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RELIGION, POLITICS AND GENDER EQUALITY PUBLIC RELIGIONS REVISITED

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Draft

April 2009

DRAFT WORKING DOCUMENT

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to revisit the argument first presented in **Public Religions in the Modern World** in order to ascertain the extent to which the theoretical-analytical framework developed there needs to be critically revised and expanded in response to two main challenges.[2] The first arises from the global imperative to develop comparative analytical frameworks which are applicable beyond Western Christian contexts. The second challenge derives from the equally urgent need to place the politics of gender equality and the related religious-secular debates into the center of any discussion of "public religion" anywhere in the world today.

The central thesis of the book was that we were witnessing a process of "deprivatization" of religion as a relatively global trend. As an empirical claim, the thesis has been amply confirmed by subsequent developments practically everywhere. In a sense, the best confirmation of the thesis can actually be found in the heartland of secularization, that is, in Western European societies. Even though there is very little evidence of any kind of religious revival among the European population, if one excludes the significant influx of new immigrant religions, nonetheless religion has certainly returned as a contentious issue to the public sphere of most European societies.[3] Most importantly, one can sense a noticeable shift in the European *Zeitgeist*. When first presented fifteen years ago, the thesis did not find much resonance among European audiences. The privatization of religion was simply taken for granted both as a normal empirical fact and as the norm for modern European societies. The concept of modern public religion was still too dissonant and the public resurgence of religion elsewhere could simply be explained or rather explained away as the rise of fundamentalism in not yet modern societies. But more recently, there has been a noticeable change in the attitude and the public attention given to religion throughout Europe.[4] There are very few voices in Europe today simply restating the old thesis of privatization. Prominent intellectuals, such as Jürgen Habermas, not only are ready to accept some role for religion in the public sphere of modern democratic societies, but have initiated a discourse on "post-secular society."[5] Even the self-assured French *laïcité* is on the defensive and ready to make some concessions.

In this respect, more important than the empirical confirmation of the global trend of deprivatization of religion has been the widespread acceptance of the basic analytical-theoretical and normative claims of the thesis, namely that the deprivatization of religion did not have to be interpreted necessarily as an anti-modern, anti-secular, or anti-democratic reaction. This was in my view the most important contribution of the book, the critique it offered to prescriptive theories of privatization of religion and to the secularist assumptions built into social theories of Western modernity and into most liberal theories of modern democratic politics. The critique was made possible by two new analytical contributions.

The first contribution was the analytical disaggregation of the theory of secularization into three disparate components or sub-theses, namely, a) the theory of the institutional differ-

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[2]   José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

[3]   José Casanova, "Die religiöse Lage in Europa," in Hans Joas und Klaus Wiegandt, ed., *Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen* (Frankfurt, Fischer, 2007), and "Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A European Union / United States Comparison," in Thomas Banchoff, ed., *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)

[4]   José Casanova, "Religion, European secular identities, and European Integration," in Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[5]   Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on a post-secular society," in http://www.signandsight.com 18/06/2008

entiation of the secular spheres, such as state, economy, and science, from religious institutions and norms, b) the theory of the decline of religious beliefs and practices as a concomitant of levels of modernization, and c) the theory of privatization of religion as a precondition of modern democratic politics. Such an analytical distinction makes possible the testing of each of the three sub-theses separately as different empirically falsifiable propositions. Since in Europe the three processes of secular differentiation, religious decline and privatization have been historically interconnected, there has been the tendency to view all three processes as intrinsically interrelated components of a general teleological process of secularization and modernization, rather than as particular contingent developments. In the United States, by contrast, one finds a paradigmatic process of secular differentiation, which is not accompanied, however, either by a process of religious decline or by the confinement of religion to the private sphere. Processes of modernization and democratization in American society have often been accompanied by religious revivals and the wall of separation between church and state, though much stricter than the one erected in most European societies, does not imply the rigid separation of religion and politics.

The second main analytical contribution was the distinction of three different types of "public religion," corresponding to the analytical distinction between three different areas of a modern democratic polity: "state," "political society," and "civil society." Established state churches would be the paradigmatic example of public religion at the state level. Religions which mobilize their institutional resources for political competition through political parties, social movements, or lobbying agencies would be examples of public religion at the level of political society. Finally, public religions at the civil society level would be exemplified by religions which enter the public square, that is, the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society, to participate in open public debates about the *res publica*, that is, about public issues, public affairs, public policy and the common good or commonwealth.

Obviously, this is an analytical, one could say, "ideal-typical" distinction. In actual empirical reality the boundaries between the three areas of the polity are by no means so clear cut and therefore the delineation of the different types of public religion can also not always be clear and distinct. Nevertheless, the purpose of the analytical distinction was to put into question any rigid theory of privatization which would like to restrict religion to the private sphere on the grounds that any form of public religion represents a threat to the public sphere or to democratic politics. Empirically, the case studies illustrated various instances in which public religious mobilization had contributed to the democratization of authoritarian polities in Spain, Poland, and Brazil or to the enlivening of democratic politics and the public sphere of civil society in the United States. Obviously, one could easily adduce many other empirical instances in which, by contrast, the political mobilization of religion may have undermined or endangered democratic politics. Consequently, the meaningful question cannot be whether "public religion" in general, much less whether "religion" in the abstract, is good or bad, ally or threat, but which kind of public religion, in which particular context, for which particular purpose?

While I still think that the analytical-theoretical framework developed in **Public Religions** is generally useful and still defensible today, nonetheless the framework needs to be revised critically and expanded in order to address specifically the issues of globalization and gender equality. I can see three main shortcomings or limitations of the argument I developed there: 1) its Western-Christian centrism, 2) the attempt to restrict, at least normatively, modern public religions to the public sphere of civil society, and 3) the empirical framing of the study as church-state-nation-civil society relations from a comparative national perspective,

neglecting the transnational global dimensions. I would like to proceed by offering first a revision and expansion of the analytical framework of "public religions" in order to make it more amenable to a global comparative perspective beyond the Christian West.[6] The second part of my paper will attempt to address some of the ways in which the central issue of gender equality impacts upon religious politics and some of the ways in which the deprivatization of religion may in turn affect the politics of gender equality.

I. Revisiting Public Religions from a global comparative perspective

Since my comparative-historical study was focused on the two main branches of Western Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, it could function with a relatively unreflexive category of "religion." The moment one adopts a global comparative perspective, however, this is no longer possible. Yet, the difficulties of formulating a satisfying general definition of religion, not to speak of the even more serious difficulties of constructing an adequate general theory of religion are well-known. In fact, while the social sciences, particularly the sociology of religion, still function with an unreflexive category of religion, within the newer discipline of "religious studies" the very category of religion has undergone numerous challenges, as well as all kinds of critical genealogical deconstructions.

This is not the place to revisit the debates of the last two decades concerning the competing genealogies of the "modern" category of religion, and its complex relation to the pluralization of Christian confessions and denominations in early modernity, to the Western colonial expansion and the encounter with the religious "other," to the triumph of "secular reason," the hegemony of the secular state, and the disciplinary institutionalization of the scientific study of religion, as well as to the Western "invention of the world religions" and the classificatory taxonomies of religion which have now become globalized.[7] But it is appropriate to begin a discussion of religion in the contemporary global age with the recognition of a paradox, namely that scholars of religion are questioning the validity of the category of "religion," at the very same moment when the discursive reality of religion is more widespread than ever and has become for the first time global.[8] I am not claiming that people today everywhere are either more or less religious than they may have been in the past. Here I am bracketing out altogether the question which has dominated most theories of secularization, namely whether religious beliefs and practices are declining or growing as a general modern trend. I am only claiming that "religion" as a discursive reality, indeed as an abstract category and as a system of classification of reality, used by modern individuals as well as by modern societies across the world, has become an undisputable global social fact.

It is obvious that when people around the world use the same category of religion they actually mean very different things. The actual concrete meaning of whatever people denominate as "religion" can only be elucidated in the context of their particular discursive practices. But the very fact that the same category of religion is being used globally across cul-

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[6] This section builds upon the analysis first developed in José Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited," in Hent de Vries, ed. *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

[7] Cf. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Hans Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002; Tomoko Mazusawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Russel McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 269-284 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Hent de Vries, ed. *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

[8] Peter Beyer, *Religions in Global Society* (London: Routledge, 2006).

tures and civilizations testifies to the global expansion of the modern secular-religious system of classification of reality which first emerged in the modern Christian West. This implies the need to reflect more critically upon this particular modern system of classification, without taking it for granted as a general universal system valid for all times and places..

1. Rethinking Secularization beyond the West: Towards a global comparative perspective

While the two minor sub-theses of the theory of secularization, namely "the decline of religion" and "the privatization of religion," have undergone numerous critiques and revisions in the last 15 years, the core of the thesis, namely the understanding of secularization as a single process of functional differentiation of the various institutional spheres or sub-systems of modern societies remains relatively uncontested in the social sciences, particularly within European sociology. Yet one should ask whether it is appropriate to subsume the multiple and very diverse historical patterns of differentiation and fusion of the various institutional spheres (that is, church and state, state and economy, economy and science) that one finds throughout the history of modern Western societies into a single teleological process of modern functional differentiation.[9]

Talal Asad called our attention to the fact that "the historical process of secularization effects a remarkable ideological inversion…. For at one time 'the secular' was a part of a theological discourse (*saeculum*)," while later "the religious" is constituted by secular political and scientific discourses, so that "religion" itself as a historical category and as a universal globalized concept emerges as a construction of Western secular modernity.[10] Thus, any thinking of secularization beyond the West has to begin with the recognition of this dual historical paradox. Namely, that "the secular" emerges first as a particular Western Christian theological category, while its modern antonym, "the religious," is a product of Western secular modernity.

