

Secularity: Suppressing the sacred in international business

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore and critically examine the integration of religious perspectives in diversity & inclusion initiatives in the context of international business.

Design

This qualitative study employed a case study methodology, focusing on an international consulting firm, inspired by Islamic Sufism, and their clients in South Africa and Pakistan. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with consultants and clients from 25 organizations, participant observations during training sessions, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyze patterns in the data.

Findings

The study revealed that religious ideas and individuals are marginalized in the global business environment through a phenomenon termed ‘secularity’. Consultants from the Islamic Sufi-inspired firm had to detach religious elements from their management model to gain acceptance in secular corporate settings. Participants reported that religious perspectives were systematically excluded, and those expressing religious viewpoints faced significant barriers. The findings emphasize the need for more inclusive D&I practices that genuinely integrate religious diversity into organizational cultures.

Originality

This study introduces the concept of ‘secularity’ to describe the systemic marginalization of religious perspectives in international business, a novel contribution to the diversity & inclusion literature. We challenge the dominant secular paradigm in global business, advocating for more equitable and inclusive integration of religious diversity in organizational practices.

Keywords

Diversity, Inclusion, Secularism, Secularity, Marginalization of religion, Islamic management, Sufism

Paper type

Research paper

Introduction

The rise of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives in International Business (IB) research and practice is driven by complex socio-political forces, extending beyond mere global interconnectedness. Over the past few decades, social movements advocating for equality, evolving workforce demographics, and a growing recognition of the business benefits associated with diverse teams have propelled D&I to the forefront of IB scholarship and corporate agendas (Georgiadou, 2024). In the context of broader management literature, significant research has explored various aspects of diversity, such as gender, race, and ethnicity (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). However, a critical examination is needed to assess how these initiatives might

inadvertently reinforce existing power structures. As Boussebaa (2023) argues, even well-intentioned diversity efforts can marginalize certain groups when implemented under static organizational frameworks. This challenge is especially apparent in the treatment of religious perspectives within IB contexts.

Religion is a fundamental aspect of human identity, profoundly influencing values, work ethics, and consumer behavior across cultures (Gbadamosi, 2021). It is a major force globally, with diverse religious beliefs practiced in all regions where international businesses operate. Ignoring religion limits our understanding of the global workforce and the complex dynamics that shape organizational behavior and employee engagement in multinational contexts (Primecz and Mahadevan, 2024). This oversight is especially problematic given the role of religion in shaping ethical business practices such as fair trade and labor standards (Miller, 2015, Proffitt and Spicer, 2006, Tracey, 2012, Van Buren et al., 2020).

While scholars have highlighted the domination of Western culture in IB practices (Boussebaa, 2021), the hegemony of secularism has largely gone uncontested. This pervasive secular orientation in multinational corporations often leads to the exclusion of religious perspectives and the perpetuation of religious inequalities in the workplace. Some scholars argue that this exclusion represents a significant misrepresentation of reality, particularly in contexts where religion plays a central role in shaping business practices and decision-making processes (Tracey, 2012, Van Laer and Essers, 2024).

Research has highlighted the importance of integrating religious ideas into workplaces, with Gebert et al. (2014) arguing that their marginalization contradicts core principles of inclusion and undermines social justice principles of a multicultural global organization that respects individual and communal identity (Byrd, 2014). Excluding religious perspectives not only limits the ethical and cultural understanding available to organizations but also overlooks alternative management approaches that could strengthen organizational effectiveness in today's complex global business environment. While diversity can be mandated through legislation and policies, inclusion stems from voluntary organizational actions (Winters, 2014). True inclusion involves equal opportunity for members of socially marginalized groups to participate and contribute while concurrently providing opportunities for members of non-marginalized groups, enabling employees to be fully engaged at all levels of the organization and to be authentically themselves (Nishii, 2013).

However, there remains a gap in understanding the complex dynamics of religious diversity in this context. Empirical work is essential to inform and shape efforts that address the challenges faced by marginalized religious stakeholders. Against this backdrop, we aim to examine these complex dynamics, specifically exploring the systemic barriers to the inclusion of religious perspectives in global business settings. More specifically, we address the following research question: *How does the integration of religious perspectives in D&I initiatives influence the practices and ideologies of global businesses, and what are the challenges associated with this integration?*

Our qualitative investigation centers on the case of Schuitema Human Excellence Group, an international consulting firm with roots in Islamic Sufism. This organization, founded in South Africa and operating globally, offers a unique perspective on the challenges of integrating religiously inspired management practices in secular business environments. By examining this case study, we investigate the impediments faced in assimilating religious ideas in the workplace

and explore how employees are expected to conform to the dominant secular ideology, despite harboring differing worldviews.

Our study contributes to the D&I debate in IB literature in several ways. First, we highlight the structural constraints of engaging with religion in IB through a case study of a religiously inspired multinational consulting organization. Second, we propose "seculararchy" as a systemic force that marginalizes religious perspectives in the workplace. This dominant paradigm not only suppresses religious voices but also establishes itself as the hegemonic model for business thought and practice. We demonstrate how seculararchy manifests itself through authority and governance structures, educational systems, and organizational policies and practices that confine religion to the personal domain, thereby repressing it in corporate environments. In this way, we extend the D&I literature beyond documenting religious marginalization to theorize how it operates as a field-level phenomenon. Third, we uncover the forms of agency and resistance adopted by the religious, in their efforts to cope with seculararchy. These include distillation of ideas from their religious context, or otherwise opting out of opportunities where their voices are silenced. Finally, we emphasize the need for a more equitable treatment of religion in D&I initiatives, recognizing the multifaceted nature of marginalization and the importance of challenging the dominance of secular ideologies in IB.

By addressing these critical issues, our research aims to broaden the scope of D&I studies to include religious diversity, offering a better understanding of how global businesses can create truly inclusive environments that respect and integrate diverse religious perspectives. This work responds to calls for more in-depth explorations of diversity dimensions in IB (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023) and contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of religion in shaping global business practices (Van Buren et al., 2020).

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in IB

D&I have become critical areas of focus in IB research, reflecting the increasingly globalized and multicultural nature of the global workforce. Cox (1994) defines diversity as encompassing all the differences that people bring to an organization, while inclusion refers to creating an environment where everyone feels valued and can contribute fully. Similarly, Herring (2009, p. 209) describes diversity management as "policies and practices that seek to include people who are considered, in some way, different from traditional members [of an organization]".

