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Introduction: Religious authority in minority constellations and digital media

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Abstract

This introduction outlines the central questions and structure of the special issue and highlights key comparative insights from the collected studies. Against the backdrop of current changes in religious authority structures, the contributions of this special issue focus on the role of religious minority constellations as well as media change and digitalisation shaping the dynamics of religious authority. The research underpinning this volume is informed by a sociological and cultural-studies concept of authority that integrates theoretical questions with empirical perspectives. In addition to an outline of these conceptual considerations and a brief presentation of the individual contributions, this introduction offers some comparative considerations on intersecting conceptual themes and follow-up thoughts on religious authority.

1. Thematic framework

In late modern societies, social mega-trends, such as individualization, pluralization and digitalization are putting traditional religious authority structures to the test (Campbell 2010; Horsfield 2016; Baumann/Nagel 2023: 130). Immigration and religious diversification evoke additional challenges to religious authority, providing both mutual learning opportunities while also signifying social demarcations; TikTok preachers stand alongside traditional authorities, digital media form their own religious discourse spaces, and generational change in small congregations leads to negotiations about spheres of influence. Against this backdrop, questions arise about how and to what degree these developments impact religious authority structures in minority contexts.

This special issue is dedicated to investigating the ongoing significance and transformation of religious authority structures amid these changes. It takes a broad analytical view on the diversity of religious traditions operating in contemporary societies. The overarching aim is to shed light on the dynamics of authority structures and their transformation in the context of a) religious minority constellations and b) media change and digitalization. The guiding assumption is that

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both minority settings and digital media heighten the basic tension, experienced by both religious authorities and religious communities, between adapting religious norms and worldviews to the requirements of the times and the desire to preserve religious traditions.

Throughout history, migration movements and social changes have led to the formation of religious minority constellations. These constellations pose special challenges to the re-interpretation of religious traditions, the preservation and reorganization of religious decisions and the development of community ties and structures. Processes of cultural transmission in the countries of arrival can produce new iterations of tradition (e.g. in the form of canonization processes) or provoke conservative reactions. In diaspora settings religious authority finds itself under pressure and stretched between the demands of the country of arrival and the expectations of the country of origin (Cohen 2008; Baumann/Nagel 2023: 35-37). In fact, these mechanisms are not restricted to immigrant communities but also apply to "autochthonous" religious minority-majority constellations (Elwert et al. 2025).

In addition, it is now widely acknowledged that the change of media has far-reaching implications for religions and in the configurations of religious authority. Digitalization permeates many domains of everyday life, including religion: Digital media provide users with extensive access to religious knowledge, foster discursive interaction, and facilitate the redefinition of interpretative authority. In other words, digital environments profoundly reshape the epistemic frameworks through which religious meaning is produced, distributed, and negotiated. Furthermore, digital media create opportunities for old and new forms of religious community building, for example in hybrid forms which combine local presence and religious online offerings, in intimate circles and supra-regional events, and in the strengthening of the ingroup as well as for inter-group cooperations (Gifford 2005; Horsfield 2016).

This special issue emerged from the work of a group of authors who came together in response to a call for papers issued in the summer of 2023. Building on a concept paper drafted by the editors of this special issue, the authors developed articles that organize findings from their current research around the question of changes in religious authority. They presented early versions of their essays at a joint workshop 2025.[1] This introduction offers an overall framework of this collaborative endeavour and has three main goals: First, we offer some preliminary conceptual considerations which serve as a framework for our joint work. Second, we provide a brief overview of the articles in this special issue and third, we explore some of the thematic connections between the contributions. In the following section, we first present the concept paper that forms the basis for our working definition of religious authority and served as a reference for the contributions as they were developed.

[1] The workshop with the title *Religiöse Autorität unter Bedingungen von Migration, religiöser Minderheitensituation und Digitalisierung* (religious authority under conditions of migration, religious minority status and digitalization) was held in Göttingen on 3–4 April 2025. We are grateful to the Thyssen-Foundation for the generous funding.