But as I pointed out in my response to Asad's critique, contemporary genealogies of secularism fail to recognize the extent to which the formation of the secular is itself inextricably linked with the internal transformations of European Christianity, from the so-called Papal Revolution to the Protestant Reformation, and from the ascetic and pietistic sects of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries to the emergence of evangelical, denominational Protestantism in nineteenth-century America.[11]

The contextualization of our categories, "religious" and "secular", should begin , therefore, with the recognition of the particular Christian historicity of Western European developments, as well as of the multiple and diverse historical patterns of differentiation and fusion of the religious and the secular, as well as of their mutual constitution, within European and Western societies. Such recognition in turn should allow a less Euro-centric comparative analysis of patterns of differentiation and secularization in other civilizations and world religions, and more importantly the further recognition that with the world-historical process of globalization initiated by the European colonial expansion, all these processes everywhere are

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[9]   For a poignant critique of the thesis of differentiation see, Charles Tilly, "Four more pernicious postulates," in *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage, 1984) pp. 43-60.
[10]   Asad, *Formations of the Secular,* p. 192.
[11]   José Casanova, "Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad," in David Scott and Charles Hirschkind eds., *Powers of the Secular Modern*: *Talal Asad and his Interlocutors"* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006) pp. 12-30.

dynamically interrelated and mutually constituted. Without questioning the actual historical processes of secular differentiation, such analysis contextualizes, pluralizes and in a sense relativizes those processes by framing them as particular Christian-Western historical dynamics, that allows for a discourse of multiple modernities within the West and of course even more so for multiple non-Western modernities.

From the comparative perspective of the axial revolutions, the process of Western secularization appears as a radicalization of the great disembedding of the individual from the sacred cosmos and from society that was first initiated by the axial revolutions.[12] In the context of a general theory of "religious" evolution, one may understand this process as a redrawing of boundaries between sacred/profane, transcendence/immanence, and religious/secular. All too often we tend to view these dichotomous pairs -- sacred/profane, transcendent/immanent, religious/secular -- as synonymous. But it should be obvious that these three dichotomous classificatory schemes do not fit neatly within one another. The sacred tends to be immanent in pre-axial societies, transcendence is not necessarily religious in some axial civilizations, and obviously some secular reality (the nation, citizenship, the person, and individual human rights) can become sacred in the modern secular age.

Within this perspective, the religious/secular dichotomy is a particular medieval Christian version of the more general axial dichotomous classification of transcendent and immanent orders of reality. Unique to the medieval system of Latin Christendom, however, is the institutionalization of an ecclesiastical-sacramental system of mediation, the Church, between the transcendent *Civitas Dei* and the immanent *Civitas hominis.* The church can play this mediating role precisely because it partakes of both realities. As *Ecclesia invisibilis*, "the communion of the saints," the Christian church is a "spiritual" reality, part of the eternal transcendent City of God. As *Ecclesia visibilis,* the Christian church is in the *saeculum,* a "temporal" reality and thus part of the immanent city of man. The modern Western process of secularization is a particular historical dynamic that only makes sense as a response and reaction to this particular medieval Latin Christian system of classification of all reality into "spiritual" and "temporal", "religious" and "secular."

As Charles Taylor has clearly shown, the historical process of modern secularization begins as a process of internal secular reform within Latin Christendom, as an attempt to "spiritualize" the temporal and to bring the religious life of perfection out of the monasteries into the saeculum, thus literally, as an attempt to make the religious "secular."[13] The repeated attempts at Christian reform of the *saeculum* began with the papal revolution and continued with the emergence of the spiritual orders of mendicant and preaching friars bent on Christianizing the growing medieval towns and cities as well as with the emergence of lay Christian communities of brothers and sisters committed to a life of Christian perfection in the saeculum, in the world. These medieval movements of Christian reform already established the basic patterns of secularization which will be later radicalized first by the Protestant Reformation and then, from the French Revolution on, by all subsequent modern civilizing and reform processes.

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[12] For recent debates on "axiality" and "modernity" for which the work of Shmuel Eisenstadt has served as catalyst see,
Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg, eds., *Comparing Modernities. Essays in Homage to Shmuel N. Eisenstadt* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), and Johan P. Arnason, S.N. Eisenstadt and Björn Wittrock, eds. *Axial Civilizations and World History* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
[13] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007)

The Protestant path, which will attain its paradigmatic manifestation in the Anglo-Saxon Calvinist cultural area, particularly in the United States, is characterized by a blurring of the boundaries and by a mutual reciprocal infusion of the religious and the secular, in a sense making the religious secular and the secular religious.[14] The French-Latin-Catholic path, by contrast, will take the form of laicization, and is basically marked by a civil-ecclesiastical and laic-clerical antagonistic dynamic. This explains the central role of anti-clericalism in the Catholic pattern. Unlike in the Protestant pattern, here the boundaries between the religious and the secular are rigidly maintained, but those boundaries are pushed into the margins, aiming to contain, privatize and marginalize everything religious, while excluding it from any visible presence in the secular public sphere.

In the Latin-Catholic cultural area, and to some extent throughout continental Europe, there was a collision between religion and the differentiated secular spheres, that is, between Catholic Christianity and modern science, modern capitalism and the modern state. As a result of this protracted clash, the Enlightenment critique of religion found here ample resonance; the secularist genealogy of modernity was constructed as a triumphant emancipation of reason, freedom and worldly pursuits from the constraints of religion. The secularist self-narratives, which have informed functionalist theories of differentiation and secularization, have envisioned this process as the emancipation and expansion of the secular spheres at the expense of a much diminished and confined, though also newly differentiated, religious sphere.

In the Anglo-Protestant cultural area, by contrast, and particularly in the United States, there was "collusion" between religion and the secular differentiated spheres. There is little historical evidence of any tension between American Protestantism and capitalism and very little manifest tension between science and religion in America prior to the Darwinian crisis at the end of the nineteenth century. The American Enlightenment had hardly any anti-religious component. Even "the separation of church and state," that was constitutionally codified in the dual clause of the First Amendment, had as much the purpose of protecting "the free exercise" of religion from state interference and ecclesiastical control as that of protecting the federal state from any religious entanglement. In the United States, the triumph of "the secular" came aided by religion rather than at its expense and the boundaries themselves became so diffused that, at least by European ecclesiastical standards, it is not clear where religion begins and the secular ends.

The purpose of this comparison is not to reiterate the well-known fact that American society is more "religious" and therefore less "secular" than European societies. While the first may be true, the second proposition does not follow. On the contrary, the United States has always been the paradigmatic form of a modern secular, differentiated society. In any case, it would be ludicrous to argue that the United States is a less functionally differentiated society, and therefore less modern, and therefore less secular, than France or Sweden. On the contrary, one could argue that there is less functional differentiation of state, economy, sci-

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[14] This blurring of the boundaries is equally evident in the debates on American "civil religion" as well as in the observations of European defenders of the theory of secularization, who often discount the American evidence as irrelevant because American religion is supposed to have become so 'secular,' so 'commercialized' or so 'privatized' that it should no longer count as authentic 'religion.' Obviously, it is the European model of ecclesiastical religion that serves as the confounding norm here.

ence, etc., in *étâtiste-laïciste* France than in the United States, but this does not make France either less modern or less secular than the United States. [15]

If the European concept of secularization is not a particularly relevant category for the "Christian" United States, much less may it be directly applicable to other axial civilizations with very different modes of structuration of the religious and the secular. As an analytical conceptualization of a historical process, secularization is a category that makes sense within the context of the particular internal and external dynamics of the transformation of Western European Christianity from the Middle Ages to the present. But the category becomes problematic once it is generalized as a universal process of societal development and once it is transferred to other world religions and other civilizational areas with very different dynamics of structuration of the relations and tensions between religion and world, or between cosmological transcendence and worldly immanence.

Until very recently most discussions of secularization had assumed that European religious developments were typically or paradigmatically modern, while the persistence of religion in modern America was attributed to American "exceptionalism." It was assumed that Europe was secular because it was modern. America was the exception that confirmed the European rule, a convenient way of not having to put into question the European rule. Progressive religious decline was so much taken for granted as a normal process of modern development that what required an explanation was the American 'deviation' from the European 'norm.'[16]

But the fundamental question is whether secularization in the derived sense of decline of religious beliefs and practices, which takes the paradigmatic European form of "unchurching," that is, of ceasing to belong to Christian churches and to practice "church" religiosity, is likely to take place without having undergone first the historical experience of secularization in the primary structural sense of transformation of the Christian churches from the system of medieval Christendom through Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and the territorialization and confessionalization of the absolutist state churches, and the subsequent secularization of the state. It is this sequence of historical developments which itself produces the stadial consciousness of having superseded religion, which is associated with the collective memories of European peoples. But without the phenomenological experience of stadial consciousness associated with the stages of European historical secularization, processes of modernization elsewhere might not have the same secularizing effect as in Europe.