The evolution of D&I research in IB has witnessed a significant shift from a narrow focus on gender and racial dimensions to a broader view of diversity. Paludi et al. (2021) propose fourteen dimensions of diversity, including ethnicity, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, physical characteristics or (dis)abilities, geography, education, marital status, parental status, wealth status, work experience, military experience, and religion. This expansive view recognizes both visible and non-visible differences and the multifaceted nature of human identity, and the complexities involved in creating truly inclusive organizational cultures.

The business case for diversity has been a driving force behind the growing emphasis on D&I initiatives in global firms as beneficial organizational outcomes are associated with employees of diverse backgrounds sharing common ambitions and values with colleagues. For instance, Rao (2012) argues that a diverse workforce fosters creativity, innovation, and better decision-making in the global context. Roberson (2017) further emphasizes the importance of examining D&I

from a strategic perspective, exploring how companies can leverage diverse talent pools to gain a competitive advantage.

Despite calls to engage with all dimensions of diversity (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023), most existing research has primarily focused on gender, racial, and cultural dimensions. Scholars have examined board composition, leadership roles, and the gender pay gap in international firms (Belaounia et al., 2020, van der Straaten et al., 2024) as well as the barriers and benefits associated with gender diversity in organizational decision-making and leadership roles (Carli and Eagly, 2011, Michailova and Hutchings, 2016). Additionally, research has explored the impacts of racial and ethnic diversity on team performance, innovation, and employee engagement (Luu et al., 2019, Richard et al., 2013). However, there remains a conspicuous lack of engagement with religious diversity in IB research. Religious diversity refers to the inclusion and respect of different religious beliefs and practices in multinational firms (Barnard and Mamabolo, 2022). This oversight is significant given the critical role that religion can play in shaping individual's values, behaviors, and interactions in the workplace, as well as on broader organizational policies and decision-making processes (Obregon et al., 2022).

The implications of religious diversity in IB are extensive, influencing aspects such as work hours, holiday observances, dress codes, and ethical considerations. Fostering respect and understanding for employees' religious beliefs promotes inclusivity and improves cultural sensitivity, which can boost employee engagement and satisfaction (King and Williamson, 2005). Embracing religious diversity also helps attract and retain a broader talent pool (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017). Integrating religious perspectives in IB settings serves both as a business opportunity and a social justice imperative. While organizations often frame diversity initiatives as drivers of innovation and competitive advantage, the marginalization of religious perspectives highlights the need for a social justice approach that promotes fair practices for underrepresented groups (Byrd and Sparkman, 2022). This dual perspective emphasizes why religious inclusion requires comprehensive, systemic change rather than isolated interventions.

The lack of research on religious diversity in IB settings further emphasizes the need to explore this critical aspect of diversity. As global businesses continue to navigate increasingly complex multicultural environments, understanding and effectively managing religious diversity will become increasingly important for organizational success and employee well-being.

Barriers to Religious Diversity Engagement

The integration of religious perspectives in IB faces numerous challenges, stemming from deeply ingrained historical, cultural, and structural factors. At the heart of these challenges lies the concept of secularism in business contexts, which often inadvertently marginalizes and sidelines religious considerations (Fernando and Jackson, 2006). Secularism, as defined by Kettell (2019), is a doctrine of impartiality that mandates any formal institution to maintain an equidistant posture in relation to religious affairs, ensuring that no belief system is endorsed or suppressed. While secularism evolved organically in Western Europe, in other regions, it was often imposed from above, sometimes coercively, facilitated by colonialism, modernity, scientific rationalism, and globalization (Asad, 2003, Iqtidar, 2011, Mahmood, 2015).

The proliferation of secularism has led to a gradual shift away from religious authority and towards a more secular worldview in business contexts. This shift is further compounded by the frequent association of religion with violence, which reinforces secularism as a safeguard against

conflict (Juergensmeyer et al., 2013). However, an alternate historical perspective recognizes religion's capacity to promote peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and unity across diverse racial, ethnic, and national groups (Asad, 2003, Beekun, 1997, Rauf and Prasad, 2020), challenging the notion of religion as inherently divisive (Mitroff, 2003). In practice, achieving neutrality and integrating religion in IB is challenging. Mahmood (2009) argues that the 'religious' and 'secular' spheres are not separate but intertwined. Secularism often shapes religious beliefs to fit contemporary norms and administrative practices, making religion a complex issue in the workplace (Van Buren and Greenwood, 2008). There is often a lack of awareness and training on how to manage religious diversity effectively (Budhwar and Sparrow, 2002).

The shift towards Weberian rationalism in organizations has led to the relegation of religion to the private sphere, disconnecting it from public administrative functions (Tracey et al., 2014). This Western-centric perspective does not reflect the reality in many parts of the world where religion remains integral to society (Jammulamadaka and Ul-Haq, 2022, Khan and Koshul, 2011, Van Buren et al., 2020), a fact that warrants consideration.

Despite these barriers, emerging research is beginning to address religious diversity in organization studies (Khan et al., 2022). Comprehensive reviews, such as Obregon et al. (2022), provide valuable insights into the intersection of religiosity, spirituality, and work. Empirical studies have demonstrated that religious principles can improve ethical conduct in the workplace (Horak and Yang, 2018, Ziad, 2022), and preliminary results suggest that religious diversity can positively impact organizational outcomes, such as employee satisfaction and organizational commitment (Abu Bakar et al., 2018, Tennakoon and Lasanthika, 2018). Similarly, Gümüşay (2019) has argued that religions possess distinct characteristics that significantly influence leadership principles: a belief in and relationship to a divine being, pursuit of transcendent purpose, and adherence to sacred scripture. These elements can either inform existing leadership theories or fundamentally transform them, offering unique insights into how religious leaders navigate organizational contexts while maintaining their spiritual integrity.

Research has also shown that gender and religion can intersect to create distinct workplace experiences. For example, Muslim women often face unique challenges due to the intersection of their religious and gender identities, such as wearing a hijab, which can lead to stereotyping and discrimination (Syed and Pio, 2010). Similarly, race and religion can intersect as employees who belong to racial and religious minorities encounter barriers to career growth due to prejudice or lack of inclusive policies (Arifeen and Gatrell, 2013).

