Secularity and public religion in Europe: Historical roots, theoretical debates and the case of public Islam

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ABSTRACT

This study builds on debates over the understanding of "secularity" as a typically European construct, despite the diversity of institutional regulations of the religious field in various European countries and the existence of secular cultures "at large" in non-European, including Islamic, worlds. The article locates the roots of this view of secularism in specific ruptures in the political and intellectual history of Europe, particularly during "the radical Enlightenment" (1650-1750). This idea of secularity and the concomitant concept of secularization have been challenged by José Casanova's attempts to redefine the conditions under which the "publicization" of religion not only allows, but actually requires secularity, if reinterpreted in a more elastic way: as the product of a transformation of religion's modalities of access to the public sphere and not as the marker of religion's inexorable privatization. Talal Asad's objections to this view of secularity's inherent malleability have generated a seminal debate, where the case of Islam in contemporary Europe has become a major terrain for testing views of secularity and public religion. The article attempts to conceptually mediate the discussion by looking at the conditions of Islam's publicization in today's Europe as part of a complex and sometimes contradictory trajectory of the transformation of secularity that older and newer secularization paradigms are insufficient to capture. It is at this crucial historical passage of the transformation of secularity that "public Islam" enters the stage and exerts pressures to redefine, though not to subvert, secularity.

Introduction: European secularity as a wisdom of power?

In his novel, *Description of the Mighty Kingdom of Krinke Kesmes*, published in the Netherlands in 1708, physician Hendrik Smeeks delivered a utopian story in the style of *Robinson Crusoe*, including a message on the delicate construction and maintenance of the social bond (Smeeks, 1976). The novel's focus was actually on the effect of

religious divisiveness on maintenance of the social bond, and so on the need for secularity. Smeeks constructed an ingenious plot around the idea of the threat that unbridled religion, i.e., religious sectarianism, poses to public order and the very possibility of a peaceful and civil society.

Like in *Robinson Crusoe*, this is the story of the aftermath of a shipwreck. A Dutch-Spanish merchant, from a mixed Protestant and Catholic background, is shipwrecked in the then legendary land of Australis, in the South Sea. The population of the land, astonishingly, knows all the main languages and religions of Eurasia. This was made possible because in an earlier shipwreck, some centuries beforehand, a Persian ship directed to Mecca had sunk, carrying Muslim pilgrims along with their Christian and Jewish slaves. The wise king of Krinke Kesmes had ordered the salvage and classification of all the precious texts, in Hebrew, Arabic, Latin and Greek, which were found in the vessel. Small groups among the kingdom's inhabitants had then delved into the theological and philosophical tenets of the various religious doctrines included in the texts.

The next move was a true sociopolitical experiment. The king ordered the construction of a huge temple with several pulpits accommodating the various "reconstructed" religious sects. The goal was to ascertain, through public discourse and an open dialogue, which group was closer to religious truth. The outcome was the opposite of what the experiment was expected to yield: abusive mutual attacks between the religions, reciprocally denounced as false and heretical, seemed to have no end. An acute threat to public order became apparent. The wise king was forced to reach an uncompromising decision: to ban from the public sphere any religious dispute, and to grant religious freedom to everybody in the personal sphere.

Religious discord, secularity and the resilience of the Christian republic

The context of this study is given by contemporary battles affecting the place of "religion" and "secularity" in the Euro-Islamic equation. However, as evidenced in the story of Krinke Kesmes, the intention is to show the roots of secularity in European history and the type of power dilemmas that affected the emergence of secular formations. The working hypothesis is that these dilemmas are essential to understanding contemporary conflicts in Europe involving Islam, as well as the potential and limits of a dialogic solution to them. I use the term "secularity" in connection to, but also as distinct from, a merely ideological and normative school ("secularism") and the theoretical view of a necessary social process of differentiation of a religious sphere, linked to modernization ("secularization"). This study builds on debates over the understanding of "secularity" as a typically European construct (Asad, 2003), despite the diversity of institutional regulations of the religious field in various European countries, and notwithstanding the existence–or even popularity–of secular cultures "at large" in the non-European, including the Islamic, socio-political worlds.