One could turn European theories of American exceptionalism upside down and view the historical process of secularization of Latin Christendom as the one truly exceptional development, unlikely to be reproduced anywhere else in the world with the same stadial sequential arrangement. Without such a stadial consciousness, however, the immanent frame of the secular modern order might not have the same phenomenological effect in the conditions of belief and unbelief in non-Western societies. In fact, it may be recognized as a particular Western Christian process of secularization that lacks the same force in non-Christian socie-

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[15] I am using these three countries simply to illustrate the problematic ways in which we employ the category of the secular. France may serve as example of a country with a radically secular state and a very secular society, the United States as example of a radically secular state and a very religious society, while Sweden until the year 2000 could serve as example of a country with an established state church, and therefore with a formally Lutheran, i.e., religious state, and a very secular society. The point is that to use any of these differences as indexes of greater or lesser modernization is highly problematic.

[16] José Casanova, "Beyond European and American Exceptionalisms: towards a Global Perspective," in *Prediciting Religion,* edited by Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, 17-29. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003)

ties, which did not undergo a similar process of historical development, but rather always confronted Western secular modernity from its first encounter with European colonialism as "the other."

This particular historical pattern of Western Christian secularization became globalized through the European colonial expansion. As a result, the immanent frame of Western secular modernity became also globalized, at least certain crucial aspects of the cosmic order through the globalization of science and technology, certain crucial aspects of the institutional social order of state, market and public sphere, and certain crucial aspects of the moral order through the globalization of individual human rights. But the European colonial expansion encountered other post-axial civilizations with very different social imaginaries, which often had their own established patterns of reform in accordance with their own particular axial civilizational principles and norms. The outcomes that will result form these long historical dynamics of intercivilizational encounters, conflicts, borrowings, accommodations and *aggiornamenti* are likely to vary from place to place, from time to time and from civilization to civilization.

Moreover, following Peter van der Veer one could argue that the very pattern of Western secularization cannot be fully understood if one ignores the crucial significance of the colonial encounter in European developments.[17] In fact, in the colonial encounter secular modernity and Western Christian civilization appear always entangled. Certainly, any comprehensive narrative of the modern civilizing process must take into account the Western European encounter with other civilizations. The very category of civilization in the singular only emerges out of these intercivilizational encounters.[18] Moreover, in the same way as "our" modern secular age is fundamentally and inevitably post-Christian, the emerging multiple modernities in the different post-axial civilizational areas are likely to be post-Hindu, or post-Confucian, or post-Muslim, that is, they will also be a modern refashioning and transformation of already existing civilizational patterns and social imaginaries.

2. Public Religions beyond Ecclesiastical Dis-Establishment and Civil Society

My own analysis of the deprivatization of religion tried to contain, at least normatively, public religions within the public sphere of civil society, without allowing them to spillover onto political society or the democratic state. This remains my own personal normative and political preference, but I am not certain that the secular separation of religion from political society or even from the state are universalizable maxims, in the sense that they are either necessary or sufficient conditions for democratic politics. Today I must recognize my own modern Western secular prejudices and the particular hermeneutic Catholic and "ecclesiastical" perspective on religion which I adopted in my comparative analysis of the relations between church, state, nation and civil society in Western Catholic and Protestant societies. The moment one adopts a global comparative perspective, one must admit that the deprivatization of religion is unlikely to be contained within the public sphere of civil society, within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state, and within the constitutional premises of ecclesiastical disestablishment and juridical separation of church and state. We need to go beyond the secularist discourse of separation and beyond the public sphere of civil society, in order to address the real issues of democratic politics around the world.

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[17] Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[18] Johann P. Arnason, *Civilizations in Dispute* (Leiden: Brill, 2003)

It is unlikely that either modern authoritarian regimes or modern liberal democratic systems will prove ultimately successful in banishing religion to the private sphere. Authoritarian regimes may be temporarily successful through repressive measures in enforcing the privatization of religion. Democratic regimes, by contrast, are likely to have greater difficulty in doing so, other than through the tyranny of a secular majority over religious minorities. As the case of France shows, *laïcité*, can indeed become a constitutionally sacralized principle, consensually shared by the overwhelming majority of citizens, who support the enforcement of legislation banishing "ostensible religious symbols" from the public sphere, because they are viewed as a threat to the national system or the republican tradition. Obviously, the opposite is the case in the United States, where secular minorities may feel threatened by Judeo-Christian definitions of the national republic.

The rules for protection from the tyranny of religious majorities should be the same democratic rules used to defend from the tyranny of any democratic majority. The protection of the rights of any minority, religious or secular, and equal universal access should be central normative principles of any liberal democratic system. In principle one should not need any additional particular secularist principle or legislation. But as a mater of fact, historically-pragmatically, it may be necessary to disestablish 'churches", that is, ecclesiastical institutions that claim either monopolistic rights over a territory or particular privileges, or it may be necessary to use constitutional and at times extra-ordinary means to disempower entrenched tyrannical majorities.

By my hermeneutic Catholic perspective I mean the fact that my theory of "modern public religion" was very much informed by the experience of the official Catholic *aggiornamento* of the 1960s. The Catholic *aggiornamento* culminated in the Second Vatican Council and is expressed in the two most important documents of the Council, the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). The official recognition of the inalienable right of every individual to religious freedom, based on the sacred dignity of the human person meant that the church abandoned its traditional compulsory character and accepted the modern principle of disestablishment and the separation of church and state. *Gaudium et Spes* represented, in turn, the acceptance of the religious legitimacy of the modern secular age and of the modern secular world, putting an end to the negative philosophy of history that had characterized the official Catholic position since the Counter-Reformation.

The *aggiornamento* led to a fundamental relocation of the Catholic church from a state-oriented to a civil society-oriented institution. Moreover, the official adoption of the modern discourse of human rights allowed the Catholic church to play a crucial role in opposition to authoritarian regimes and in processes of democratization throughout the Catholic world. But the Catholic church's embrace of voluntary disestablishment did not mean the privatization of Catholicism but rather its relocation from the state to the public sphere of civil society. This is the hermeneutic context within which I developed the analytical framework of modern public religions and the theory of de-privatization. But obviously, there are many other forms of modern public religions and other forms of de-privatization.

Alfred Stepan's model of the "twin tolerations" offers in my view a fruitful way of looking into the entanglement of religion and politics in democratic systems.[19] Stepan has pointed out how the most important empirical analytical theories of democracy, from Robert

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[19]   Alfred Stepan,"The World's Religious Systems and Democracy: Crafting the 'Twin Tolerations'," in *Arguing Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 218-225.

Dahl to Juan Linz, do not include secularism or strict separation as one of the institutional requirements for democracy, as prominent normative liberal theories such as those of John Rawls or Bruce Ackerman tend to do. As an alternative to secularist principles or norms, Stepan has proposed the model of the "twin tolerations," which he describes as "the minimal boundaries of freedom of action that must somehow be crafted for political institutions vis-à-vis religious authorities, and for religious individuals and groups vis-à-vis political institutions." Religious authorities must "tolerate" the autonomy of democratically elected governments without claiming constitutionally privileged prerogatives to mandate or to veto public policy. Democratic political institutions, in turn, must "tolerate" the autonomy of religious individuals and groups not only to complete freedom to worship privately, but also to advance publicly their values in civil society and to sponsor organizations and movements in political society, as long as they do not violate democratic rules and adhere to the rule of law. Within this framework of mutual autonomy, Stepan concludes, "there can be an extraordinarily broad range of concrete patterns of religion-state relations in political systems that would meet our minimal definition of democracy."[20]

In fact, Europe itself illustrates the extraordinary broad range of concrete patterns of religion-state relations which are compatible with democracy. Despite all the normative discourse and the often repeated trope of the modern secular democratic state and the privatization of religion, it is legitimate to question how "secular" are really the European states? If one looks at the reality of "really existing" European democracies rather than at the official secularist discourse, it becomes obvious that most European states are by no means strictly secular nor do they tend to live up to the myth of secular neutrality.

France is the only Western European state which is officially and proudly "secular," that is, that defines itself and its democracy as regulated by the principles of *laïcité*. By contrast, there are several European countries with long-standing democracies which have maintained established churches. They include England and Scotland within the United Kingdom and all the Scandinavian Lutheran countries: Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland and, until the year 2000, Sweden. Of the new democracies, Greece has also maintained the establishment of the Greek Orthodox Church. This means that with the exception of the Catholic Church, which has eschewed establishment in every recent (post-1974) transition to democracy in Southern Europe (Portugal, Spain) and in Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia), every other major branch of Christianity (Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Orthodox) is officially established somewhere in Europe, without apparently jeopardizing democracy in those countries.

Since on the other hand there are many historical examples of European states that were secular and non-democratic, the Soviet-type communist regimes being the most obvious case, one can therefore safely conclude that the strict secular separation of church and state is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for democracy. Between the two extremes of French *laïcité* and Nordic Lutheran establishment, there is moreover a whole range of very diverse patterns of church-state relations, in education, media, health and social services, etc., which constitute very "unsecular" entanglements, such as the consociational formula of pillarization in the Netherlands, or the corporatist official state recognition of the Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany (as well as of the Jewish community in some *Länder*).[21]

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[20]   Stepan, *Ibid.* p.217.

[21]   John Madeley has developed a tripartite measure of church-state relation, which he calls the TAO of European management and regulation of religion-state relations by the use of Treasure (T: for financial and property conections), Authority (A: for the exercise of states' powers of command) and Organization (O: for the

One could of course retort that European societies are de facto so secularized and, as a consequence, what remains of religion has become so temperate that both constitutional establishment and the various institutional church-state entanglements are as a matter of fact innocuous, if not completely irrelevant. But one should remember that the drastic secularization of most Western European societies came after the consolidation of democracy, not before, and therefore it would be incongruent to present not just the secularization of the state and of politics, but also the secularization of society as a condition for democracy.