Despite these positive developments, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of how religious perspectives are embedded in IB organizations. Moreover, the personal experience of religious-minded individuals in multinationals is an area that has not been sufficiently explored. Further research is needed to explore the cross-cultural lived experiences of employees, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex role that religion plays in global firms.

Case study: Schuitema Human Excellence Group

The Schuitema (pronounced *Skay-tema*) Human Excellence Group, founded in 1989 by Etsko Schuitema, provides a compelling case study for examining the integration of religiously inspired leadership principles in IB contexts. Schuitema, a South African management consultant and revered Sufi master in the Shadhili-Darqawi Islamic spiritual order, developed the Care and Growth leadership model based on his experiences and spiritual journey (Khan and Naguib,

2017). Schuitema's journey began during the tumultuous apartheid era of the 1980s when, as a researcher for the Human Resources Laboratory of the South African Chamber of Mines, he investigated the causes of employee dissatisfaction and distrust. His discoveries were revelatory, pinpointing care and growth as pivotal elements fostering employee loyalty and reducing workplace conflict (Schuitema, 2021).

The Care and Growth model, rooted in Sufism and Islamic spirituality, integrates profound religious wisdom with extensive global business experience. At its core, the model posits that leadership is fundamentally about intent rather than behavior (Schuitema, 2011a). It argues that genuine leaders possess a 'benevolent intent' – an altruistic desire to give unconditionally and to care for their subordinates by attending to their needs and fostering their personal and professional growth. Schuitema's approach challenges the prevalent view of using people as mere resources for personal gain, which he terms 'malevolent intent'. Instead, he suggests that when organizations shift their focus away from profit and efficiency as primary goals and operate from a place of benevolence, desired outcomes naturally follow as a byproduct of good intent (Khan and Naguib, 2017). The Schuitema Group has disseminated the Care and Growth model through training programs to over 200 organizations in 27 countries. With its headquarters in South Africa and a branch in Pakistan, the group has been instrumental in mentoring global organizations and is widely recognized for its effectiveness in transforming organizational cultures and enhancing leadership capabilities (Schuitema, 2021).

However, the implementation of this religiously inspired leadership model in secular business environments has not been without challenges. Despite its spiritual foundations, Schuitema predominantly frames his management model in secular language in his discourse and training programs (Schuitema, 2011b, Schuitema, 2021). This strategic choice minimizes emphasis on the model's spiritual underpinnings to align with modern business norms, where integrating religious concepts is often seen as inappropriate. The case of the Schuitema Group provides valuable lessons into the complexities of integrating religious perspectives in IB settings. It demonstrates both the benefits of religiously inspired leadership models, and the challenges faced in their implementation in predominantly secular corporate environments.

This case study is especially relevant to research on religious diversity in IB as it highlights the tensions between religious and secular worldviews in global business contexts. It also provides a practical example of how religiously inspired concepts can be adapted and applied in diverse cultural settings, offering lessons for future efforts to integrate religious diversity in multinational organizations.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology, well-suited for in-depth exploratory research (Creswell, 2014), enabling a thorough examination of complex phenomena in real-life contexts (Stake, 2005). This approach uncovers the specific ways religious marginalization manifests in IB, aligning with Parent et al. (2013)'s assertion that qualitative methods capture phenomenological experiences related to marginalization. Such a method is essential for examining how individuals interpret and make sense of bias or discrimination rooted in religious differences. The case study centered on the Schuitema Human Excellence Group and its clientele, examining the rich experiences of both consultants and client personnel. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, ensuring a rich and multidimensional understanding of the case (Tracy, 2010). This

multifaceted approach provided a holistic view of the Care and Growth model's impact, revealing the challenges of integrating Sufi principles into modern management practices.

Data Collection

The primary data source was interviews with key stakeholders, including consultants from the case study firm and managers/leaders from client organizations. The selection of interviewees began with purposive sampling, targeting individuals with rich knowledge relevant to the research question (Glaser, 1978). This was supplemented by snowball and theoretical sampling, guided by emerging patterns in the data (Glaser and Strauss, 2006, Oppong, 2013). Interviews continued until data saturation was reached (Guest et al., 2006). A total of 57 interviews were conducted across 25 organizations in Pakistan and South Africa. Most of these interactions were face-to-face, with only four conducted online. Demographic information was meticulously collected, encompassing variables such as age, gender, job title, educational background, work experience, and tenure in the current organization. This demographic profiling is essential for qualitative analysis, allowing for a detailed interpretation of the data (White and Cooper, 2022).

Observations were made during training sessions, providing a complementary perspective to the interview data. A total of 8 sessions, spanning 13 days, were observed after obtaining permission from client organizations. Detailed field notes were taken during and immediately after the observations to capture the context and distinctive features of the observed behaviors and interactions (Wästerfors, 2018). Interviews and observations were conducted in key Pakistani cities – Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi – and in Johannesburg, South Africa. These locations were strategically chosen for their significance to the Schuitema organization. Organizational documents, training materials, and client feedback were also reviewed to complement the findings from interviews and observations.

For the purposes of this study, we followed the definition of religion as "the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred," (Chan-Serafin et al., 2013, p. 3) including the validated means and methods of this search in a community (Hill et al., 2000). Following Boussebaa et al. (2012), we adopted a critical approach during interviews, consciously probing beyond idealized accounts of diversity and inclusion to understand the actual practices and experiences of religious marginalization. We complemented senior management perspectives with views from middle managers and employees to capture possible contradictions between formal policies and lived experiences.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was meticulously structured to ensure accuracy and completeness. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, providing a reliable basis for subsequent analysis. These recordings were then systematically processed using MAXQDA (2018) software, a tool well-suited for qualitative data analysis. We employed thematic analysis, a robust technique widely acknowledged in qualitative research, as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method involved a rigorous examination of the data, where we identified, coded, and scrutinized recurring patterns and themes. Boyatzis (1998) further elaborates on this approach, highlighting its effectiveness in uncovering significant themes.

The data analysis followed a systematic three-stage coding procedure (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Initial open coding identified key themes around religious marginalization. Axial coding then established relationships between these themes, primarily focusing on how religious

perspectives were systematically excluded through various organizational mechanisms. Finally, selective coding conceptualized these relationships to develop our theoretical framework around seculararchy. We then refined our themes to construct a detailed "analytic narrative" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 93). This narrative was enriched by incorporating verbatim transcriptions of relevant audio segments, ensuring that the participants' voices were authentically represented.