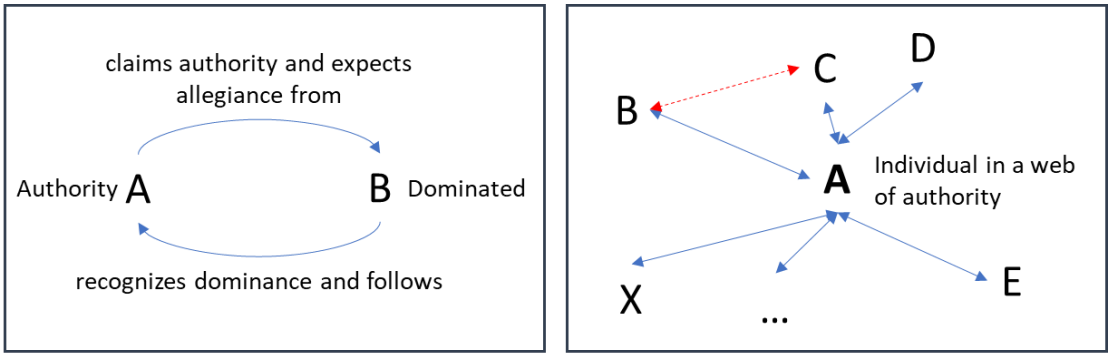
2. On the concept of religious authority

After reviewing the current literature, we summarised five guiding questions that are relevant to our consideration of religious authority, as well as five potential sources of religious authority.

Since Max Weber's fundamental reflections on the sociology of authority (*Herrschaftssoziologie*) and his distinction between charismatic, traditional and legal rule (Weber 1976), a broad theoretical discourse has developed, which addresses various aspects of the production, consolidation and dynamics of religious authority (Satow 1975; Baumann 1993; Campbell 2007). These aspects include the nature of the authority relationship, the diversity of potential authoritative entities and the structural contexts of authority and they translate into five guiding questions:

Guiding Question I: Which authority relationships are relevant for the consideration of religious authority structures?

A fundamental distinction can be made here between a bilateral and a multilateral perspective. While in Max Weber's classical approach, authority is conceived as a bilateral, or dyadic, relationship between two personal actors (A – B) (Weber 1976: 122), more recent approaches – shaped against the backdrop of social pluralization, individualization and media change –broaden this view to a multilateral perspective, addressing more complex relationships and authority structures (Popitz 1992; Gifford 2005; Horsfield 2016). Some authors even question whether there can be a universal definition of the concept of authority at all. For example, Horkheimer understood authority as "affirmed dependence" (*bejahte Abhängigkeit*) and emphasized that it is always interwoven with social structure and that the concrete meaning of authority changes depending on the social constellations (Horkheimer 1936: 24–25). The multiple levels of social integration and the varying social obligations of an individual can thus be understood as a set of authority relationships (A – B, A – C, … A – X), which overlap and can sometimes come into conflict with one other. Figure 1 illustrates the dyadic and multilateral authority structures.



Dyadic authority relationship according to Weber

Authority structure with diverse potential authorities following Horsfield

Figure 1: Dyadic and multilateral authority structures following Weber (1976) and Horsfield (2016)

Guiding Question II: On what inner attitude are authority relationships based?

This question relates to the attitudes of an individual or a collective towards an authoritative entity: belief in the legitimacy of an authority can be unquestioning and unconditional. However, it can also be governed by a more value-rational attitude, which goes hand in hand with a greater emphasis on the coherence and comprehensibility of religious directives. Finally, the question arises as to whether and to what extent the stability of an authority relationship depends on the authority's ability to prove itself, i.e. its ability to repeatedly fulfil the expectations of its believers or adherents (Weber 1976: 12, 122).

Guiding Question III: Who or what can be considered an instance of authority?

