents a key aspect of his thought. This is apparent if one considers the relevance of the theological-political in Derrida's entire corpus as well as his continued interest in political questions (*R*, 39/64) and the political dimension of themes that do not appear immediately political such as language (*LI, MO*) or time (*SM, GT,* OG). While in his later writings he overtly focuses on theological-political themes (FK, EL*, IW, PF, R, SM,* TB, WRT) and political foundations (BL, DOI, FL), his early reflections on questions of origins—ontological, temporal, and linguistic—already manifested critical attention to the theological-political issues behind the metaphysical approach informing the institution of philosophical horizons and a deep historical sensibility for political founding (*OG*). As such, Derrida's early writings too can be considered as symptomatic of a larger preoccupation with the theological-political broadly conceived as a political problem about the foundation of authority, community, and knowledge—a problem that is therefore at the heart of his critical thinking as a whole, but it is not always or sufficiently recognized as such. Above all, my discussion of how Derrida's view of the theological-political relates to the formations of epistemic and political orders emphasizes his awareness of the racialized schema that underpins the philosophical presuppositions of the modern discourse of religion—something to which the significant scholarship around various aspects of the theological-political in Derrida has paid insufficient attention.[30]

With regard to interdisciplinary debates on the so-called "return of religion," I address perspectives in political theology as well as Neo-Kantian theories of secularism. In response to scholarship in political theology, I show that by refraining from solving the theological-political nexus Derrida's perspective unsettles approaches that privilege one side of the relationship, thereby relapsing into an oppositional logic that closes the political from within or without. This applies to Carl Schmitt's attempt to save the autonomy of the political at the expenses of other spheres, [31] as well as to ambiguous aspects of Walter Benjamin's messianism that can be read as privileging the theological side of the theological-political relationship.[32] With reference to Neo-Kantian theories of secularism, I challenge the alleged neutrality associated with the idea of secularization as a "rational" translation of theological idioms and categories into secular ones, as it appears especially in the work of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls.[33] I show how their reliance on an insufficiently thematized view of translation, especially with regard to the role it plays

in the formation and maintenance of the secular world order, signals that the traditional secular paradigm cuts deeper than it appears and maintains a link, both methodological and material, with the legacy of colonialism.

As such, the book broadly positions itself between specialized literature and broader scholarship. It integrates the interrogation of the theological features that keep reappearing, however opaquely, in the understanding of modern politics with genealogical investigation. I suggest that the critical import of Derrida's approach to the "theological-political complex" consists in combining these two modes of analysis, which are joined in his quasitranscendentalism, which refers to a historically inflected philosophical thinking that proceeds through formalizations as in the transcendental tradition since Kant, but that also maintains a genealogical focus on the irreducible historicity within which formalizations take place. Putting emphasis on this aspect of Derrida's thought is not new. Rodolphe Gasché and Geoffrey Bennington have offered seminal discussions of Derrida's quasitranscendentalism.[34] Authors such as Caputo, De Vries, Mathias Fritsch, and Hägglund have further developed the discussion, especially in relation to Derrida's notion of the messianic and time.[35] While building on these views, my analysis emphasizes the historico-political sensibility of Derrida's approach in general, and the specific antiracist drive this sensibility takes with regard to the culture-specific philosophical underpinnings and political commitments of modern secular discourse. I suggest that by investigating in this way how the theological-political nexus relates to epistemic orders and political formations, Derrida employs a relational approach that simultaneously exposes the proximity between the separatist logic of secularism and that of racialized thinking, and that puts limits to the possibility of reaching a vantage point to address, understand, and negotiate the theological-political relationship. Indeed, by placing irreducible historicity and relationality at the heart of his approach to religion and politics, but also language and time, Derrida allows us to think about the political *together* with the religious "in context," and thus to think of the theological-political as an historical relation. In particular, he shows that some theological dimension, but not theological in any traditional sense, cannot be strictly excluded from the political domain. This feature is maximally exemplified by his insistence on an elementary faith (*foi élémentaire*) (FK, 80/68) that reason and religion share and that informs a structure of promissory affirmation, or a "messianicity without messianism (*messianicité sans messianisme*)" (FK, 56/30; *SM*, 74/102). Central to the foundation of both politics and knowledge, this faith radicalizes and yet unsettles the quest of origins and

naturalizations typical of modern secular and racial models, thereby open-
ing up possibilities for different political imaginaries that remain critically
vigilant against homogenizations and thus open to pluralism (ATI, 27/37).
In this way, Derrida emphasizes the interconnection, but he reflects at the
same time on the distinction, between the theological and the political,
placing his thought in proximity to longstanding positions within the Islamic
tradition(s). This approach not only challenges attempts that seek to solve
or end up circumventing the theological-political nexus itself, [36] but it also
profoundly questions the modes of thinking that share the possibility of
ordering sociopolitical life through hierarchical and separatist schemas akin
to racialized logics and colonial mentalities. Viewed this way, my interpre-
tation of Derrida's perspective shows that his position on religion, and more
broadly the theological-political, exceeds the "radical secularity" suggested
by Naas and resists the "radical atheism" proposed by Hägglund, as well as
associations to traditional religion as suggested by Caputo, who highlights
the "religious passion of deconstruction."[37] It does so while reaching secular
discourse's subterranean entanglements with the legacy of colonialism that
these authors largely neglect. The emphasis on these overlooked connections,
in turn, allows to illuminate the deeper reach of Derrida's critical vigilance
against political closures that recent perspectives on the political dimension
of his thought, such as those that Stella Gaon and Geoffrey Bennington
have underlined. Unlike that of Derrida, though, these perspectives remain
confined within secular Western horizons, whose racial features and colonial
afterlives are therefore left unscrutinized.[38]