As to public religion in political society, one should not lose sight of the fact that, at one time or another, most continental European societies developed confessional religious parties, which played a crucial role in the democratization of those societies. Even those confessional parties which initially emerged as anti-liberal and at least ideologically as anti-democratic parties, as was the case with most Catholic parties in the 19th century, ended up playing a very important role in the democratization of their societies. This is the paradox of Christian Democracy so well analyzed by Stathis Kalyvas.[22] Catholic political mobilization emerged almost everywhere as a counterrevolutionary reaction against Liberalism and its anti-clerical assault on the Catholic Church. Political and even social Catholicism was in many respects fundamentalist, intransigent, and theocratic. Focusing on Catholic ideology and doctrine one was bound to conclude that Catholicism and democracy were indeed antithetical and irreconcilable, as the liberal and Protestant anti-Catholic discourse was never tired of stressing throughout the 19th century.[23]

Yet, somehow, the dynamics of electoral competition led to the transformation of Catholic parties everywhere. Those parties, in turn, by embracing democratic politics made a fundamental contribution to the consolidation of democracy in their respective countries. With important variations the similar story repeats itself in Germany, Austria, Holland, Belgium, and Italy, the countries where Christian Democracy became dominant after World War II. This story, as Kalyvas points out in his conclusion, is particularly relevant at a time when the alleged incompatibility of Islam and democracy and the supposedly anti-democratic nature of Muslim and other religious parties is so frequently and publicly debated.[24]

In sum, I cannot find either on democratic or on liberal grounds a compelling reason to banish in principle religion from the public democratic sphere. One could at most, on pragmatic historical grounds, defend the need for separation between "church" and "state", whenever ecclesiastical institutions or religious authorities impede the free exercise of religion and basic democratic rights.[25] But in any case, the attempt to establish a wall of separation be-

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effective intervention of state bodies in the religious sphere). According to his measurement all European states score positively on at least one of these scales, most states score positively on two of them, and over one third (16 out of 45 states) score positively on all three. John T.S. Madeley, *"Unequally Yoked: the Antinomies of Church-State Separation in Europe and the USA,"* paper presented at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, August 30-September 2.

[22] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UniversityPress, 1996).

[23] José Casanova, "Catholic and Muslim Politics in Comparative Perspective," *The Taiwan Journal of Democracy,* Vol 1:2, December, 2005

[24] For a more extensive elaboration, see José Casanova, "The Problem of Religion and the Anxieties of European Secular Democracy," in Gabriel Motzkin & Yochi Fischer, eds., *Religion and Democracy in Contemporary Europe* (London: Alliance Publishing Trust, 2008) pp. 63-74.

[25] One can also, of course, defend the need for a secular state on "religious" grounds, that is, precisely in order to protect free and voluntary religious commitment from state enforced religious coercion. This was the original rationale of Baptists and other sects in support of "no establishment" and "free exercise" of religion in the United

tween "religion" and "politics" is unjustified, unlikely to succeed and probably counterproductive for democracy itself. Curtailing the "free exercise of religion" per se must lead to curtailing the free exercise of the civil and political rights of religious citizens and will ultimately infringe on the vitality of a democratic civil society. Particular religious discourses or particular religious practices may be objectionable, and susceptible to legal prohibition, on some democratic or liberal ground, but not because they are "religious" per se.

This is especially relevant in the case of the politics of gender equality and women rights. It is neither possible nor advisable to restrict empirically or normatively the "religious" politics of gender equality to the public sphere of civil society. What is desirable is to subject religious discourses legitimating patriarchal customs or discriminatory gender practices to open public debate and to political contestation. But this in itself is a form of deprivatization of religion that thrusts religion necessarily into the political arena. What makes blatant gender discrimination and patriarchal practices objectionable is not the fact that they may be grounded in religious discourse, but the fact that they violate basic democratic and legal norms of equality. The democratic solution cannot be to outlaw religious discourse or patriarchal norms but to subject such a discourse to public debate and to subject collective norms to legal-political democratic processes.[26] In any case, given the enormous diversity of political and cultural contexts, one can at best propose some general guiding principles. But their application in any particular context will have to be guided by prudential contextual practical judgment, rather than by universal principles or the rule of general consistency.

II. Gender Equality, Religious Politics and Public Religions

The religious politics of gender worldwide has become one of the most important issues facing global humanity and is likely to remain an issue of increasing relevance for the foreseeable future, if one assumes the validity of the following premises[27]:

a) That democratization, in the sense proposed by de Tocqueville, as the categorical principle of equality of ascribed conditions, is a modern, irresistible, universal and "providential" force or drive; that the principle of gender equality is "a rising tide" and one of the last manifestations of this modern drive, so that the proposition that "all men and women are created equal" is becoming a global "self-evident truth"; that the task of somehow bridging the enormous gap between the norm of gender equality and the appalling reality of unequal worth, unequal status, and unequal access to resources and power which women suffer throughout the world is likely to remain one of the most important historical-political tasks and challenges for all societies; that while the drive to institutionalize the principle of gender equality may be general, its practices and effects – that is, the particular cultural, socio-

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States. Today a similar argument for the sake of free individual commitment to Islam and to *shari'a* and against any state coercion in the religious sphere has been developed most convincingly by Abdullahi An-Na'im in, *Islam and the Secular State. Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[26] The only other alternatives for reform would be either "internal secular enlightened despotism" or "external imperial imposition of secular democracy." I tend to think that neither of them is likely to be effective, much less desirable.

[27] The relevant literature is already very vast. See, Darlene M. Juschka, ed., *Feminism and the Study of Religion: A Reader* (New York Continuum, 2001); Elizabeth A. Castelli, ed., *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Stephen Ellingson and M. Christian, eds., *Religion and Sexuality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Denise Lardner Carmody, *Women and World Religions* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979); Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young, eds., *Religion and Women* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994); Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly, eds. *Women, Religion and Social Change* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985).

political and institutional arrangements – are likely to vary significantly across societies, cultures, civilizations and religions.[28]

b) That sexuality is one of the most powerful, one could even say "sacred" or "transcendent" dimensions of individual and intersubjective human life; that sexual intercourse entails not only a unique source of erotic pleasure, but also a physical act of intimacy between two persons which may serve as the foundation for a life-long mutual commitment, and in addition has the potential for the creation of new life and is therefore the foundation for kinship structures and social reproduction; that sexuality is therefore simultaneously the most intimate expression of the embodied self and therefore the most private of affairs and the primary source of socio-biological reproduction and therefore a public affair which no society can leave unregulated. In particular the female body, because of its indispensable function in the pregnancy and gestation of new life, is caught in the middle of this tension between the private and the public dimensions of sexuality. The modern sexual revolution, however, entails a dual separation of sexuality and biological reproduction, as well as the emancipation of sexual desire from heterosexual norms. Reflexive birth control through reliable techniques of contraception have freed sexuality from reproduction and made possible the liberation of women from the onerous burden of unwanted reproductive labor. In turn, advances in reproductive technologies and biogenetics could potentially free biological reproduction not only from sexuality but also from all traditional forms of social reproduction through family and kinship. We could be entering, indeed, a "brave new world."

c) That insofar as religions are discursive systems of beliefs and practices which offer structures of moral order, cultural meaning and motivational purpose to individuals and collectivities through symbolic means of transcendence and spiritual communication with some higher extra-human, supernatural or divine reality, religions have frequently been involved in the task of regulating sexuality, biological and social reproduction, family structure and gender roles in accordance with some transcendent principle posited as natural, sacred or of divine origin. In particular, monotheistic religions, which claim a radically absolute divine transcendence as the source of universally valid and unchanging principles, face the challenge of having to apply hermeneutically those universal principles to changing circumstances. The radical change in circumstances produced by the modern democratic and sexual revolutions and the fundamental transformations in gender relations and gender roles which both entail present a particularly difficult challenge to the sacred claims of those traditions.

If these premises are correct, then it is not surprising that the politics of gender and gender equality are central to politics everywhere and that religion is thoroughly and intimately implicated in the politics of gender. Indeed, religious politics and the politics of gender appear to be so ubiquitously entangled that it is not surprising that so many analysts have even been tempted to interpret what they construct as a singular global resurgence of religious "fundamentalism" in all religious traditions as primarily a patriarchal reaction against the common global threat of gender equality, the emancipation of women, and feminism.[29] Feminism appears to have replaced communism as "the specter" haunting all religious traditions. In turn, the discourses of feminism and secularism have become intertwined today in the same way as communism and atheism became intertwined in the 19th century. "Gender" or "the

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[28] Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Rising Tide. Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[29] Martin Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), and *Die Rückkehr der Religionen: Fundamentalismus und der Kampf der Kulturen* (München: Beck, 2000).