Secularity manifests itself in concrete life forms and modes of governance, and in the way religion is reconstructed as experience and belief to be confined to the private sphere of life. This is a sphere whose intangibility is protected by the state, under the condition that the public sphere is safeguarded as the dominion of the symbols of allegiance to the state and is not invaded by uncontrollable beliefs. However, the implications of secularity go beyond this mere confinement of religion to a "sphere" of individual or, at most, "community" life. The roots of this view can be traced to specific ruptures in the political and intellectual history of Europe, going back in particular to the period that Jonathan Israel (2001) has defined as "the radical Enlightenment", roughly spanning the century between 1650 and 1750.

Nonetheless, we should be aware that the whole semantic area designing the "secular" is much older that the range of processes, discourses and institutions associated with modern secularity. As noted by Talal Asad, mainly by invoking the work of German intellectual historians like Reinhart Koselleck, the notion of *saeculum* had some importance in medieval theological discourse and worldview. It was intended, first of all, as the sphere of religious life external to the *regula*, the monastic rule, and therefore as close to the care of the souls of the lay people. This idea of a passage from a self-enclosed religious life building the kernel of a holistic conception of human life in the service of God, to an expanded domain of common life, was transposed into the market realm once the modern notion of individual property started to gain strength. Secularization ended up designating the release of ecclesiastical property into private hands and market circulation (Asad, 2003:192). On the other hand, the notion of secularity that crystallized after the Enlightenment and in particular within anthropological and sociological theory – in a singular symbiosis with the transformations of Christian, mainly Protestant theological discourse – can no longer be understood as the outcome of further transpositions of its medieval meaning. Through this epistemic transformation, the other hand of the binary spectrum, i.e., the religious life, broke loose from its link to the *saeculum* and ended up signifying "a variety of overlapping social usages rooted in changing and heterogeneous forms of life". These were squeezed "into a single immutable essence", designated as "the object of a universal human experience called 'religious'" (ibid, 2003:31). Asad indicts Durkheim for grounding, on the basis of this insulation of "religion", a transhistorical opposition between the "sacred" and the "secular".

We need to redefine the loaded notion of secularity by avoiding a pre-emptive culturalization of its meaning and by giving all due attention not just to the power relations it entails, between state authorities and religious groups, but to the metamorphosed notion of power that it incorporates. The hypothesis here pursued is that secularity manifests itself in concrete power relations and modes of governance, and in the way religion is reconstructed as experience and belief to be confined to the private sphere of life. However, the implications of secularity go beyond this reduction of religion. The Protestant Reformation triggered by Augustinian monk Martin Luther

in the sixteenth century gave to the older dialectics of popular challenge of religious authority and institutional response and reform a new traumatic quality and radicalized the opposition of "religion" and "politics" that had first gained visibility in several innovative theoretical systematizations by Dominican and Franciscan scholars during the Axial Renaissance of the Low Middle Ages. It was in this context that religious discord, highlighted by the final crisis of the imperial institution – that had been essentially, though ambivalently tied to the idea of *respublica christiana* – opened the lid to the so-called Wars of Religion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, terminated by the Peace of Westfalia in 1648. In this traumatic, early modern European experience, "religion" started to be considered legitimate in the public sphere only if it helped overcome discord and moralize public life, while being compatible with the general framework of political and moral values of its society, or simply with the religion of the ruler (*cuius regio eius religio*). The state's domestication of religion started to consolidate as a means to cement national unity. Religious homogeneity was considered a precious resource complementary to linguistic homogeneity in building the nations. However, the sanctioning and quasi-sanctification of such a political fragmentation in the sovereignty of independent states in Europe went hand in hand with the consecration of a principled reconstruction of power mechanisms resting on a radical redefinition of religion. An increasingly mature, singular and self-conscious notion of secularity, variously derived from the wise decision of the king of Krinke Kesmes, provided this principle, and became a factor of ideological homogeneity in Europe alongside its drifting political fragmentation and territorial and colonial competition.