In classical sociological theory, particularly as articulated by Max Weber, authority is fundamentally understood as the legitimate power that individuals or entities hold and exercise by virtue of established social consent and allegiance (Weber 1976). More recent perspectives on authority also focus on non-personal entities of authority. For example, a religious source text can be understood as a direct authority in the context of a literal reading or recitation. In addition, institutions, guiding ideas (e.g., the idea of divine signs in everyday life) and basic ethical positions (e.g., charity as a principle) as well as their material manifestations (e.g., a lightning strike or a wayside cross) can convey claims of authority (Campbell 2007; Gifford 2005; Horsfield 2016).

In the context of migration, globalization and mediatization, it is increasingly unclear who is entitled to speak on behalf of a religious group. Traditional religious authorities (institutions or individuals) are faced with the challenge of adapting religious norms and values to communities experiencing rapid social change as well as to the lifeworld of their followers (for example in a minority constellation). In turn, the followers or adherents are forced to position themselves in complex authority relationships (see guiding question 1) and make decisions in favour of one or more authorities. In doing so, their personal consciences or feelings act as authorities in their own right (El-Wereny/Nagel 2024).

Guiding Questions IV: How does an authority relationship work or: What degrees of allegiance can be distinguished in these relationships?

A relationship of authority is based on instruction and recognition (or, in Weber's Prussian terminology, "Befehl" and "Gehorsam" (command and obedience). Recognition presupposes acceptance of the claim to authority made by a person or institution. This means, for example, that an instance of authority issues instructions which believers follow out of their own free will. If one deviates from these instructions due to certain circumstances (e.g., in a diaspora setting where compliance to ritual norms is not possible due to a lack of suitable infrastructure), this may be a form of justified disobedience. Obedience can therefore be conditional to some extent

(Weber 1976: 122, 140). However, it is also conceivable that individuals do not obey due to a lack of interest in religion (religious indifference) (Gärtner/Pollack/Wohlrab-Sahr 2003: 13).[2]

Overall, a relationship with religious authority can be characterized by a dynamic simultaneity of obedience, adaptation, autonomy, dissent, and suppression — contingent upon both the situational context and the specific sphere of life involved. This multifaceted negotiation is reinforced by, among other factors, digital media, which enable individuals to acquire religious knowledge selectively and autonomously (Campbell 2007; Horsfield 2016). Furthermore, the secular polities of many countries of arrival in the Global North contribute to this subjectivist understanding, as religion is understood as an individual civil right rather than a collective obligation (König 2018; Rohe 2015).

Guiding Question V: In which structural contexts are authority relationships embedded?

In addition to an actor-centred perspective on authority, we believe that the wider socio-cultural or socio-economic context is essential for understanding a given relationship of religious authority. Thus, even in the context of a marketplace of religious offerings, decisions for or against a religious community or lifestyle—and hence for or against specific forms of religious authority—together with processes of religious opinion formation, are framed by other social systems. Examples of such framings are the socio-structural positioning of a relationship of authority (social background, cultural capital), migration experiences and minority constellations, and media-induced changes in religious communication (e.g., under conditions of pandemia) as well as generational differences and shifting public discourses.

Assuming that authority always presupposes a minimum level of acceptance on the part of those who follow that authority, the question arises as to which sources this acceptance can be based upon. Building upon Weber's classical threefold typology, Horsfield (2016, 43-45) differentiates several distinct sources of authority. In the following section, we focus on five of his categories that are particularly pertinent as analytical reference points for understanding religious authority:

Socio-economic position: A claim to authority can be underpinned by the social position held both within (e.g., a religious office) and outside the religious field. Of particular interest here is how religious authority can be derived from secular measures such as material success and economic capital, for example when the wealth of an authority figure is recognized as an expression of his or her religious privileges (e.g., according to the teachings of Prosperity Gospel).