For clarity and accessibility, any excerpts originally in Urdu were carefully translated into English. This translation process was conducted with attention to preserving the original meaning and context, thereby maintaining the integrity of the data presented. Throughout the analysis process, we engaged in constant comparison, continuously comparing new data with existing codes and categories to refine our understanding and ensure theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 2006). We also employed member checking, presenting our initial findings to a subset of participants to validate the accuracy of our interpretation (Madill and Sullivan, 2018).

Findings

Our findings are summarized in Table I, and elaborated in three key areas: (a) marginalization of religion; (b) strategies and mechanisms for secular domination; and (c) forms of agency and resistance.

Table I. Summary of Findings

Theme	Sub-Theme	Example Quote/Incident
Marginalization of Religion in the Workplace	Marginalization of Religious Ideas	Sometimes the clients <i>specifically</i> ask us <i>not</i> to have <i>any</i> mention of religion <i>whatsoever</i> . (Female Pakistani consultant)
	Marginalization of Religious People	If you have a religious appearance, they would be very anti ... but it is not from a law point of view, they would probably have made laws of inclusiveness as well, but culturally speaking you could tell that those who have religious beliefs they, in subtle ways, do not tolerate them in the upper circles (Male Pakistani manager)
Strategies and Mechanisms for Secular Domination	Maintaining Hierarchical Control	What is affirmed is what is valued by senior people, so senior people cultivate themselves by finding people in their juniors who most display these ... values or characteristics and those are the people who then rise to the top of enterprises. (Male South African consultant)

	Biasing Education	I do think it's the universities, I mean they've been <i>absolutely</i> party to the manufacturing of this secular worldview. (Male South African consultant)
Forms of Agency and Resistance by the Religious	Sanitizing Religion-Based Ideas	Because we live in a world which is, I mean for most of it, almost self-consciously atheist. And so, if you want to get people to revisit the significance of things other than the immediate material, you've got to find a way of, in a sense, "flying under the radar". (Male South African consultant)
	Opting Out of Opportunities	A senior manager in a Pakistani organization tried in vain to make his voice heard in opposition to a proposal as part of a company expansion initiative for a microfinance venture, which he felt was unethical (taking or giving interest is prohibited in Islam). However, his opinion was discredited as a personal religious matter, and ended up in the manager opting out from the project.

Marginalization of Religion in the Workplace

The exploration of religious integration in the workplace unveiled several facets of how religion is perceived and treated in modern corporate settings. This investigation led to the identification of distinct themes: the marginalization of religious ideas and the marginalization of religious individuals.

Marginalization of Religious Ideas

The Care and Growth model, deeply rooted in Sufism as discussed by Khan and Naguib (2017), was significantly influenced by Schuitema's spiritual journey and Islamic spirituality.

Schuitema's approach to resolving workplace conflicts was shaped by his internal spiritual development, which he described as follows:

... My trying to ... understand things in the world was putting pressure on my own understanding of how I function on the inside — my own spirituality. And that, in turn, gave me tools to have a deeper understanding of what was going on around me. So, I don't think ... I would have had the models that have been developed if I wasn't at the same time busy with my own inner work. (Etsko Schuitema)

Despite the spiritual foundations (Schuitema, 2011a), Schuitema predominantly frames his management model in secular language in his discourse (Schuitema, 2021, Schuitema, 2011b) and training programs. This strategic choice minimizes emphasis on the model's spiritual underpinnings to align with modern business norms, where integrating religious concepts is often seen as inappropriate. A consultant from South Africa echoed this sentiment:

... It's not mentioned anywhere because ... I think quite blatantly ... I just feel like it wouldn't be received well if it was mentioned ... You know if we went in as a religiously based organization — especially *Islamically* based organization — I think we would struggle ... (Male South African consultant)

The pervasive influence of secularism appears to underpin this marginalization, systematically relegating religious perspectives to the periphery of corporate dialogue and restricting spiritual matters to the realm of personal beliefs. This view was further elaborated by a Pakistani manager:

In the current environment in which we are working ... the concept of religion has been broken down as a very personal thing ... for this reason, in the workplace, religion is not encouraged, as it is your personal matter. ... So, for getting work done in the workplace there will be something else, some other principles. So ... if there is any religion-based thing, people will not accept it. But this is a dilemma, the way the definition of religion is being explained to people now, it is natural that they will respond in this manner. ... The decision makers, majority of them will discredit it or they will not encourage it. (Male Pakistani manager)

This perspective suggests that religion is perceived as a matter of personal conviction, while the corporate sphere remains secular. Consequently, managers tend to dismiss religious concepts, either subtly or overtly. This dichotomy between private and public spheres is further illustrated by the experiences shared by other informants. For instance, two female consultants from Pakistan reported that in private group sessions, religious discussions were welcomed, whereas corporate clients often requested the exclusion of religious topics: "Sometimes the clients *specifically* ask us *not* to have *any* mention of religion *whatsoever*." (Female Pakistani consultant)

This phenomenon reflects the public/private divide created by secularism. Additionally, some participants tactfully avoided discussing religion when it surfaced in interview questions, adhering to the unwritten workplace rule that reserves such conversations for more intimate personal interactions.

A Pakistani manager viewed Schuitema's intervention as a welcome relief. He recalled that upon learning Etsko was a Sufi Shaykh, he eagerly anticipated learning about management from a Sufi perspective, as religious viewpoints were rarely allowed expression in organizational environments.

Marginalization of Religious People

Our field observations revealed that marginalization transcends religious concepts and extends to individuals of faith. This phenomenon is encapsulated in the following quote:

I think people, ... they also look at who is talking. If it is someone with a husky voice and gel-packed hair or if it is a person with a somewhat religious appearance, this also

matters. Even if it is not in that (religious) language, but who's saying this. (Male Pakistani manager)

The preceding quote implies that individuals with a visibly religious demeanor may find it challenging to convey their thoughts, as their appearance often leads others to associate their ideas with religiosity, regardless of the actual content. Conversely, those who practice their faith yet adopt a non-traditional appearance might encounter fewer obstacles in having their voices acknowledged. Another quote illustrated this point:

I mean there is a question whether it is a typical *maulvi* (Muslim cleric or religious person) or different *maulvi*, ... this is also an issue somewhat. ... Meaning one is an orthodox and the other is not orthodox. So, I think the new generation, for whom there are soul-searching questions, approach those who are not orthodox more. (Male Pakistani manager)

The prevailing view is that employees might prefer interacting with colleagues who don't conspicuously display their religiosity, rather than with those who adhere to more traditional expressions of faith. Indeed, the participant suggests that judgments about one's religiosity are often inferred from their physical appearance, which in turn influences how their comments are received. Moreover, individuals who present themselves in a religious manner frequently encounter a paradox in 'liberalism' – a concept that, despite its claims to open mindedness and tolerance, sometimes fails to accommodate visible signs of faith. This contradiction was highlighted by a participant:

They start labelling you, ... this is a person with religious views.