Woman question" has become in this respect the preeminently contested "social question," while "religion" has been thrown, willingly or unwillingly, into the vortex of the global contestation. Traditional religious establishments tend to view feminist agendas and particularly the very notion of gender as a contingent, socially constructed, and therefore changeable reality, as the greatest threat not only to their religious traditions and their moral authoritative claims, but to the very idea of a sacred or divinely ordained natural order, inscribed either in natural law, *shari'a*, or some "right way" universally valid for all times. The unholy alliance of "patriarchy" and "altar," which such an attitude fosters, provokes in turn the secularist response of feminists, particularly in the West, who tend to view religious fundamentalism, indeed "religion" itself, as the main obstacle to the global advance of women's rights and the progressive emancipation of women, and therefore will tend to advocate the secularization of state, politics, law and morality. At least in Europe, the need to advance and protect gender equality and women's rights has become today the most common normative justification of secularism.[30]

Secularist discourses on "religion" will inevitably lead to the essentialist reification of religion, mirroring ironically the essentialist reification of "gender" one finds in traditionalist and fundamentalist religious discourses. To a certain extent any general discussion of "religion" "gender" and "politics" will necessarily lead to some essentialist reification of all three. Yet, generalization and therefore some reification is inevitable in scholarly as much as in moral-practical and political discourse. In the following presentation I will be making general references to religion, though most of my reflections will be contextually derived from my recent engagement with the comparative analysis of Catholicism and Islam as religious regimes and as discursive traditions.

In some of my recent work I have emphasized the similarities between the contemporary global discourse on Islam and an older liberal secular Protestant anti-Catholic discourse that was prevalent in the second half of the 19th century and which tended to depict Catholicism as an essentially fundamentalist, undemocratic and anti-modern religion.[31] The Catholic *aggiornamento* of the 1960s and the crucial role of Catholic groups and movements in the "third wave" of democratization in the following decades have made the old anti-Catholic discourse obsolete. Yet the juxtaposition of the anti-Catholic and anti-Muslim discourses has the critical function of putting into question any depiction of any religion as essentially fundamentalist and unchanging. The obvious implication is that if Catholicism can change, renew and update its tradition in response to modern challenges, then certainly there is no reason to believe that Islam cannot do the same. But more importantly it suggests that viewing contemporary Muslim transformations as forms of Muslim *aggiornamenti*, that is, as plural and often antithetical attempts by Muslim individual and collective actors to fashion their own Muslim versions of modernity may be analytically and hermeneutically more fruitful than to

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[30] This is the ground on which many people defend *laïcité* today, in spite of the fact that historically French *laïcité* was not very conducive to the advance of the political or legal rights of French women. Joan W. Scott, *Parité. Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Not surprisingly, some of the most important feminist critical reflection has been engaged in disentangling "secularism" and "feminism." Cf. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) and Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, eds. *Secularisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

[31] José Casanova, "Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam," *Social Research* 68:4, Winter 2001, pp. 1041-80; "Catholic and Muslim Politics in Comparative Perspective," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 1:2, December 2005, pp. 89-108.

view such transformations as the civilizational resistance of fundamentalist Islam against an essentialist construction of Western secular modernity.

Yet, one could argue legitimately that when it comes to the religious politics of gender both, Catholicism and Islam tend to support, sometimes in tandem as happened in the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development, similar versions of patriarchal fundamentalism or of fundamentalist patriarchy. Thus, even assuming that one accepts the argument that the Catholic *aggiornamento* represents a successful adaptation to secular modernity, is it not the case that when it comes to issues of family structure and gender roles, gender equality, authority and power within the church, sexuality and reproductive health, bioethics and genetics, the Catholic Church, or at least its official hierarchy, remains anchored in a traditionalist, naturalist and fundamentalist patriarchal position? Similarly, is not the "veil" the most poignant symbol of modern Islamic fundamentalism, the unequivocal and undisputed sign of Muslim patriarchy, and of the literal effacement of female individual identity and subjectivity?

I pose those questions in such a provocative manner precisely in order to warn against any simple and unambiguous answer. Yet, such warning by no means belittles the urgent historical need to subject both religious traditions to an internal radical feminist critique, reinterpretation, and reappropriation. Strategically at least, internal critiques aiming to reform certain aspects of tradition would seem to have better chances to succeed than external frontal attacks against any religious tradition. In any case, the long centuries of anti-Catholic polemics and anti-Muslim Orientalist discourses should raise some suspicions about the validity and efficacy of external calls to "crush infamy" or civilizing missionary efforts to liberate people from internalized oppression, self-imposed tutelage, or false consciousness. There are many compelling critiques of religious patriarchy from an external secularist or liberal feminist position which reflect the normative consensus reached in most advanced Western democratic societies in the last decades. Those external critiques are useful and necessary. But in this paper I want to adopt consciously what could be called an internal critique from within the normative claims of religious traditions.

As a fruitful heuristic way of organizing the points of entry for such an internal critique, I am going to follow Birgit Heller's tripartite analytical differentiation between: 1) the issue of "*women's status and roles* in different religious traditions", that is, the kinds of institutionalized gendered religious division of labor within particular religious regimes; 2) "the subject of *cultural images, ideas, stereotypes and norms* about women" within diverse discursive religious traditions; and 3) "the question what *women as religious subjects* do and think", that is, the question of the historical agency of religious women today in the contemporary reproduction and transformation of their religious traditions and in the insertion of religious discourses, resources and practices in the contested politics of gender equality.[32]

1) The Gendered Religious Division of Labor and Power Relations within Religious Regimes

Sociologically one can view institutionalized religions as religious regimes with certain analogies to polities, that is, as systems of production and distribution of power, authority, and decision making within a community in relation to the sacred, as well as to economic modes of production, that is, as symbolic modes of production, distribution and consumption of the sacred and of religious goods. In both cases the obvious question is the extent to which

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[32] Birgit Heller, "Gender and Religion" in Kari Elisabeth Børresen et al., ed., *Gender and Religion* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2001) pp. 357-59.

the system of power relations and the social relations of production are gendered and unequal, that is, whether men and women have unequal differential access to religious power and authority and unequal differential access to the means of production, distribution and consumption of religious goods.[33] The political analogy, at least, is by no means farfetched since after all the very word *ecclesia* in ancient Greek refers to the political assembly of citizens of the polis or city state, while the word *ummah* has analogous connotations of a sociopolitical community.

In the first place, as universalist salvation religions both, Christianity and Islam, offer equal access to salvation and to holiness to male and female. There is no gender discrimination in the eyes of God. God is the source and model of equitable justice and fairness to all. Moreover, as "loving Father" and as "the Merciful and Compassionate," God may be said to express a feminine "preferential option" for the weak, the poor, the meek, the orphan, the widow. This is the core prophetic ethical norm that anticipates modern gendered equality as a transcendent principle. As high religions, however, the divine revelations have been linguistically and discursively embedded in patriarchal and androcentric cultures and societies. In the prophetic/charismatic foundational age of both religions, individual women had particularly close access to Jesus and Muhammad and played important active roles which seemed to break with the patriarchal relations of their respective socio-historical contexts. But, as the charismatic foundational movements became routinized and embedded in established worldly regimes, the patriarchal principles became clearly dominant as organizative principles of both religions and a gendered division of labor of unequal religious roles became institutionalized. Both, priesthood in the case of the Catholic Church, the *ulama* in the case of Islam, as hierarchically differentiated and high status religious roles, are exclusively male.

The Catholic church is characterized by a dual system of highly differentiated and canonically regulated religious roles, the sacramental one between ordained priesthood and laity, and that between, on the one hand, the *religious* orders of monks, friars, and nuns which follow the higher evangelical calling, withdraw from the world (*saeculum*), and profess the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience and all the secular Christians (including the *secular* clergy) who live in the world. The dynamics of modern Western secularization, both the Protestant one of abolishing the differentiation between *religious* and *secular* roles and callings, and the Catholic/laicist one of giving primacy to *civil* (laic) over *ecclesiastical* (clerical) ranks, authority, and jurisdiction, were reactions against this dual Catholic system of differentiation.

While patriarchal, in as much as in its public dimensions it has been primarily a male assembly, the *ummah* within Sunni Islam is more democratically organized, without a priestly/sacerdotal/clerical class and without the high differentiation of religious virtuosi/literati and ordinary people/laity typical of most high religions. The *ulama*, as the self-organized guardians of tradition and custodians of change, come close to being a clerical class of Muslim literati.[34] Only within *Shi'ite* Islam, however, have the *ulama* attained in modern times a highly differentiated, at times also hierarchically organized structure.

The existence of similar male and female *religious* orders and the high number of female saints, particularly in the early Church, seem to indicate that there is indeed ungendered,

[33] Otto Maduro, *Religion and Social Conflicts* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982)

[34] Muhammmad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Malika Zeghal, *Gardiens de l'Islam: Les oulémas d'Al Azhar dans l'Egypte contemporaine.*(Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1996).

universal access to religious salvation (*Ecclesia invisibilis)* within Catholicism. However, within the Catholic Church as *Ecclesia visibilis*, both as public assembly and as a hierarchically and bureaucratically organized episcopal church, the crucial differentiation is that between priests and laity. Priesthood, as the site of sacerdotal/sacramental, magisterial, and administrative/canonical authority is exclusively reserved for males. This is the fundamental issue of patriarchal gender discrimination within the Catholic Church. The discrimination is the more blatant as traditionally the majority of the assembled faithful, at least in modern times, and thus the majority of consumers of the religious goods distributed by the Church have been female, while the production, administration and distribution of those goods has been almost exclusively in male hands.