In presenting Derrida's take on the "theological-political complex,"
I engage in both exegetic and analytical readings that seek to expound
Derrida's reflections on issues of language, time, religion, and politics as
they relate to the theological-political relationship, with a view to explore
the role this relation plays in the formation of epistemological and political
orders. While I explain Derrida's view of these issues to illuminate the logic
of relationality at the heart of his take on the theological-political, I also
seek to *think with* Derrida and push this logic further. Indeed, my aim is
to illuminate the significance and decolonizing potential of his approach to
the "theological-political complex," especially for rethinking the relationship
between religion and politics and democracy in ways that Derrida himself
never thought, developed, or perhaps would have agreed with but are
possibilities opened by the deconstructive gesture.[39] In pursing this, I draw
particular attention to the critical sources his thought offers to maintain
critical vigilance against epistemic hierarchizations, naturalized representa-

tions, and assimilative forms of translation on the one hand and to open up spaces for transformations beyond dominant knowledge forms and received interpretations on the other.[40] I also strive to keep an awareness throughout that Derrida's ideas, in this book, are articulated in English, and thus in translation with regard to the original French. While I selectively indicate the original French, the exegesis and expounding of the argument in English encounter the limits and possibilities of it being done in translation, as my discussion will illustrate. I leave it to the reader to judge whether I have succeeded on this score.

Employing this composite reading strategy, I start by setting the critical framework for rethinking the theological-political relation through a focus on conceptions of language and time informing dominant modern political thinking before moving on to more recognizably political topics. This choice is not simply organizational but seeks to connect two bodies of Derrida's work, the earlier "philosophical" writings with the late "political" works, in order to signal the deep continuity between the two in spite of the turn usually attributed to his intellectual trajectory (*R*, 39/64). Through an engagement with Derrida's early and later writings on linguistic context and translation, chapter 1 foregrounds his view on language. It aims to unpack the philosophical and political dimensions of translation and its problematic use in influential approaches to secularism and political theology that seek to effect a secularization of religious language by appealing to the allegedly neutral language of secular reason. After illustrating Derrida's critique of the colonial implications connected to the global spread of the language of secularism as the relevant translating language of the public sphere, the chapter explores the potential of resistance to dominant knowledge forms of Derrida's view of language as "promise."

Chapter 2 examines Derrida's view of time as it connects to political thought. Reading his famous notion of *différance* in conjunction with that of "White mythology," I analyze his critique of Western metaphysical thinking and teleology, exposing the dangerous proximity between philosophical foundations based on the grasp of pure origins and racialized schemas. Through this framework, I then offer critical reflections on the political stakes and implications of teleological responses to the theological-political nexus as they appear in the work of thinkers as diverse as Karl Marx, John Rawls, and Jürgen Habermas. Focusing on Derrida's alternative epistemological approach to time, the chapter moves then on to articulate his notion of the "messianic" as a nonteleological and antiracist form of political thought, illuminating its significance for rethinking questions of justice, reason, and

the foundation of communal life, beyond the purity of ideal representations and thus the possibility of naturalizations.

In chapter 3, I present a distinctively political view of Derrida's understanding of the secular as the allegedly religion-free field of the socio-political that complements and expands the limited and mainly philosophically oriented literature on this topic.[41] Through an analysis of Derrida's later work on political founding and religion, I specifically focus on how the theological-political relationship factors in the institution of political authority. Engaging scholarship in political theology, the chapter pursues two lines of inquiry: first, it links the theme of racial formations to Derrida's critique of Schmitt and more generally to the patriarchal and exclusionary implications of relying on the notion of fraternity and the opposition to Islam in order to draw the boundaries of the political. Second, it highlights the irreducible nexus between the theological and the political by exploring Derrida's discussion of Benjamin. This inquiry leads to the idea that, for Derrida, the theological and the political are interrelated and yet distinct since first inception. Thus, they cannot be separated as in traditional conceptualizations of secularism, or collapsed into one another as in forms of critical messianism *à la* Benjmain, or religious fundamentalism.

In order to illuminate Derrida's view of democracy in the context of the "theological-political complex," chapter 4 explores his notion of "democracy to come" (*démocratie à venir*) in connection to issues of sovereignty, freedom, and equality. Building on the issue of racial formations addressed in previous chapters, the chapter emphasizes the racialized and masculine character of canonical understandings of democracy as sovereignty, highlighting the exclusion of sexual difference as typical of the modern paradigm. Through an exposure of Derrida's topical reliance on, and yet critical distance from, traditional political theology, I argue that his view enables thinking about democracy beyond "old" secularism. The chapter shows that Derrida's "democracy to come" does not simply offer resources to challenge unitary and undifferentiated conceptions of agency and identity informing secular understandings of sovereignty, freedom, and equality typical of most modern nation-states. By enabling a radical form of criticism that can resist the naturalization of *secular* democracy, it also opens a space to nonsecular perspectives, outside the West and within it, that offer important contributions to alternative configurations of communal life.

The last chapter concludes the book by exploring the place of Islam in Derrida's later writings. Through an investigation of his treatment of Islam in relation to the modern discourse of religion, secularism, and democracy,

I trace the complex and controversial role Islam plays in Derrida's political thought. Specifically, I focus on the sort of openings and closures his deconstructive logic enables beyond what he did or failed to do with it in his specific interventions. I argue that although Derrida's position is marked by controversial ambiguities and historical inaccuracy, his intervention opens up the future of the political and of democracy to Islamicate perspectives and contexts.[42] In this way, Derrida joins those forces within and beyond such spaces that resist closures within Islamic discourses, as well as various forms of Orientalist Islamophobia.