... people should look at it without any biases, who's saying it and what is being said, you know, if they look at things on merit then they should be able to understand it. ... (But) they don't because people have biases. No matter what they call themselves — liberal, or modern, ... (Male Pakistani manager)

The participant believes that ideas should be judged solely on their own merits, irrespective of the speaker's identity. Yet, in practice, he finds this is often not the case. Some participants highlighted a discrepancy between the ideals of inclusion campaigns and the reality of religious exclusion, especially at the upper echelons of management. A manager in Pakistan observed that while religious symbols were ostensibly included in his local organization's diversity initiatives, the actual policies and activities were predominantly centered on gender, with little attention to religious diversity. Furthermore, when comparing his experiences between a local firm and a multinational corporation in Pakistan, he remarked on the noticeable absence of individuals with beards – a common indicator of Islamic faith – in the senior ranks of the multinational, despite their presence in the local company's leadership.

If you have a religious appearance, they would be very anti ... but it is not from a law point of view, they would probably have made laws of inclusiveness as well, but culturally speaking you could tell that those who have religious beliefs they, in subtle ways, do not tolerate them in the upper circles (Male Pakistani manager)

The manager also expressed that individual with beards refrained from sharing religious views, perceiving it as 'crossing a red line' – an unspoken boundary not to be breached.

While the broader socio-religious context exerts some influence on sidelining religion-oriented management practices, our study's findings did not reveal as substantial an impact as one might

anticipate. In Pakistan, where Muslims constitute the vast majority, a specific prejudice against Islam was not discernible. We observed that local consultants occasionally incorporated more religious references during training sessions than their South African peers, yet these were typically presented as cultural rather than religious elements. Although Schuitema's network of followers contributed to team dynamics in Pakistani companies, the nation's Muslim-majority demographic did not significantly affect client recruitment, since the model was predominantly marketed on secular grounds.

In contrast, South Africa's Christian-majority setting and its religiously varied populace prompted Schuitema's team to take care to convey their model strictly in a secular context, to broaden its appeal among clients. Nevertheless, the tendency to distance corporate culture from religious matters was a common thread observed in both countries. A South African consultant remarked on this global phenomenon:

I think any religion would have a problem, Islam would have a much bigger problem in South Africa, Christianity would have a much bigger problem in Pakistan, ... I mean in South Africa definitely Islam would have a much bigger problem than Christianity would. But I think because it's the secular nature of society any religion would have a problem, you know. (Male South African consultant)

The above quote suggests that any country employing the model could encounter obstacles if it incorporates religious implications. In a non-Muslim country, resistance might arise not only from general dissent but also from the perspective of a specific religion. Conversely, in a Muslim-majority nation, the main contention would likely stem from the secular versus religious dichotomy. In certain settings, like the UK, the work atmosphere is so wary that consultants may face accusations of religious proselytization and confront hostile reactions, even in the absence of overt religious allusions.

And I have had lots of experiences that I have had in my life where people have misunderstood me, so for instance ... like ... that happened to me a lot in the UK ... I mean I've been accused of preaching religion in the UK.

And I've had other contexts where people accused me of basically propagating, generally Islam, that they think I am trying to ... you know sort of Christians think I am ... because you know ... in a sense they get threatened by the pragmatism of what I am saying. And so, the only defense is that they charge it to be religious (proselytization), so I try and stay out of that debate. I try *not* to engage in that. (Male South African consultant)

In summary, the findings highlight how religious marginalization in the workplace manifests both in the treatment of religious ideas and individuals, influenced by the secular nature of corporate culture. This marginalization varies across countries but maintains common threads of resistance to religious integration in professional settings which contradicts the core principle of inclusion.

Strategies and Mechanisms for Secular Domination

Our research uncovered various tactics by which secularism asserts and sustains its predominance in the professional environment, manifesting through several strategies.

Maintaining Hierarchical Control

Secularism in the professional realm is perceived by some participants as a lingering effect of the historical background of MNCs. This perspective was articulated by a consultant:

Clearly the approach that we have to corporates today is ... the product of how corporations developed in western Europe ... via the various East India trading companies that created these multinational corporates. And what came with that also was a cultural chauvinism of superiority, that initially sort of had a Christian footing to it but it became increasingly atheist and, in that sense, secular. (Male South African consultant)

The individuals in the upper echelons of these organizations were deeply ingrained in Western values, steering the organizations towards their ideologies, including secularism. This leadership perpetuated its influence by consistently recruiting and advancing individuals who aligned with secular principles to prominent positions.

What is affirmed is what is valued by senior people, so senior people cultivate themselves by finding people in their juniors who most display these ... values or characteristics and those are the people who then rise to the top of enterprises. (Male South African consultant)

A manager from Pakistan cited the appointment of the new head of HR in his organization as illustrative of this trend. The appointee, with UK-based education and over 20 years of professional experience there, was favored by the Western-oriented senior management over candidates with local education and experience.

Our management (will give preference to) such CVs ... so when he comes as the head of HR ... obviously (he will put in place) policies like that ... which are secular-based ... and where they then ensure it. (Male Pakistani manager)

Individuals with more religious perspectives are often marginalized or confined to subordinate positions. These lower tiers are more readily managed in organizations due to the prevalent high-power distance in these nations.