The official response of the Catholic male hierarchy to the modern demand for female ordination has been that ordination is of divine origin and therefore unchangeable, since Jesus selected only males as his disciples, who are the links to the apostolic succession of episcopal male priesthood. This is perhaps a persuasive socio-cultural argument of historical precedent in accordance with the cultural patriarchal premises of the apostolic age, but it is not a very well grounded theological argument with scriptural support. Indeed, the male character of the priesthood was such taken for granted cultural premise throughout the history of the church, that it was unnecessary to provide a serious theological justification for it. Only after the modern democratic revolution put into question any form of gender discrimination was a theological justification required. It has become obvious that the body of discursive theological argumentation within the Catholic tradition proscribing female ordination is very thin. One could add that, at least since the establishment of the principle of the charisma of office after the Donatist heresy (4th c. C.E.), it has been official Catholic doctrine that it is the sacramental charisma of the office, i.e., the charisma of ordination that gives sacred dignity to the person of the priest, not the personal spiritual attributes, much less the bodily ones, of the individual.

Although the demand for female access to the *ulama*, the learned guardians of the Muslim tradition, does not seem to have become such an urgent or contested issue in Muslim societies, one might assume that the demand is likely to grow in the future, particularly within *Shi'ite* Islam where the *ulama* have real hierarchically organized power and prestige. Within the Sunni *ummah* at least, there is no rigid differentiation between the religious clerical elite and ordinary Muslims. Moreover, with the modern universalization of literacy and the democratization of religious knowledge the differential status and role of the ulama has become even less marked. What may become increasingly noticeable is that the real differentiation within the *ummah* is not a religious one between clerics and laity, but a gendered patriarchal one between male and female Muslims. Ironically, in this context, pious veiled Muslim women becoming ever more visible in the public sphere of Muslim societies and increasingly attending mosque services can be interpreted actually as a sign of increasing religious gendered equality, and thus as evidence of the modernization of Islam under the pressure of modern gender democracy rather than as a fundamentalist reaction to modernity. In this respect, it can be read as evidence of the pressure of global secular norms upon all religious traditions.

The deprivatization of religion, as I have stressed throughout my work, is a two-way street. It implies not only religious actors bringing religious norms into the secular public sphere, but also secular norms inevitably entering and affecting the religious sphere. Only through radical sectarian segregation from society and from the *saeculum* can a religious community avoid secular influence. But such a sectarian strategy of creating isolated religious enclaves cannot be in the long run a viable option for public "churches," that is, for

those religious traditions that have universal, global claims, as is the case of Catholicism and Islam. Under conditions of globalization even the strategy of state territorialization of religion, people, and cultures, which was the model of the Westphalian system of sovereign confessional territorial states, as well as the model of *Dar El Islam* is increasingly becoming a less viable option. Under the emerging system of what I call "global denominationalism," no religious tradition, much less those with universal global claims can be immune from global public opinion.[35]

This raises the fundamental question of what are to be the proper boundaries between the private and public spheres. It is obvious that the boundaries themselves are historically and culturally contingent, and therefore themselves open to continuous public contestation and redrawing. What is to be a matter of private individual conscience, left to individual freedom and therefore in need of legal protection by the state from any external coercion, religious or secular, as a fundamental inalienable human right? What is to be a matter of discretion or autonomous self-determination by each religious community in accordance with their sacred or authoritative tradition, which the state and other groups should respect under the principle of "free exercise of religion" (the US constitutional formula) or of "equal respect and mutual distance" (Indian constitutional formula)? What is to be a matter of public state jurisdiction and therefore subject to public scrutiny, legislation and state intervention to guarantee basic rights, justice and public order? Most importantly, under contemporary global conditions, what are to be the dynamics of encounter, confrontation, recognition, and respect between diverse and unequal "publics" in the global public sphere ('secular' and 'religious,' 'liberal' and 'illiberal,' 'tolerant' and 'intolerant,' 'critical' and 'fundamentalist,' 'modern' and 'traditional,' 'feminist' and 'patriarchal,' 'cosmopolitan' and 'provincial,' 'Western' and 'non-Western') that do not simply reproduce old imperial, colonial and orientalist rationales for the civilizing mission of superior cultures over inferior ones?

As debates over abortion, conversion and proselytizing, blasphemy and criticism, multiculturalism and plural systems of private religious law, religiously sanctioned polygamy, peyote ceremonies and other "religious crimes" demonstrate, none of these questions allows for simple, straightforward, uncontroversial answers. In this context, I would only like to interrogate the extent to which modern secular norms of gender equality ought to become also principles of self-organization, i.e. of the internal reform, of religious communities or, conversely, whether secular public authorities and secular publics should leave matters of internal religious organization to the discretion of the religious communities themselves even when certain practices would appear to be clear cases of gender discrimination. I stress the qualifier "internal" reform or "internal" organization, because it seems to me that this should be the basic criterion of "free exercise of religion."

Following Stepan's formula of "the twin tolerations," one could argue that in the same way as religious authorities ought to "tolerate" the autonomy of democratically elected governments "without claiming constitutionally privileged prerogatives to mandate or to veto public policy," democratic states and political institutions ought to "tolerate" the autonomy of religious groups to organize themselves internally in accordance with their religious traditions, "as long as they do not violate democratic rules and adhere to the rule of law."[36] The added proviso curtailing the principle of "free exercise of religion" would legitimate the right of a democratic state to intervene and outlaw certain religious customs which would appear to be blatant violations of basic human rights, such as the outlawing of *sati* or the formal aboli-

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[35] Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited," pp. 117-19.
[36] Stepan, *Arguing Comparative Politics* p. 217

tion of the Hindu caste system by the secular Indian state. Other more blatantly secularist interventions like the Kemalist reforms abolishing the Caliphate and Sufi brotherhoods or proscribing veiling and other traditional dress codes and de facto establishing state control of Muslim institutions may have lesser democratic legitimation.

The very connotation of the word "toleration," however, clearly points to the fact that practices and institutions that may have been "tolerated" at some point by liberal democratic regimes, perhaps even finding justification in most religious traditions, may become "intolerable" at a later time as the result of some fundamental change in moral public opinion. Slavery would be an obvious example.

A new near universal human moral consensus against slavery has been reached. At least nobody dares to defend what is now considered an abominable inhuman practice in public. Other practices, such as Mormon "celestial polygamy" or "patriarchal marriage" were also outlawed by the US government under the pressure of democratic public opinion, which found the practice "intolerable" and "repugnant." But clearly there is lesser moral consensus on the practice of polygamy, at a time of expanding toleration and legal protection of sexual practices among consenting adults, such as homosexuality, which only some decades ago were outlawed, hardly tolerated by public opinion, and degraded by medical "scientific" experts.

The denominational splits and the acrimonious debates within the global Anglican/Episcopal Communion over homosexuality illustrate the difficulties which all religious traditions find in isolating themselves from the effects of radical changes in public moral opinion. The issue here is not one of moral relativism, as a matter of arbitrary individual choice or preference, but that of the clash between fundamental "sacred" moral values. Theologically, any religious community should have the right to uphold what it considers a divinely ordained sacred injunction or moral norm. Sociologically, however, the question is how long any religious tradition can resist the adoption of a new moral value when a near universal consensus concerning the sacred character of such a value emerges. The modern sacralization of human rights is a case in point. The Catholic affirmation and missionary embrace of modern human rights, such as the inalienable right to religious freedom, grounded in the sacred dignity of the human person, after having been repeatedly condemned by various popes as anathema, should serve as ground for some theological and moral caution. Humbly, the Catholic Church has admitted publicly to have committed grave moral errors in the past.

Sociologically, one can predict that it is a matter of time until the Catholic Church embraces the modern value of gender equality more firmly as a "Sign of the Times" and revises some of its positions as no longer defensible forms of gender discrimination. The public theological debate over the ordination of women is by no means settled by papal decree.[37] But even if some theological consensus were to persist, that women should be excluded from the sacerdotal/sacramental function, which should be reserved only for males, there will be greater theological difficulties to exclude women religious from greater administrative power within the church, including the Curia and the College of Cardinals.

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[37] Kelly A. Raab, *When Women Become Priests: the Catholic Women's Ordination Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

2) Religion and Sexism: Androcentric Images of Women in Religious Traditions

It would be impossible and presumptuous to even attempt to summarize here the state of scholarship and the contemporary debates on this central issue. This is the area in which the interface between "religion" and "culture," i.e., "the customary sphere" is the greatest. This is the area also in which religion most clearly shows its "Janus-face." Comparative historical research is particularly relevant in this sphere not only because of the tremendous range and diversity of religious norms and cultural customs concerning gender, but more importantly because both traditions, Catholicism and Islam, like all religious traditions, are equivocal and ambivalent and, therefore, can be used to legitimate and reinforce, as well as to challenge prophetically patriarchal and androcentric customs and norms. Indeed, in the name of reverting to some pristine religious tradition, movements of religious reform, revival or purification often tend to introduce and legitimate radical changes in the customary sphere.