As mentioned earlier, the decisive process of refining the notion of secularity goes back to major ruptures in the political and intellectual history of some parts of Europe in the aftermath of the Peace of Westfalia, during "the radical Enlightenment" of 1650-1750 (Israel, 2001). This is not surprising, since this is the buffer period between the Wars of Religion triggered by the Protestant Reformation and the golden era of the European nation-state, of the "mature" Enlightenment and of a full-blown colonial modernity. Since then, a family of conceptions of secularity in various nation-states has provided discrete, locally adapted approximations to the institutional principle of state neutrality toward religion, which should be regarded as the kernel of secularity at both an institutional and an ideological level. The case of the Netherlands is particularly instructive, since it provides a prototype of the attempt to transform the sectarian divisiveness unleashed by the Protestant Reformation into an orderly principle of national cohesion of republican shape. Moreover, the emerging Dutch religio-political problematique can be seen as located at the border between the liberal English and Scottish, later British, on the one hand, and the continental-republican models, on the other. Moreover, the Dutch model emerged out of ongoing conflicts which were clearly specific to northwestern Europe.

The most elegant and theoretically cogent justification of this secular kernel of republicanism found in the Netherlands, during the century of the radical Enlightenment,

was in ethical Spinozism. The importance of the thought of Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza for several vanguards of the European Enlightenment and for the modern self-understanding of present-day Europe cannot be overestimated. However, it is mostly neglected that his thought was heir to the vibrant cultural world of al-Andalus. With Spinoza, the son of a Sephardic Jewish family that had resettled in Amsterdam due to the Catholic persecutions, "the Mediterranean irrupts again into Western thought" (Voegelin, 1999:126). He pieced together distinct motives, some of which echo the most daring visions of Islamic philosophy and rationalist speculative theology, those most strenuously combatted by Muslim legists. His family legacy reflects the tragedy of the persecution and expulsion of Muslims and Jews in the beginnings of the nationalization and christianization of Spain, in which we should see the roots of modern and contemporary European judeophobia and islamophobia.

Spinoza's reflections on religion, power and the state combine this tragic legacy with the experience of the bloody sectarianism unleashed by the Protestant Reformation and the destruction of the following Wars of Religion. Yet, his radically innovative system of thought was deeply indebted to Jewish mysticism and Islamic philosophy and to the heritage of such thinkers as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and especially the Andalusian Ibn-Rushd and Maimonides, though Spinoza's will to be detached from any specific cultural and religious tradition made these roots completely untransparent and unacknowledged in his work (Albiac, 1987; Strauss, 1965; Voegelin, 1999).

For Spinoza, who was a sharp critic of priestly power and superstition, the only criteria for judging the truth of religions is practical and entails assessing their capacity to institute justice and *caritas* (doing good to others), which clearly do not exist – and here he agrees with Hobbes – in the state of nature (Preus, 1989:90-91). Religion is constituted pragmatically for its appeal to the imagination of the common man and for its capacity to instill in him the dispositions that support the social link between ego and alter. He sees the kernel of so conceived religion in practical action rooted in good dispositions (*pietas*), and therefore as in principle separated from the external realms of politics and law: "Inasmuch as [religion] consists not so much in outward actions as in simplicity and truth of character, it stands outside the realm of law and public authority". The key to this "true religion" is "faithful and brotherly admonition, sound education, and, above all, free use of the individual judgment" (Spinoza, 1951:118).

Spinoza saw religion as historically based on prophetic discourse trying to harmonize justice and *caritas* with the practical needs of the common people, and therefore instituting the very notion of the common good. This is a secular approach, in that the exhortative discourse of faith is conceived as a conversation between human agents and does not need to be located theologically in God. God matters here solely as the initiator of human power, as the source of divine sparks present in individual beings, who are a heterogeneous multitude; nor do they have to respond to priestly authority. This Spinozian vision was not simply the product of a sharply critical mind, but was part of an effort to come to terms with the threat of chaos represented by the religious

sectarianism that did not seem to be completely subdued after the Peace of Westfalia and the promulgation, at the highest level, of the principle of *cuius regio eius religion*, which had gained momentum since the first eruption of the Reformation. These dilemmas were well alive in public discussions and in the collective imagination at the beginning of the eighteenth century, as witnessed by the story of the king of Krinke Kesmes, which reflected typically Spinozian motives. Yet, Spinoza himself refused to justify the suppression of religion from the public sphere on the mere level of rational expediency, as a pure wisdom of power. His theory implies, rather, that whenever the multitudes go public with their pious passions and raise claims of justice, this movement represents *ipso facto* a determination of power that enters the political process of the ongoing conflicted constitution and reconstitution of the *res publica*. As in Balibar's words:

> The supplementary force of religious *fides*, submitting individuals to God, "frees" them from slavery in relation to the *imperium* (that is, from the pure relations of forces) at the very moment when, by turning the damage caused to others into a violation of right (*injuria*) and a sin, it subjects them internally to the ends of civil society (1997:180).

The motive that emerges from the popular Spinozism of the story of Krinke Kesmes is the failed attempt to institute a neutral public cult as wished by Spinoza, while keeping and even reinforcing the principle that the basic value for the republic is public order, the sine qua non of *res publica*. However, this outcome is not purely celebratory in the novel. The emerging secular principle prevents conflict but suffocates dialogue, and it makes diversity invisible. Any religious identity has to be made private enough so as not to diminish public loyalty to the state, essential to preserving its authority and individual citizens' rights. This is conducive to a monological political culture. The message is that "religion derives from the political regime and not the political regime from religion" (Israel, 2001:321). Outward religion has to fit political imperatives. Inner religion cannot go public, but it cannot be obviously banned, as the subject is sovereign in the inner forum. This is also a Lockean theme that has become crucial to modern and contemporary notions of secularity. The winning model of European secularity rests, therefore, on a combined idea of inwardness, subjectivity, sovereignty, agency and responsibility. As Talal Asad remarks:

> At least as far back as John Locke, "person" was theorized as a forensic term that called for the integration of a single subject with a continuous consciousness in a single body. The development of property law in a nascent capitalism was important to this conception. But equally important was the way attributing an essence to him helped the human subject to become an object of social discipline (2003:74).

Even more importantly, this conception facilitated a split between legality and morality that were then reconnected in new ways through dialectics of powers external and internal to the subject. This dynamic is conjured up by the dependence of subjective agency on the tutelage of Leviathan, who warrants security but also the enforcement of agreements. The bridling of religion recalls the essential absolutist kernel of the modern state, even if it takes a republican or a liberal shape: surveillance and increasingly bio-politics – whose beginnings we can detect in the story of Krinke Kesmes – are essential to the forging of responsible subjects who internalize the moral force of religion. Religious neutrality is not just a rational postulate, but has to rely on sophisticated discursive and institutional machinery guaranteeing and delimiting religious freedom.

However, one cannot reduce the Spinozian approach to religion, power and what Spinoza himself defined in classic terms as "civil society" (*societas civilis*) without reassessing his key concepts and how they could be potentially employed for a modern reconstruction of secularity. One could speculate that an alternative reconstruction would have the potential to change the postulates of cultural homogeneity and the basically monological character of political cultures in the European states and help propose solutions to the contemporary Euro-Islamic equation. For Spinoza, God is the supreme good, but is mainly, though not completely, identified with nature and deprived of any anthropomorphic attributes. Man can only realize his nature and pursue the good in company with other men. Political society should be constructed in such a way that the pursuit of good is possible for the largest number. Spinoza recombined key elements drawn from Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions in order to achieve this revolutionary synthesis.

Spinoza clearly saw that the ruptures in medieval Christian civilization, far from realizing a new freedom, had unleashed sectarian passions in the form of unredeemed wills to power. His mysticism of reason and restraint as the only key to a balance of powers leading to collective enjoyment was a radical antithesis to the sectarian furor released by the Protestant Reformation. For all the merits of his daring and intriguing vision, his view was quite elitist. It implied, despite his intentions, a privatization of God as the supreme good (Voegelin, 1999:136). In the *Tractatus Politicus*, left unfinished by his premature death, Spinoza theorized about the political role of the masses and multitudes by marginalizing the role of religious imagination postulated in the earlier *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, yet in this way he lost touch with the sentiments of the masses, with their pious passions. The emerging European states were more skillful in absorbing those pious passions of early modernity, which, though manipulated by subsequent waves of self-appointed reformers, had profound roots in the sensibilities of urban strata in continual upheaval. The story of Krinke Kesmes probably reflects these popular sensibilities and radicalism better than the geometric political theory of the "laic saint" Spinoza. Yet, the message of Krinke Kesmes sanctions the rolling victory of the European state over the energies of the multitudes.