Biasing Education

A significant bastion of secular influence is the Western education system, which remains the dominant educational framework in these nations. As demonstrated by the HR manager's example above, individuals with Western educational backgrounds are often selected for key roles in both local and multinational firms. A consultant reflected on this trend, stating:

I do think it's the universities, I mean they've been *absolutely* party to the manufacturing of this secular worldview. They've produced the ideology of the age and they've done so in all of the disciplines. I mean, they've created the conditions where ... there's this cynical worldview that puts itself forward as scientificity. (Male South African consultant)

Western educational institutions and curricula often exhibit an inherent bias against religion, predominantly reflecting the European narrative shaped by interactions with Catholic institutions during the Middle Ages. This perspective tends to overshadow the religious experiences and sentiments of other regions and faiths. One consultant pointed out how the perception of religion fostered by such education is dismissive, often labeled as 'hocus-pocus' – deemed impractical, ineffective, and irrational. A manager elaborated on this situation:

If you do a religious discussion with a western child, then they will come back with, because they have been taught, “Look, 500 years ago, the pope did this and since we brought the concept of secularism and we separated religion from it then democracy was also invented, central banks were also invented, world economy was also invented” ... these thoughts are put in the minds of those children, so if you want to teach them that “No, you are not looking the total picture”, I think that things will also get corrected from there. (Male Pakistani manager)

Participants expressed that fostering discussions around religion and secularism in the workplace could pave the way for a deeper mutual understanding. However, such conversations are hindered as the topic of religion remains largely taboo within organizational settings. Conversely, there is a noticeable shift towards religious beliefs among individuals seeking answers beyond the scope of secularism, especially regarding existential queries about life’s higher purposes. This inclination towards spirituality is amplified by the widespread availability of religious content through digital media and the internet. Unfortunately, without the aforementioned dialogue, this trend is contributing to a growing divide between secular and religious viewpoints.

Forms of Agency and Resistance by the Religious

Our data provides evidence of the diverse responses of religious individuals when confronted with various types of religious marginalization in the workplace.

Sanitizing Religion-Based Ideas

The prevalence of secularism and workplace bias against religious practices necessitates those concepts originating in religious traditions be carefully separated from their spiritual associations. This allows for their strategic presentation in a manner that circumvents existing prejudices. A South African consultant articulated this dilemma as follows:

Because we live in a world which is, I mean for most of it, almost self-consciously atheist. And so, if you want to get people to revisit the significance of things other than the immediate material, you've got to find a way of, in a sense, “flying under the radar”. ... So, I think the key challenge for all people of belief today, is to articulate the truth of what they have to say in such a way ... that they are not seen to be proselytizing because the moment you do that you've lost the people, they're just not interested. (Male South African consultant)

Consequently, religious ideas, even if relevant to the organizational collective, may not be expressed freely or openly to avoid losing clients’ attention. Another consultant in South Africa concurred on the necessity of positioning the model carefully, ensuring it is free from any religious elements.

But when you put it in front of them in such a simple manner that is devoid of, sort of political or religious allegiances, then they can easily accept it. But if contains any political or religious allegiances, then the Christian would deny that truth, because ... in accepting that truth, they're accepting a position contrary to theirs, in their minds. (Male South African consultant)

The pressure to sanitize Schuitema’s model from its religious branding was felt not only by the consultants but also by employees of the client organizations. A female South African manager at a client organization recounted how, in a previous job, she had unsuccessfully tried to convince

Muslim managers in South Africa of management ideas from an Islamic perspective. However, when Schuitema presented the same ideas separated from the Islamic context, the managers were not only open to them but actually excited.

When I was trying to *sell* those ideas (from an Islamic perspective) ... they would never have listened to me ... the middle management (in that organization) is (mostly) Muslim, males, and females, ... So, of course these people knew why they were sitting with him, but they didn't want to be told he was a Muslim. They were buying the package ... for their business. (Female South African manager)

Thus, the same ideas have opposite effects when marketed non-religiously as opposed to religiously. As a result, consultants must purge the model's ideas of religious association before presenting them to make them palatable. Knowing the religious background of the consultancy's founder and his philosophy, senior management at a South African client was forced to avoid any references to religion:

Etsko's a Muslim ... what we deliberately always did was avoid (religious references). So, I mean the truth is, this is really about bringing you closer to God, you know that this is what the whole thing is really about. I always avoided talking it in those terms ... but ... we never put that in the organization, I just want to make that clear, because we had some, sort of devout Christians who would have run the other way if we even talked of anything that had a religious context that wasn't exactly in line with *their* religious beliefs, you know and everyone has got their own religious beliefs. So, we never sort of covered those things. (Male South African manager)

The quote suggests that people hold diverse beliefs, and associating an idea with a specific religion might alienate those who hold different religious views. Similar to their South African counterparts, Pakistani clients feel pressure to present the Care and Growth model as secular, fearing ostracization in companies striving for a Westernized image for domestic and international audiences. Conversely, some employees saw religious framing as controversial despite the model's core values (generosity, courage, altruism) resonating universally. This suggests a desire to maintain a modern, secular image which took precedence over acknowledging the benefits of religious framing.

But the issues of generosity and courage are deep issues, you know, and those are the issues that affect the organization, so those are *legitimate* subjects for discussion — around generosity and courage. And those really are one of the key issues in terms of spiritual advancement is the issue of generosity and courage ... So to me it was a path of spiritual discovery that I was seeing out of this, but I wouldn't have explained that to everyone else, simply because everyone has their own, and sometimes very dogmatic, view of what spiritual discovery is about, depending on your religion, or lack of it, ... everyone has their own view of that ... (Male South African manager)

Our findings highlight a key tension: both consultants and clients felt compelled to present the Schuitema model, despite its religious roots, in purely secular terms. This aimed to avoid perceptions of it being 'unnecessarily religious' among clients, peers, or supervisors. This implicit filtering process, where religious references are removed from the model, is essential to improve its palatability in the secular business world. This creates a significant barrier – a secularized public/private divide – that emerging ideas, especially those with religious underpinnings, must overcome to gain acceptance:

So, for *me*, because the bifurcation, because the split between the sacred and the secular is false — the sacred is secular, the secular is sacred — you've got to articulate this truth in such a way that you provide something fresh, that doesn't end up in either of the two terrains. (Male South African consultant)

This quote suggests that downplaying the religious aspects of the model (secularizing the sacred) can encourage a more positive perception. After all, client perception is vital for maintaining their interest and ensuring they believe they are receiving value.