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[2] In sociological debates on religion, religious indifference describes an attitude of uncertainty or lack of concern vis-a-vis God or religious questions in general. Following Gärtner et al., a distinction can be made between existential and cognitive forms of religious indifference. *Existential* religious indifference is marked by a general lack of interest in religion, the absence of religious practice or reflection, and a loss of relevance of religious authorities for everyday life. *Cognitive* religious indifference goes further and treats religion as generally meaningless, so that people neither ascribe significance to religious practice in daily life nor can they decide what they consider true or false in matters of faith. Central theological issues, such as life after death, often remain unanswered for them. According to Gärtner et al., this cognitive stance can ultimately develop into atheism (Gärtner/Pollack/Wohlrab-Sahr 2003).

Knowledge/expertise: In addition, a claim to authority can draw on knowledge, expertise and other forms of cultural capital. Within the religious field, this concerns formal (e.g., a degree in theology) or informal modes of religious scholarship (e.g., knowing the Qurʾan by heart as a hafiz), which are characterized in particular by in-depth knowledge of religious teachings. However, cultural capital outside the religious field can also grant religious authority, for example when the academic training of a community member is inferred to be a sign of his or her religious knowledge, or when someone is respected because he or she "knows how things work" and can thus secure advantages for his or her community (e.g., in the construction of a prestigious sacred building or with the adept use of digital forms of communication).

Wisdom/life experience/seniority: In addition to expertise and knowledge, the wisdom and life experience attributed to a person can also establish religious authority. A classic characteristic for this would be seniority, which has a habitual component in addition to chronological age. In addition, concrete experiences in the life of an authority figure, such as an act of martyrdom, like standing up for one's own religious tradition in a minority context, as well as other forms of heroism can also strengthen religious authority.

Charisma: Some people can simply attract an audience. Unlike Weber (and in line with Horsfield 2016), we do not understand charisma to be a "gift of grace", but rather a certain form of performativity and self-presentation that can be effective in generating authority in its own right. In addition to personal characteristics such as a melodious voice or an impressive stature, charisma also includes acquired forms of cultural capital such as rhetorical ability or group leadership skills.

Collective memory: In addition to actual knowledge of religious teachings, references to specific religious elements or events within the collective memory of a religious group can serve as a source of authority in its own right. Horsfield lists this under the heading of "visual memory" (Horsfield 2016: 45) and gives the example of the role of religious paintings. We believe that the facet of memory can be extended to the wider material field and beyond: If a person succeeds in credibly relating their own actions or biography to the tradition or traditional history of a group, this can endow them with authoritative significance. Examples might be framing oneself as an "instrument of God" or correlating personal biographical events with the narratives of biblical prophets. By utilizing the material elements of a tradition (e.g., buildings, signs, ritual objects), the connection to that tradition is emphasized.

3. Religious authority in context of minority constellations and media change: the contributions to this special issue

In his contribution "Patterns of change in religious authority: routinization, oligarchization and institutionalization" Alexander-Kenneth Nagel offers a synoptic reading and comparison of classic approaches to the routinization of religious authority, namely Max Weber's considerations on the routinization of charisma, Robert Michels' theory of oligarchizing and, through the lens of the

sociology of knowledge, an interpretation of institutionalization as an interactive process. Nagel develops a preliminary understanding of the empirical analysis of the routinization of religious authority and shows how it can be applied in various contexts. He also examines how the routinization of authority is influenced by cultural and social factors, such as the change of media and the impact of globalization.

Maren Freudenberg examines authority relationships across generations in "Generational transition and the transformation of authority structures in an African Pentecostal congregation in western Germany". Based on qualitative research she investigates how and to whom authority is ascribed and she identifies relationships and attitudes towards authority within the congregation. Freudenberg concludes that the church's leadership exerts authority, but not in the way one would expect in a Pentecostal setting: Instead of centralized authority structures and a dominating, "charismatic" pastor, multiple people and groups are granted varying degrees of autonomy to shape congregational life. In particular, this includes the congregation's youth group. To ensure a stable future for the congregation, the leadership delegates authority to this group of young, bicultural, committed Christians who, nonetheless, are reluctant to claim this authority for themselves.