Secularity in contemporary Europe

The innovative and sophisticated inroads made by "radical Enlightenment" thinkers like Spinoza into the semantic and interactional fields of religion and politics and into their complex relations were later stultified into a rigid differentiation between "religion" and "politics". This post-Enlightenment understanding *and* regulation of religion is common to the whole of the non-Orthodox part of Europe, notwithstanding differences in the degrees of its institutional enforcement and a variety of power relations between state authorities, established churches and non-established religious groups. This commonality is rooted in the idea of a religious field regulating religious belief and practice, along with the range of social and cultural (therefore, non-political) competencies radiating from religious commitments. This type of arrangement is, in Western and Central Europe, the least common denominator representing the basic secular character of the institutional landscape, regardless of national differences.

This outcome simplifies and rigidifies the historic complexity of the Euro-Islamic equation. Relations of tension and compromise between religious communities or institutions, on the one hand, and the rising states, on the other, have been constitutive of modern European societies. The variety of arrangements resulting from this ongoing relation are inscribed in the social and legal charters of the various European societies and inform contemporary national political cultures. It should no longer be surprising – as often stressed by José Casanova (1994) – that the principle of religious neutrality of the state was often promoted by non-conformist and non-established religious groups. While this principle was the result of a "movement" that pushed for its acceptance and institutionalization, it had to feed into the logic of concentration and sophistication of power and control that became the trademark of the nation-state in Europe.

Therefore, at the basis of the principle of religious neutrality is an inherent tension between the tolerance of the other and the constraining of this potential openness into rigid rules enforced by the state. The twin principles of the religious neutrality of the state and of religious tolerance imposed as a rule on all citizens operate as factors of separation. While they provide a potential for promoting civic life and securing public order, they also might be inimical to communication and dialogue. Therefore, in its variety of institutional and ideological forms – from *laïcité* to state church – the separation between religion and politics in Europe is far from unproblematic. The predicament of Muslims in contemporary Europe is just the last, overdramatized instance of this problem. Fear of confrontation might inhibit dialogue, which is the lifeline of any effective public sphere and therefore also a condition for a vital public religion. The paradigm of Krinke Kesmes is a very fragile arrangement for post-colonial Europe. It risks suffocating the public sphere.

As we have seen, the liberal modern understanding of the separation between religion and politics tends to ignore the function of institutional regulation in maintaining the separation, and so creates a shift from function to essence in the understanding of

"religion". The legitimate question – or suspicion – that has been raised by some sociologists of religion is, then, whether the disciplining action of the state in circumscribing and delimiting a "religious field" is the real process, while the establishment of the autonomy of religion is a mere byproduct of the process, although one willingly embraced by those religious groups or sects that had to combat dominant – later "established" – churches. Secularity should be understood in this light. Even more radically, Talal Asad has suggested that it is largely a mystification to understand secularity's emergence as the enforcement of the autonomy of religion, because since early modernity, the power machinery of the rising states has been simultaneously applied "to control the increasingly mobile poor in city and countryside, to govern mutually hostile Christian sects within a sovereign territory, and to regulate the commercial, military, and colonizing expansion of Europe overseas" (Asad, 2003:192). To underwrite the liberal notion of "religion" that was the outcome of such larger processes as substantially, transculturally and transhistorically valid is therefore a plain distortion. It was this liberal modern essentialization of "religion" that transformed the claim to a religious neutrality of the state agitated by radical fringes of non-established groups into secularity as a principle of power management. This process crystallized into the following axioms, whose seeds were all already incorporated in the story of Krinke Kesmes (cf. Bielefeldt, 2003):

a) Religion is a source of divisiveness if it becomes public speech.
b) Religion belongs to an inner forum.
c) Religious freedom in non-public space is itself a condition of public order, whose maintenance is a prerogative of Leviathan.