Only through Abelard's method of *Sic et Non*, simultaneously affirming and denying every proposition could one do justice to the contradictions, ambiguities, and ambivalences in the religious traditions. The very strong misogynist strand in the Christian tradition is undeniable and has been amply documented most critically by contemporary female and feminist theologians and religious scholars.[38] But no serious scholar could claim that this misogynist strand is derived from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth or deny that in its origins primitive Christianity represented an egalitarian countercultural trend against the patriarchal culture of the times.[39] One could debate how to allocate fairly the blame for the later reversal to patriarchy, for the intensification of misogyny, or for the novel introduction of misogamy beyond the Jewish tradition, whether to attribute them to specific currents within Hellenism or Gnosticism, for example, or to particular *Patres*, such as Paul, Tertullian, Agustin, etc. What is undeniable is that for two millennia the images of women and gender within the Catholic tradition have been produced and controlled by males and, what is most significant, mostly by celibate clerics. The persecution of witches in Medieval Christianity and in Early Modernity offers the most damaging evidence of the way in which religious images could be used to sanctify the oppression of women. Only in the last decades have female scholars and religious activists began to challenge in earnest the established patriarchal images and the male celibate control of those images.[40] In most advanced capitalist Western countries the development of religious feminism was mostly a response to general secular trends in those societies, to the radical transformation in gender roles, to the advancement of woman's liberation and to the spread of feminist ideas and sensibilities. But in many so-called "Third World" countries, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, religious feminism often presents a prophetic challenge vis-à-vis established patriarchal customs and gender roles.[41]

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[38] Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures; Vol 1: A Feminist Introduction; Vol II: A Feminist Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1993, 1994); Mary Malone, *Women and Christianit; Vol I: The First Thousand Years; Vol II: From 1000 to the Reformation* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2001)

[39] Andrew Greeley, *Jesus: A Meditation on His Stories and His Relationship with Women* (New York: Forge, 2007).

[40] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1985); Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1990)

[41] Rosemary Radford Reuther, "Feminism in World Christianity, " in Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young, eds., *Feminism and World Religions* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999) pp. 214-247; Mercy Ambo Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995)

Specifically within the Catholic tradition, the cult of Mary, the Virgin Mother of Jesus, Mother of God, and Mother intercessor of all believers represents most paradigmatically the ambivalence in woman's image, being simultaneously mother and virgin, and thus an unattainable ideal for all her sisters.[42] It is undeniable that the Virgin Mary in its myriad diverse vernacular representations has served as an iconic symbol of perpetual help to the most needy, the most marginal, and the most disprivileged, who in all cultures throughout the world happened to be oppressed women at the bottom of all hierarchies of power and privilege. What is debatable is whether such symbolic representation and "marianismo" offer the anticipatory critical promise of transcendence and liberation in this world and in the next, or rather the otherworldly ideological compensatory opiate that serves to sanctify the status quo and quietist resignation in this world.[43]

Similar heated debates concerning the image of women within Islam and the role of Islam in legitimating and reproducing patriarchy and gender inequality within Muslim societies have erupted with great force in the last decades. As in the case of Christianity, female scholarship has made the most important critical contributions to those debates.[44] There is less scholarly consensus that the Prophetic Revelation and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet constituted an improvement in the situation of women when compared with the reigning conditions in the immediate pre-Islamic period in the Arabian peninsula, despite the widespread and strongly held conviction among ordinary Muslims, both male and female, that this was the case. It is more widely accepted that Muhammad himself respected and trusted women and tried to provide for equal participation of women in the religious life of the *ummah*. On the other hand, there is evidence for a rapid decline with the institutionalization of the early Muslim community, marked by what Jane Smith has termed a dual process of "exclusion" and "seclusion," that is, the exclusion of women not only from leadership roles but from the communal aspects of religious life and their seclusion to a place apart from normal social intercourse with men.[45]

The most heated controversies, however, relate to the central role of women in modern processes of Islamization. Veiling, above all, has become the most salient, contested, and controversial emblem of contemporary global Islam. As Nilüfer Göle has pointed out, "no other symbol than the veil reconstructs with such a force the 'otherness' of Islam to the West. Women's bodies and sexuality reappear as a political site of difference and resistance to the homogenizing and egalitarian forces of Western modernity."[46] One cannot understand the centrality of the issue without taking into account the dynamics of thesis and antithesis,

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[42] Marina Warner, *Alone of all her sex: the myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage, 1983); Andrew Greeley, *The Mary Myth: on the Femininity of God* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977).

[43] Evelyn P. Stevens, "Marianismo: the Other Side of Machismo in Latin America," in Ann Pescatello, ed. *Female and Male in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973); and Marysa Navarro, "Against Marianismo," in Lessi Jo Frazier et al. ed., *Gender's Place: Feminist Anthropologies of Latin America* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

[44] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Re-Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam. An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Haideh Moghissi, ed., *Women and Islam. Vol I: Images and Realities* (New York: Routledge, 2005)

[45] Jane I. Smith, "Women, Religion and Social Change in Early Islam," in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly, *Women, Religion, and Social Change* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985) pp. 19-35.

[46] Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern. Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996) p. 1.

marked by Western orientalism and colonialism, on the one hand, and Muslim response and resistance, on the other.

Certainly, in the West the "headscarf" has become the symbol of fundamentalist Islam and the clear sign of the oppression of Muslim women. But countering such a simplistic liberal, feminist and secularist reading of the meaning of the Muslim veil, anthropological phenomenological analyses of the practices and discourses of Muslim women both in Muslim societies and in immigrant diasporas has offered more nuanced, ambivalent, and contextual interpretations.[47] One should notice that while France outlawed the wearing of headscarves in public schools in 2004 in the name of secularism and gender equality, the government in Turkey did the opposite, that is, attempted to lift the secularist Kemalist ban on wearing the veil in universities and public schools, allegedly for exactly the same reason, that is, to guarantee equal access and the "right to higher education" to all girls.

Indeed, throughout the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East, the veil has functioned as an emblem of the eruption of women in the public sphere after centuries of "seclusion" and as such as a symbol of their political, economic, and cultural emancipation, and above all as expression of female agency and subjectivity. Of course, the latter can only be true where Muslim women have real freedom to wear or not to wear the veil, without having to suffer negative consequences for exercising their individual freedom. Neither secularist proscription of the veil in public places, as is the case in France or in Turkey, nor the Islamist obligatory prescription of the veil in Muslim societies, such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, allow the free exercise of religion as a matter of individual conscience. But it would be misleading to simply frame "the politics of the veil" anywhere in terms of liberal principles of religious freedom, female autonomy or individual conscience.[48]

3) Women as religious subjects, historical agents, and political actors

From a comparative perspective this may well be the most critical area of research insofar as it examines the historical agency of women in the contemporary reproduction, reinterpretation and transformation of their religious traditions and their role in the contested politics of gender equality. The proliferation of feminist religious discourses both within Catholicism and Islam is undoubtedly the harbinger of radical transformations in both traditions.[49] At the same time, the religious politics of gender are also at the center of the internal contestations and debates within both traditions.[50] Women reading the sacred texts of their traditions with female eyes and with female sensibilities without the mediation, interpretation, and con-

[47] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender. The Religious Debate in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[48] Cf. Joan W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves* (Princeton: Princeton, University Press, 2006), Göle, *Forbidden Modern*, and Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*.

[49] Cf. Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: the Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Tinna Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Sandra Marie Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004); Maria Pilar Aquino, *Teología Feminista Latinoamericana* (Quito: Ecuador: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1998); Valentine M. Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate," *Signs* 27:4, 2002, 1135-1171; Riffat Hassan, "Feminist theology: the challenges for Muslim women," in Moghissi, ed. *Women and Islam*.

[50] For a good comparative survey, covering a good number of Catholic and Muslim countries, in response to the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing see, Jane H. Bayes and Nayereh Tohidi, eds., *Globalization, Gender and Religion. The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

trol of male clerical authorities is the first hermeneutics step, simple yet radical, on the road to female religious subjectivity and agency.[51]

About the global expansion of female religious subjectivity and agency in all religious traditions there is little doubt. This is perhaps the most significant and novel element shared by liberation theology and the Base Christian Communities within Catholicism, the explosion of Pentecostal Christianity in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, and the pious mosque movement throughout the Muslim world and in immigrant diasporas. It certainly can be viewed as a sign of religious modernity. Of course, nuns and religious sisters had always played traditionally an active role within Catholicism, running and staffing many of the Church's educational, welfare, and health care institutions. But they had been much more subservient to male clerics, even in the definition of proper female religious roles. Noticeable in the last decades, however, and particularly since Vatican II, women religious have assumed a much more leading intellectual, organizational and pastoral role at all levels of Catholic life. Intellectually, they have surpassed the educational credentials and achievements of male priests.[52] Organizationally, given the drastic fall in vocations of male priests, they have become ever more indispensable to the management of Catholic institutions at all administrative levels. Pastorally, they serve increasingly as de facto surrogate pastors in many parishes and leaders of many CEB's. But equally significant is the extent to which ordinary Catholic women of all social strata, who had always constituted a majority of the practicing faithful, have become increasingly active female religious subjects, actively forming and informing their religious selves and creatively appropriating and reshaping Catholic practices and discursive traditions.[53]

Particularly in the case of Latin American Catholicism much of this female religious agency and grassroots activism has been in concert with progressive, liberal and secular feminist agendas.[54] But one should not exaggerate the extent to which the Catholic religious revival in Latin America and even a majority of the CEBs are linked to a progressive agenda of social and political transformation. Much of this religious revival has as its primary goal religious self-transcendence and the transformation and liberation of the religious self. This is particularly the case in much of the Charismatic Catholic movement.[55] Moreover, on crucial

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[51] This is the basic hermeneutic principle shared by liberation theology in Latin America and Sisters in Islam in South East Asia, for instance. Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Indonesian Women Reading the Qur'an* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006)

[52] Bridget Puzon, ed., *Women Religious and the Intellectual Life* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publication, 1996)

[53] Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women: a contemporary challenge to traditional religious authority* (Bloomingdale: Indiana University Press, 1995); Sonia Alvarez, "Women's participation in the 'people's church': a critical appraisal," *Feminist Studies* 16:1, Summer 1990; Carol Drogus, "Reconstructing the Feminine: Women in São Paulo's CEBs" *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 71, July-September 1990; Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Base Commmunities: An Introduction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1994).