In Sebastian Rimestad's article "L'Église orthodoxe en Europe occidentale. Quelle autorité pour quelle communauté?" (the Orthodox Church in Western Europe. What authority for what community?), he analyses the development of the structures of the Orthodox Church in Western Europe, taking into account local and transnational constructions of the legitimacy of religious authority. He highlights different strategies for dealing with the tension that arises from a historical and territorial religious authority structure ("mother churches") on the one hand, and the loss of territorial references due to the collapse of the political order in Eastern Europe, the diaspora situation of Orthodox Christianity in Western Europe, and impacts of digitalization, on the other hand. In his analysis, Rimestad identifies three strategies that actors in the field use to deal with this situation, thereby illustrating how religious offices are legitimized through detraditionalization, religious innovations and pluralization.

The article by Stefan van der Hoek, "Diakonische Autorität als Widerstand und Ordnungskraft in charismatischen Bewegungen der koptischen Kirche" (Diaconal authority as a force of resistance and order in charismatic movements within the Coptic Church), explores symbolic violence and its connection to authority within the charismatic renewal movement of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. This study is grounded in empirical data drawn from the author's observations and interviews, as well as from previous ethnographic research. Building upon Pierre Bourdieu's framework, the author examines how Abuna Samaan, a charismatic leader, gained distinct authority through exorcisms, healing, and charity among the Zabbaleen community in Cairo, extending his influence beyond church hierarchies. He also highlights conflicts between charismatic groups and the church hierarchy, as well as tensions linked to territorial, digital, and global dynamics.

Evelyn Reuter investigates in her contribution "Facing the shaikh: Sufi authority through self-representation in Halveti Facebook communities" the way Sufi shaikhs represent themselves on Facebook as they assert their authority over communities. Focusing on the Halveti Order in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, the study analyses how shaikhs construct their online identities as authority figures through social media engagement and content creation. Reuter shows how the self-representation of Sufi shaikhs plays a crucial role in how they exercise their own religious authority. She also analyses how the self-representation of Sufi shaikhs is influenced by various factors, such as mediation and migration. The study reveals how these social media personas reveal the shaikhs' self-image as online authorities, thereby offering a deeper understanding of digital media's influence on religious authority and community dynamics. Reuter further develops these findings to elucidate the evolving role of Sufi shaikhs in the digital era.

Mahmud El-Wereny elucidates in his contribution "Religious authority in the digital age: exploring the reception of fatwas and muftis among Muslims in Germany" the significance of fatwas and muftis in the everyday lives of Muslims. Fatwas and muftis provide essential religious norms and guiding principles that orient adherents toward living in harmony with Islamic teachings. His study foregrounds their particular relevance for Muslims residing in Germany and emphasizes the transformative influence of contemporary digital media on this migration constellation. Based on qualitative research, the study critically explores the conceptualizations and practical enactments of fatwas by individuals, investigating the meanings ascribed to these constructs by German Muslims and the factors shaping their adherence to them. Moreover, the investigation illuminates the primary sources of religious authority upon which German Muslims rely, highlighting the increasing predominance of the internet as a pivotal channel for the dissemination and acquisition of Islamic knowledge.

In her article "Digital-Creatorinnen mit Hijab. Modische Inspiration und mediatisierte Modellpraktiken" (Digital creators with Hijab: Fashion inspiration and mediatized modelling practices), Laura Haddad analyses how women who wear the hijab and who have gained increased visibility through the rise of social media act as points of reference for religious authority. The study focuses on how they realize their subject positions as Muslim women in Germany visually and discursively. Using two examples, Haddad identifies the "spiritual mentor" and the "purified" as two types of creators who, in their digital practice examined in terms of modelling practices, give shape to a new female form of Islamic authority in the digital age.