The non-stated (or understated) corollaries to these three axioms are that:

d) The religious neutrality of the state is not really such as to what religion is/ should be.
e) If the state trusts one particular religion more than the other and considers it functional to state goals, it can grant this religion factual and juridical privileges over the other and justify them in broader cultural terms, i.e. for pinpointing the culture of the majority.

Further historical excursions are not needed to note that these points do not fit well into the historical experience of the Muslim world, nor do they adequately cover the history and vicissitudes of those parts of former Latin Christian Europe where religion has not been so divisive, since it did not produce sectarian radicalism (mainly due to the capacity of the Catholic Church to close ranks and institute state-like instruments of repression and control after the Reformation).

This idea of secularity, and the concomitant concept of secularization championed by the sociology of religion till the 1970s and after, have been challenged by the attempts of José Casanova to redefine the conditions under which the "going-public" (or publicization) of religion puts secularity in a more elastic and realistic perspective: secularity is here interpreted as the product of a malleable transformation of religion's

access to the public sphere, and not as the marker of religion's inexorable privatization. This approach has generated a seminal debate between José Casanova and Talal Asad, who has formulated a theoretically grounded skepticism about secularity's malleability.

I will try to conceptually mediate the discussion also by briefly referring to concrete public controversies involving Islam in Europe and the conditions of its "publicization" as part of a complex trajectory of the transformation of secularity. This trajectory seems far from exhausted, and, according to some interpretations but also to some recent developments (like the recent French law against religious symbols in public educational institutions), has reached a dead end where it openly clashes with postulates of individual rights, whose relation to secularity becomes highly ambivalent. It is at this crucial passage of the transformation of secularity that "public Islam" enters the stage, as a legitimate challenger of European secularity within the same public spheres.

The root of a definition of public Islam is in José Casanova's definition of "public religion" and is strictly related to a discussion of secularity. From his book *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994) to a more recent essay explicitly embracing Islam as the present and future candidate to play a positive role as a public religion (2001), Casanova has brought fresh insights into a conceptual deadlock concerning the question of whether secularity allows or prevents the rising and thriving of public religions. The hard kernel of Casanova's argument is interestingly related to the redefinition of religion that goes back to Spinoza, which is eminently functional (though not functionalist), and so one full step back from the ideological trap of the liberal secular essentialization of religion. For Casanova, justice and doing good to others (*caritas*, in the Christian terminology of virtues) are an enduring and even expanding part of the religious code of most religious groups, including the established ones. Discourses of justice and human solidarity increase in importance for those communities and groups that see their mandate as global. These codes do not simply "invade" the arena of politics, but create a strong link between "social", "cultural" and "political" fields. The Enlightenment dream of creating a pure field of politics governed by a discourse of reason mediated in the public sphere is eroded by this transversality of a religious code that finds ramifications, new allies and new foes in wide sectors of society.

By reconstructing a Toquevillean model of civil and public religion, Casanova reinterprets secularity as fair play governed by the rules of the public democratic game. It therefore does not impinge on forms of life, but rather facilitates a representation of values in the democratic process, within the public sphere. Among those representing values publicly, religious groups have probably the best cultural equipment in society. This legitimizes "public religion" in an institutionally secular environment. At the very least, this reinterpretation of secularity generates tensions and cross-currents: Is secularity more than a sheer rule setting? Does it entail the risk to be value-indifferent or even to further negative values if public religion does not come to its rescue? Can forms of a-religious humanism survive without keeping a religious substratum of

cultivation of human values? Is secularity then an essentially contested and contestable concept? Does it predetermine modes of governance or even life forms, even if it is not meant to do so?

Islam in Europe: A challenge to European secularity?