[54] Cf. Carol Ann Drogus and Hannah Stewart-Gambino, *Activist Faith: Grassroots Women in Democratic Brazil and Chile* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); John Burdick and W.E. Hewitt, eds., *The Church at the Grassroots in Latin America: Perspectives on Thirty Years of Activism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000); Manuel Vásquez, *The Brazilian Popular Church and the Crisis of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Daniel H. Levine, *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[55] Andrew R. Chestnut, "A Preferential Option for the Spirit: The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Latin America's New Religious Economy," *Latin American Politics and Society* 45:1, 2003; Edward L. Cleary, The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Latin America's New Religious Economy," in Timoty J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary, ed., *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007). In this respect the original tendency to counterpose the progressive and activist Catholic CEB's with the conservative and quietist Latin American Evangelical and Pentecostal movements has

gender issues central to secular liberal and feminist agendas, such as contraception, abortion, homosexuality, divorce, and family values, the Catholic hierarchy has maintained a firm conservative "traditionalist" position not only in the public sphere of civil society but engaging also in active political mobilization, trying to influence directly the legislative-democratic process and state policies. Not surprisingly, liberals and secular as well as Catholic feminists have responded with counter-mobilizations and accusations of religious "fundamentalism."[56]

Sociologically, in reaction to the Catholic Church's official defense of a "traditionalist" position on all kinds of gender issues and a singularly obsessive focus on "sexual" moral issues, one can observe throughout the Catholic world a dual process of female secularization and erosion of the Church's authority on sexual morality. [57] Women are increasingly leaving the Church, most dramatically throughout Europe. Indeed, female secularization may be the most significant factor in the drastic secularization of Western European societies since the 1960's and in the radical rupture of European "religion as a chain of memory."[58] But equally important seems to be the drastic secularization of sexual morality. Increasing numbers of practicing Catholic are disobeying the injunctions of the Catholic hierarchy and following their own conscience on most issues related with sexual morality. [59] Moreover, there is increasing evidence that young Catholic adults are explicitly dissociating their sexuality and their religiosity, claiming that religion has absolutely no influence upon their attitudes toward sexuality.[60]

It is on this complex relation between gender moralities, religion, feminism and secularization that one can observe very different dynamics throughout the Muslim world. Indeed, as Saba Mahmood has pointed out, "the vexing relationship between feminism and religion is perhaps most manifest in discussions of Islam."[61] On the one hand, nobody can deny that the female veil has become the public face of global Islam. This could not have happened had it

given way to more nuanced ethnographic analyses that emphasize the deep similarities between them. Cf., David Lehmann, *Struggle for the Spirit: Religious Transformation and Popular Culture in Brazil and Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996) and Andrew R. Chestnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)

[56] Mala Htun, *Sex and the State: abortion, divorce and the family under Latin American dictatorships and democracies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and "Life, Liberty, and Family Values: Church and State in the Struggle over Latin America's Social Agenda," in Frances Hagopian, ed., *Religious Pluralism, Democracy and the Catholic Church in Latin America* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2009 forthcoming); Sonia Correa, *Population and Reproductive Rights: Feminist Perspectives from the South* (London: Zed Books, 1994).

[57] Soledad Loaeza, "Cultural Change in Mexico at the Turn of the Century: The Secularization of Women's Identity and the Erosion of the Authority of the Catholic Church," in Hagopian, *Religious Pluralism*

[58] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), and Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization, 1800-2000* (London: London , 2001)

[59] Cf. William V. D'Antonio et al. *American Catholics Today: new Realities of their Faith and their Church* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); John Fulton, ed., *Young Catholics and the New Millennium: the religion and morality of young adults in Western countries* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2000); Bonnie Shepard, "The 'Double Discourse' on Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Latin America: The Chasm between Public Policy and Private Actions," *Health and Human Rights*, 4:2, 2000; Belden Rusonello and Stewart Research and Communications, *Attitudes of Catholics on Reproductive Rights, Church-State,, and Related Issues. Three National Surveys in Bolivia, Colombia and Mexico.* Conducted for Catholics for a Free Choice and Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir en Bolivia, Colombia y Mexico. December 2003. Accessed February 16, 2009, from htpp://www.catholicsforchoice.oeg/topics/international/documents/2004latinamericanpoll.pdf.

[60] José Casanova, "Spanish Religiosity: An Interpretative Reading of the Religion Monitor Results for Spain," in Berterlsmann Stiftung, ed.*What the World Believes. Analysis and Commentary of the Religion Monitor 2008* (Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2009) pp. 223-55.

[61] Mahmood,, *Politics of Piety,* p. 1

not been for the fact that Muslim women have actively entered the public sphere of Muslim societies. But more importantly, it is the first time in history that Muslim women not only have entered the mosque en masse, but are in many cases leaders of the modern mosque movement, thereby challenging the traditional image of the mosque, and the umma, as a public male assembly. [62] But it is precisely this public manifestation of female agency and subjectivity and the grassroots character of the mass movement that most baffles liberal and secular feminist assumptions as well as our conceptions of a modern civil society. As Mahmood has asked rhetorically: "why would such a large number of women across the Muslim world actively support a movement that seems inimical to their 'own interests and agendas,' especially at a historical moment when these women appear to have more emancipatory possibilities available to them?"[63] The fact that the movement also enjoys support from highly educated and articulated women from the upper and middle-income strata of many Muslim societies, makes explanations in terms of "false consciousness" "self-imposed tutelage" or the "feminist intuition" that women (like men) can internalize norms that lead to their own oppression, even more problematic.[64]

Indeed basic secularist assumptions, which tend to contrapose as self-evident secular humanist autonomy and religious theistic heteronomy, turn the very notion of female religious subjectivity and free agency into an oxymoron despite the overwhelming empirical historical evidence of the prominent role of deeply religious women in all kinds of modern reform, liberation and democratic movements, including the women's movement. Yet, as Phyllis Mack has pointed out, feminist scholars,

> like many other post-Enlightenment intellectuals, (they) assume that those who are inspired by religious enthusiasm or fanaticism, or who live under the influence of a religious institution or discipline, have no agency or limited agency, whereas secular society, which locates religious authority and practice of politics or the marketplace, allows for domains of free, autonomous behavior.[65]

The fact that women are highly active in contemporary Islamist movements is undeniable. But as I've stressed frequently, when it comes to Islam, that, is, to global imagined community of Muslims, we in the West tend to be obsessed with state islamism and *khilafist jihādism* as the two contemporary dominant forms of globalized Islam.[66] But one could argue that the majoritarian currents of transnational Islam today and the ones likely to have the greatest impact on the future transformation of Islam are national and transnational *da'wa* movements*, that is, pious networks and movements of Muslim renewal, equally disaffected from state Islamism and transnational *jihādism*.[67]

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[62] To understand the magnitude of the change one only needs to consider some numbers of the mosque movement in Egypt, so brilliantly analyzed by Saba Mahmood. The number of mosques in Egypt grew from 28,000 in 1975 to 50,000 in 1985 and to 120,000 in 1995. Of the 50,000 mosques listed in 1985, only 7,000 had been established by the government. It is therefore primarily a grass-root movement of civil society. Mahmood, p. 4

[63] Mahmood, p. 2.

[64] Natalie Stoljar, "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition," in Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, eds., *Relational Autonomy:* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[65] Phyllis Mack, "Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29:1, 2003, p. 153.

[66] Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam. The Search for a new Ummah* (London: Hurst & Company, 2002)

[67] Mahmood uses "the terms 'the *da'wa* movement' and 'the piety movement' interchangeably to refer to this network of socioreligious organizations of which the mosque movement is an important subset." Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 3, footnote 5.

Furthermore, within this piety movement of Muslim renewal there is a minoritarian, but nonetheless in many places significant and even prominent movement of Muslim feminists, such as *Sisters in Islam* in Malaysia, who are actively struggling to inform their own Muslim vision of modernity. In Islam, as in every other civilization and religious tradition, the most important culture wars are taking place not as a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West, but in the form of internal struggles to redefine and make the tradition relevant for the modern age. Even if it is true, that so-called "fundamentalist" religious movements in all religious traditions are active and reactive interventions and responses to the radical global transformation of gender relations, the aim of this paper has been to put into question the unreflexive binary categories of Western liberalism, secularism, and feminism, which equate "secular" with liberation and autonomy and "religious" with subjection and heteronomy. Such binary categories can not easily be grafted upon gendered religious politics even in Western contexts. Much less is this the case in non-Western Catholic and Muslim contexts.[68]

This paper has tried to propose a broad framework for a critical analysis of "public religions" beyond the Christian-Secular West and beyond "ecclesiastical disestablishment" and "civil society," as well as presented some critical reflections on the religious politics of gender within the Catholic and Muslim traditions, which put into question some dominant liberal secular feminist assumptions. Necessarily, the analysis had to remain at a rather abstract and general level. In order to prove its hermeneutical or practical usefulness, however, the analytical framework would need to be applied more in depth to various particular contexts of gendered religious politics, local, national and/or global. Such a task would need to go beyond the limitations of this essay and its author.

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[68] Margot Badran, *Feminism Beyond East and West. New Gender Talk and Practice in Global Islam* (New Delhi: New Global Publications, 2007); Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood. Western Feminism and Iran* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Sharma and Young, *Feminism and World Religions*.