Anna Neumaier and Mehmet Kalender examine in their contribution "Religious authority in the field of German speaking Muslim content creators" different facets of religious authority in Islamic content on the social media platform Instagram. The study's focus is on selected content from Muslim content creators in which aspects of religious authority can be traced. Neumaier and Kalender identify different aggregate states of religious authority on social media by tracking references to religious roles, religious and other knowledge, personal qualities of the creators, and the relationship between content creators and social media users.

Manuel Pachurka's contribution "Zen-Buddhismus im deutschsprachigen Internet – Eine kultursoziologische Annäherung" (Zen Buddhism on the German-language internet – a cultural-sociological approach) focuses on the practice of Zen Buddhism on the German-speaking internet. He analyses forms of religious action that emerge from the digitalization of this religious sphere and examines how authority is exercised in the digital space. Pachurka shows how Zen Buddhism on the German-speaking internet has gained importance and is shaped by various actors, such as Zen masters as well as individuals who engage with Zen Buddhism online. He explores how the rise of social media has led to the increased visibility of Zen Buddhism, and how this has impacted the way Zen Buddhism is practiced and understood in the context of the German-speaking internet.

4. The long shadow of Max Weber, or: afterthoughts on religious authority

As the contributions to this special issue illustrate, the dynamics of authority are diverse, shaped by social contexts, and subject to modernization trends, especially in minority constellations and amid rapid digitalization and media change. As a final point in this introduction, we would like to draw some overarching conclusions from the contributions collected here. To this end, we briefly reflect on a few significant connections between the contributions and then consider the implications for the broader theoretical discussion of religious authority in the present day.

The contributions to this special issue offer different angles for comparison in their approach to examining authority structures. From a thematic angle, the articles oscillate between either migration and minority constellations or digital media as their primary context in examining the construction and transformation of religious authority. Some articles clearly tend to one of these poles, such as the contribution by Freudenberg which mainly deals with face-to-face interactions in an immigrant church, or the article by Haddad that puts a clear emphasis on digital content creation. Yet, others address both thematic aspects in almost equal weight, such as the contributions by Reuter, El-Wereny, and van der Hoek, who explicitly look for authority dynamics at the intersection of minority constellations and the change of media. From a methodological angle, the articles draw on a wide range of approaches from "pure" theory (as in the case of Nagel) to the analysis of policy documents (Rimestad) to qualitative content analysis (e.g., Freudenberg, El-Wereny, Neumaier and Kalender) to more process-oriented approaches of (digital) ethnography (as in the cases of Haddad, Reuter, and van der Hoek). From a conceptual angle, all articles share some common ground in that they analyse authority as a mediated and subtle form of exerting power. In doing so, they emphasize the willingness (or at least acceptance) of actors to comply with authoritative commands. Yet, at the same time, the contributions highlight different aspects of these religious authority dynamics: While Freudenberg emphasizes the interactive reproduction of authority structures through processes of reciprocal recognition, Rimestad and Nagel focus on the institutionalization of religious authority. Other authors, such as Reuter and van der Hoek, conceive of religious authority as a field and hence they concentrate

on the tactics and symbolic struggles present in the self-positioning of minority groups. Pachurka reclaims the role of lineage in the formation of Buddhist digital entrepreneurs whereas Haddad analyses authority as an attribute of model practices rather than as individual actions. Neumaier and Kalender isolate subtle aspects and sources of the production of religious authority in social media content.

If we view the contributions in light of our initial considerations on the instances of authority (see section 2), we encounter a variety of constellations: While Nagel and Rimestad concentrate on authority dynamics within religious institutions, other authors, such as van der Hoek, Freudenberg and El-Wereny, explore the relationship between personal ("prophetic") and institutional ("priestly") authority. And yet another subset of articles takes an actor-centred perspective on persons or digital "personae" as a central locus of religious authority (e.g. Neumaier and Kalender, Reuter, Haddad, Pachurka). Moreover, the articles explore a wide range of sources of authority, some of which are clearly located in the religious domain, such as learnedness, charisma and charitable action (e.g. El-Wereny, Reuter, van der Hoek) whereas others are more broadly connected to life experiences, economic success or technical knowledge about digital infrastructures (e.g. Haddad, Neumaier and Kalender, Reuter, Pachurka)

What did we learn about religious authority in general (and what is still unclear)? The concept paper which we circulated among the authors was meant to provide a preliminary framework in order to provoke a more nuanced conversation between the individual articles. Here we would like to conclude with a critical appraisal of our endeavour as well as some afterthoughts for prospective analyses of "authority" in the scientific study of religion.