Not surprisingly, and the "American" bias of the early nineteenth-century European observer Tocqueville notwithstanding, both Casanova and Asad view Europe as a major testing ground for assessing secularity: is it a set of rules not intrinsically hostile to public religion, but ideologically open and contestable (Casanova), or a sociocultural and political "formation" affecting life forms and modes of governance (Asad)? In either case, the evaluation of secularity can be pragmatically linked to the chances and limits of public religion, and in particular of public Islam, in contemporary European scenarios. Talal Asad, in numerous writings and especially in his recent book (2003), has expressed serious doubts about the possibility that Islam – through Muslim actors, movements and discourses – might be allowed to produce and unfold distinctively Islamic forms of public reason in a secular European sociopolitical context, due to the institutional rigidities of European secular formations. At its best, when it is not a yardstick to blindly castigate alien political cultures and secure the cultural homogenization of the political body, secularism (the compact political discourse based on secularity) provides a normative and constitutional approach that covers and protects secularity as a life form and as a mode of governance.

José Casanova is more optimistic and bases his argument on a comparative analysis of the public role of religion in various sociopolitical settings from North and South America, as well as from Western and Eastern Europe. His exploration is then invested in a conceptualization of the movement of "de-privatizing" religion, and therefore of building a "public religion". This he sees as inherently beneficial to the public sphere in a liberal-democratic context. Without venturing into the technicalities of Casanova's thesis that redesign the dominant paradigms in the sociology of religion, it is possible to summarize his main argument in the following way: religious traditions in general, and specifically those sprouting from the Axial-Abrahamic tree, have the potential to contribute decisively to public discussions of controversial issues involving basic societal values, such as justice, the protection of human life and the environment, peace, and solidarity with disadvantaged social strata. Indeed, religions in general, and Abrahamic religions in particular, articulate views of forbearance, piety, "doing good" and friendship, which configure, more than abstract values, dispositional methods for turning those values concrete, starting from the crucial, albeit elementary relation between ego and alter that grounds the elementary social bond.

However, Casanova contends, this potential of religions to sustain public action can only become effective if religious authorities play by the rules of the game of democratic

politics. In other words, public representatives of a given religion, like or even more than any other social and political actor accessing the public sphere, have to rely on persuasion via public discourse. They cannot invoke traditional authority and the concomitant repertoires of authoritative means to discipline religious practitioners into complying with religious norms and ethics. Therefore, religious values of justice, humanness, solidarity and peace can and should contribute to the common good, according to Casanova, but only as part of discourses geared to persuade the general public or its majority. On this side of the equation, public religion is almost a necessity. Casanova delivers nothing less than a counter-manifesto to Krinke Kesmes and its syndrome of publicness.

At the same time, the de-privatization of religion not only contributes to collective life through public engagement for the common good, but also defends traditional life-worlds from state and market penetration. This defense is legitimate to the extent it induces public reflections on normative structures of modern societies and on their adherence to the common good, which has to be defined globally and universally (Casanova, 2001:1048-1049). Public religion can best be legitimated in Tocquevillian terms: "Tocqueville saw religious associations as 'the schools' of civil and political associationism crucial for a democratic republic" (ibid:1057). Can there be a "public Islam" as an instance of public religion? "The Tocquevillian argument can easily be applied to Islam" (ibid:1058). And, even more explicitly: "The public reflexive elaboration of Islam's normative traditions in response to modern challenges, political learning experiences, and global discourses has a chance to generate various forms of public civil Islam which may be conducive to democratization" (ibid:1076; see also Salvatore, 2001; Salvatore and Eickelman, 2004; Salvatore and LeVine, 2005).

In Casanova's view, this is the positive legacy of secularization as an "objective" process of differentiating societal spheres, which is therefore not inherently tied to any particular discourse, ideology or "formation". Religion has a potential, a particularly strong one, for addressing the common good in secularized societies and motivating citizens into civic and political participation in the name of universal values that secular doctrines too often proclaim but neglect, due to the frequent prevalence of particularistic interests and egoism. In a sense, Casanova regards religion as the permanent and most secure source of those universal values, so that a secular political formation without public religion might find itself in danger of losing touch with these underlying values. He makes a further step when he argues that

> the very resurgence or reassertion of religious traditions may be viewed as a sign of the failure of the Enlightenment to redeem its own promises. Religious traditions are now confronting the differentiated secular spheres, challenging them to face their own obscurantist, ideological, and inauthentic claims. In many of these confrontations, it is religion which, as often as not, appears to be on the side of human enlightenment (1994:233-234).