Opting Out of Opportunities

Our client interviews revealed that marginalization of religious ideas happens not only in the consultant-client relationship but also in corporations. A senior manager in a Pakistani organization tried in vain to make his voice heard in opposition to a proposal as part of a company expansion initiative for a microfinance venture, which he felt was unethical (taking or giving interest is prohibited in Islam). However, his opinion was discredited as a personal religious matter, and ended up in the manager opting out from the project. Another Pakistani manager recounted an incident when his company faced serious financial trouble due to interest-based loans. While the firm focused on increasing revenue to overcome its financial woes, the manager believed that eliminating the loans was the solution. Despite being assigned to present proposals to top management, he was too afraid to suggest this solution due to his religious appearance and the Islamic prohibition against interest, which would frame it as a religious issue. Eventually, the firm succumbed to a hostile takeover by a competitor.

The difference in approaches between consultants and most managers can be attributed to the resources available for strategizing. For consultants, having a like-minded team in the organization and integrating the issue with their core business strategy can provide the impetus to allocate time and cognitive resources to develop a refined strategy of sanitization. This may also apply to managers who received significant individual mentoring from the consultants. In contrast, most other managers might struggle alone with these issues amid numerous pressing 'firefighting' concerns, which limit their ability to develop more effective strategies in the face of such suppression, leading to their exclusion or silencing.

Discussion

Our study contributes meaningfully to the D&I discourse in IB by exploring how societal biases intersect with organizational practices. We argue for a truly inclusive approach to diversity, one that extends beyond traditional categories like gender and race to include often-overlooked aspects such as religion. This aligns with recent calls in the literature to address how dismantling oppression is essential for fostering equality and human dignity in the workplace (Byrd, 2014). In our case study, we observed religious marginalization, which directly contradicts the principle of inclusion. This systematic exclusion of religious perspectives presents a substantial challenge to achieving genuinely inclusive workplaces. In the context of religious diversity, true inclusion requires environments where religious identities are not only accepted but valued as sources of unique strengths and contributions to organizational life.

This study extends beyond documenting religious marginalization to theorize how it operates as a field-level phenomenon through 'secularchry' - a systemic dominance of secular values and ideologies that marginalizes religious perspectives in organizational contexts. This concept provides a novel analytical lens through which to understand the persistent barriers to religious

inclusion in diversity initiatives. In the realm of IB, secularism manifests as a pervasive preference for secular ideologies and practices over religious ones in multinational firms. This concept provides a novel analytical lens through which to understand the persistent barriers to religious inclusion in D&I initiatives. Secularism operates through multiple mechanisms in organizational settings. Firstly, it influences authority and governance structures, with power typically concentrated in the hands of those who adhere to and promote secular ideologies - often Western-educated individuals in senior management positions. Secondly, it is reinforced through educational systems which shape the worldviews of future business leaders. Thirdly, it is deeply embedded in organizational policies and practices that relegate religion to the private sphere, creating a stark public/private divide in professional settings. Lastly, secular dominance is also maintained through what Bourdieu (1998) terms 'illusio' - the implicit rules and taken-for-granted assumptions that govern organizational life. This helps explain why even well-intentioned diversity initiatives often fail to meaningfully integrate religious perspectives.

Our research highlights a profound division between religion and business, a phenomenon that persists even in nations where such separation is not evident at the societal or political level. This finding aligns with Asad et al. (2009, p. 26)'s observation that "what is plausibly liberating in one context is clearly repressive in another." While secularism in Western societies is often associated with liberalism and progress, our study reveals its tendency to be oppressive in different cultural contexts, especially in the Global South. This marginalization of religious perspectives in IB mirrors what Boussebaa (2023) identifies as the field's broader tendency to exclude non-Western knowledge systems and experiences. Just as IB research has historically privileged Western epistemologies, our results suggest that secular perspectives have achieved a similar hegemonic status in multinationals.

The study also sheds light on the strategies employed by religious individuals to navigate this secular dominance. Some, such as Schuitema, exercise agency by distilling religious ideas from their original context and removing overtly religious elements to make them more palatable in secular corporate environments. This strategic detachment of religious elements from management models aligns with what Gümüşay (2019) identifies as a common coping mechanism among religious leaders in secular organizations - the need to 'fly under the radar' by articulating religious truths in ways that would not be perceived as proselytizing. This strategic sanitization of religious content reveals what Ferdman (2017) terms the 'inclusion paradox' - wherein individuals must downplay their authentic identities to be included, thereby undermining the very premise of inclusive practices. The consultants' careful navigation of religious expression illustrates how inclusion initiatives can inadvertently reinforce rather than challenge existing power hierarchies.

Nevertheless, those lacking the resources for such strategic approaches often face silence and exclusion. This supports Hilde and Mills (2015)' observation that the pressure to conform to mainstream discourses can limit workplace opportunities for marginalized groups. Moreover, the concept of psychological safety takes on special significance when examining religious marginalization in IB contexts (Byrd, 2024). The experience of psychological safety may differ significantly for religious individuals entering predominantly secular business environments, where their worldviews and practices may be viewed as incompatible with modern corporate culture.

Our work contributes to the epistemic expansion of D&I literature by providing rich, qualitative empirical evidence from the Global South. This contribution emphasizes the need to treat

religious communities not merely as beneficiaries of inclusion initiatives, but as true stakeholders who should have an agency in determining how their perspectives are integrated into organizational practices. This is especially significant as it demonstrates how organizational cultures can either perpetuate or challenge what Mor Barak and Daya (2014) describe as “exclusionary workplaces based on the perception that all workers need to conform to pre-established organizational values and norms” (p. 393). Our findings suggest that secularism operates as such a pre-established norm, requiring religious individuals to conform to secular expectations. Our exploration of the often-overlooked religious perspective in an IB setting inherently challenges and disrupts the secular order that has long dominated management discourse. We caution against superficial adoption of diversity rhetoric in global firms, which may lead to unfulfilled commitments regarding the acknowledgment and support of religious voices. Such superficial approaches often address inclusion without challenging the deep-rooted knowledge systems and relational structures that maintain existing power dynamics (Yousfi, 2021, Henry and Leroy-Dyer, 2024). True inclusion requires a more fundamental re-evaluation of organizational norms and practices.