The long shadow of Max Weber: Both our concept paper and many of the articles in this special issue underscore the extent to which the debate about religious authority is still influenced by Weber's sociology of domination. The advantages of using Weber's approach are its notion of authority as a relational capacity and its empirical accessibility, i.e. the clear-cut question: Who does what to whom? At the same time, it is disadvantageous as far as it offers a reductionist understanding of authority relationships as dyadic and static and does not sufficiently elaborate on the specific manner in which authority is actually ascribed. Many articles in this special issue address these limitations of Weber's theory. With regard to the first aspect, several contributions follow Horsfield and offer a less reductionist view of authority relationships by conceiving religious authority as a complex and potentially ambiguous "web", "current" or "field" in which authority positions are continuously negotiated, produced and contested. With regard to the second aspect, many articles in this special issue offer more detailed descriptions of how authority is ascribed. In doing this, they suggest that religious authority is not only associated with "priestly" theological learnedness or "prophetic" charisma, but also with apparently mundane qualities, such as socio-economic standing, procedural knowledge or a sense of exemplary behaviour.

Combining actor-centred and (post-)structuralist perspectives: On a more general level, the long shadow of Max Weber seen in this special issue also manifests as a certain bias towards a micro-sociological actor-centred gaze. And while this perspective may be beneficial for empirical operationalization, one might argue that it cannot account for the structural roots of power asymmetries. Hence, it needs to be complemented with *(*post-) structuralist perspectives, either from a Foucauldian viewpoint on epistemic power asymmetries and techniques of disciplining and normalization, or from a Bourdieusian stance on authority as symbolic violence (van der Hoek 2026). Both perspectives can offer productive challenges to further illuminate the intersections between religious authority and knowledge and may allow for a better understanding of the intersectionality of (religious and non-religious) sources of authority.

Religious authority and modernization theory: Without a doubt, Weber's sociology of domination is embedded in an overall teleological theory of modernization, namely occidental rationalization. Even without tackling the inherently colonial framework of this epistemic enterprise, we would do well to explore the modernistic implications of our own approach. For instance, whereas Horsfield and Popitz are certainly right in pointing out the pluralization of authority relations, we should not be too quick to designate complex "webs" or "chains" of authority as solely a characteristic of modernity. At the same time, many of the contributions show how minority constellations and media change are key factors in dismantling and diversifying religious authority constellations. Therefore, it would be productive to complement the contemporary case studies in this special issue with historical micro-analyses of authority dynamics from previous eras.

How critical should an analysis of domination be? Last, but not least, the question arises as to whether and to what extent the analysis of authority dynamics can (or should) adopt a critical impetus. By and large, the contributions in this special issue mainly focus on the observation of authority constellations while avoiding more critical analyses. And while this is fine from a classical Weberian notion of "Werturteilsfreiheit" (principle of value freedom), the above-mentioned post-structuralist and postcolonial perspectives may involve more dynamic understandings of "Herrschafts- und Ideologiekritik" (critisism of domination and ideology). From this perspective, the asymmetrical distribution of power, often at the cost of younger generations (Freudenberg) or religious minorities (van der Hoek, Reuter), demands not only description, but also criticism or even activism. Likewise, the practices of digital content creators (Haddad, Neumaier and Kalender) are not only a fascinating token of late modern religiosity but could be criticized for their commodification of religion or as a manifestation of a neoliberal "Kulturindustrie".

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