The concept of secularism that we introduce builds upon and extends existing critiques of secular dominance in organizational studies. It provides a better understanding of how secular ideologies permeate organizational structures and practices, often to the detriment of religious diversity. This concept can serve as a valuable tool for scholars and practitioners seeking to understand and address the systematic marginalization of religious perspectives in global business environments. This marginalization fundamentally contradicts not only the core principles of D&I but also of organizational social justice - the ideology that organizations should create cultures where all individuals feel included, accepted, and respected, and where human dignity and equality are upheld (Byrd, 2014). The systematic exclusion of religious perspectives represents a failure in social justice advocacy, which refers to organizing efforts to bring about change within systems that sustain oppressive conditions. Our findings also have important implications for the practice of diversity management in multinational corporations. They suggest that current approaches to D&I, which often treat religion as a private matter, may be insufficient to create truly inclusive environments. Instead, organizations may need to develop better approaches that recognize and value religious diversity as an integral part of employees' identities and a source of organizational strength.

Our analysis of religious inclusion in the workplace reveals a complex tension that merits further examination. The very act of advocating for religious inclusion in the framework of diversity and inclusion initiatives could be seen as inadvertently reinforcing the supremacy of secular ideologies in organizational contexts. By positioning religion as "just another identity" to be accommodated, we risk perpetuating the marginalization of religious perspectives rather than challenging the fundamental assumptions of secularism. This approach may indeed reflect what could be termed an "inferiority complex," where religious inclusion is sought on terms set by the very secular forces it aims to counterbalance. However, we argue that this tension is not necessarily a weakness in our approach, but rather a reflection of the deeply entrenched nature of secularism in contemporary organizational life.

In this regard, the challenge lies in finding ways to advocate for religious inclusion that do not simply assimilate religious perspectives into existing secular frameworks, but instead prompt a fundamental re-evaluation of the assumptions underlying those frameworks. This may require a more radical reimagining of organizational structures and practices that goes beyond the current

paradigms of diversity and inclusion. By acknowledging this tension, we open up new avenues for critical reflection on the nature of religious inclusion in the workplace. Such approaches can lead to transformative models of inclusion that do not merely accommodate religious perspectives but genuinely value and integrate them into the core of organizational life.

Furthermore, our study highlights the need for a more critical examination of the concept of 'neutrality' in organizational settings. What is often presented as a neutral, secular stance may in fact be deeply rooted in Western, post-Enlightenment ideologies (Taylor, 2007) that are not universally applicable or desirable (Asad, 2003). This calls for a re-evaluation of what constitutes 'best practices' in global management, especially when operating in diverse cultural contexts. The strategies of religious individuals documented in our study - from careful reframing of religious concepts to self-censorship - reveal the hidden costs of maintaining a secular facade in organizations. These strategies, while effective in the short term, may lead to a loss of valuable perspectives that could contribute to organizational innovation and ethical decision-making. We also observed that while training formed a component of Schuitema's approach, standalone diversity training is only marginally effective in creating lasting change. The organization's broader strategy, which included ongoing mentoring, cultural transformation, and structural changes, aligns with evidence that effective DEI initiatives must be part of wider-scale change efforts that address both individual and systemic factors (Byrd, 2014).

Overall, our study advocates for a practice that goes beyond mere tokenistic inclusion of religious individuals to actively listening to and integrating their voices and ideas into the core of IB management practices. This approach aligns with calls for holistic understandings of diversity in IB contexts (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). By recognizing and valuing religious diversity, organizations can tap into a rich source of ethical perspectives, cultural understandings, and alternative management approaches that may strengthen their ability to operate effectively in an increasingly complex and diverse global business environment. To effectively address religious marginalization, multinationals can implement 'respectful pluralism' (Gebert et al., 2014) - a meta-norm requiring mutual respect among all employees, including those expressing different religious identities. This approach could help balance religious expression rights with organizational cohesion needs. Moreover, they need to move beyond symbolic inclusion to implement structural interventions that address power imbalances (Sasikala et al., 2024). This could include: (a) establishing clear accountability mechanisms for religious inclusion initiatives, (b) developing industry-wide standards for religious accommodation, (c) creating partnerships with religious stakeholders to inform policy development and design inclusion programs and (d) develop a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures to assess religious inclusion outcomes.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study's limitations stem partly from the case study methodology, which, while enabling detailed data collection and analysis, also inherently narrows the context and range of scenarios explored (Creswell, 2007). The scope limitations are somewhat mitigated by the diverse experiences of participants in organizations and countries beyond those included in the study. Some consultants and managers had professional experience in many countries spanning much of Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America, and they included this experience in the interview discussions. Nonetheless, the limited organizational context may restrict the response strategies of religious individuals facing anti-religious bias. Future research in other IB environments, such

as exclusively Global North organizations, could shed light on different aspects of religious marginalization.

There is also a need for further investigation into the factors that contribute to the marginalization of religious ideas and individuals, with a special focus on the education system's role. Moreover, a deeper examination is required to understand the impact of such discrimination on both individuals and communities. Additionally, it is important to explore strategies beyond 'flying under the radar' that individuals employ to navigate marginalization, as well as viable approaches that could foster inclusivity in this context.

Furthermore, future research should explore the intersectionality of religious diversity with other dimensions of diversity, such as gender, race, nationality, and culture. This intersectional approach can provide deeper understanding into the complex interplay of multiple identities (Köllen, 2021) and how they shape individual experiences and organizational dynamics (Primecz and Mahadevan, 2024). An example of this in our dataset are Pakistani (nationality) Muslim (religion) females (gender) who might face multiple layers of discrimination in IB settings. Islamophobia, combined with stereotypes about Pakistan and females, can lead to biases that hinder career progression (Arifeen and Gatrell, 2013). Hence, understanding these dynamics through the lens of intersectionality can provide valuable insights into their unique experiences and highlight the need for inclusive policies in multinational firms.

Finally, future research should explore how religious perspectives might be better integrated into organizational practices without being stripped of their spiritual essence. This could include comparative studies across different national contexts to understand how varying degrees of societal secularization influence organizational approaches to religious diversity. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how organizations successfully transition from secular dominance to more inclusive approaches that genuinely value religious perspectives.

Conclusion

By acknowledging the diverse religious and cultural traditions that shape business practices across the globe, we can move beyond the Western-centric and secular biases that have historically dominated IB scholarship. This shift requires a sustained, collective effort from all stakeholders at the broader social level, emphasizing diversity as a valuable asset rather than promoting uniformity (Georgiadou, 2024). Embracing a more inclusive and pluralistic view of diversity enriches our theoretical frameworks and supports culturally sensitive and effective business practices in an increasingly interconnected world.

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