Casanova is consequential in maintaining that, for many practitioners of religious traditions, a commitment to freedom, starting from the elementary freedom of conscience, has never been based on liberal secular values. However, this potential of religious traditions can only be invested in the secular rules of the game, laying a premium on the capacity to mobilize and persuade without threatening the state's monopoly of the institutional instruments of coercion and consensus-building, and without impinging on citizens' freedom of conscience. Indeed, it is on this latter point that Asad's critique has been focusing. He remarks that Casanova highlights the dependence of the legitimacy of religion "on *how* religion becomes public" (Asad, 2003:182). Asad maintains that this is a quite narrow conceptual and operational bottleneck, since "the only option religious spokespersons have in that situation is to act as secular politicians do in liberal democracy" (ibid:187).

While Casanova's approach has the merit of deflating the notion of secularization by eliminating its underlying teleological assumption about the decline of religion and its normative assumption about the privatization of religion, it preserves as the hub of the notion of public religion the idea of secularization as an institutional differentiation between religion and politics. The model of public religion is based on the normative presupposition that whoever has legitimate credentials to speak in the name of a religion or of a religious group is called to distill "values" out of the religious commitment and build a persuasive ethical discourse that can legitimately intervene into the political process. The problem is that even the above cursory look at the European history of the formation of modern secular nation-states (and lately of European integration) shows that the separation of religion and politics has never been as fully institutionalized as the discourse of secularization claims it to be. The relation between religion and politics within European modernity – whatever the official claims of public authorities – has crystallized into a field of permanent and shifting tensions more than into a stable constitutional separation.

The problem with this tension is that the keys to its management are in the state's hands, which implements an essentialized view of religion to devise contingent solutions fitting into its imperatives of control and public order. In other words, the fairness of the so-called secular rules of the public game, as assumed by Casanova's thesis, cannot be taken for granted, not just in their application (all games might be rigged), but also in their institutional formulations. Secular formations do not really condense the ethical claims of the radical Enlightenment. Indeed, these claims were too elitist and bent too much towards an immanent humanist religion of the philosophers. Although Casanova's thesis is theoretically coherent, it is based on the kind of rational and enlightened understanding of secularity that precedes the tragedies of colonialism, the great nationalist wars and late-modern judeophobia and islamophobia, and less so on how secularity was reconfigured through all these events. On top of all these dramas, or rather underneath them, one cannot ignore the resilience of a Christian substratum of European culture as the key both to Europe's fragmentation and unity and to the construction of its internal other.

The nineteenth-century idea of a "European concert" (wherein the Ottoman state was dubbed – with dubious taste – the "Sick Man of Europe") was a fragile interlude before the twisting of imperial rivalries at the turn of the twentieth century. However, it was also based on the Grotian idea that "infidels were *neighbors* and so should be the object of protection and love", provided they did not violate natural law as developed within Christian European philosophical and legal theories (Asad, 2003:163). What had earlier excluded the Ottomans from the European scene till the balance of power was definitively tilted in favor of the European powers was not the fact that they were "infidels", but simply that they were not, or not yet, considered adequate subjects of natural law; therefore, they were considered inferior on a northwest Europe-centered civilizational scale (ibid, ibid:164).

In this long-term process of building secularity and inscribing it not only into state law, but also into international law, we see an increasing immanentization and essentialization of religion based on metamorphosed Christian tenets of natural law. One thing cannot be denied: it would be a huge misconstruction to try to reinvent Spinoza, who is the hero of the ethicization and immanentization of the Andalusian Islamo-Jewish heritage as applied to European Christian sectarian warfare, as a critic of the modern, optimally republican, state that was, at his time, on its way to secularity. In many ways, Spinoza was the apologist of this type of state power and a genuine critic of Ottoman autocracy.

The decline of the political and military power of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century and the construction of colonial empires by the European powers secularized the European religious self-understanding into the racialized idea of the "white man's burden" in the task of civilizing non-Europe. At the same time, when the imperialistic expansion and conflict were spiraling up, Europe's dominant class deepened its ambitions to purify national cultures from identities and allegiances considered dangerous to the homogeneity of the polity. The culmination of the rivalry between European imperial powers into the two devastating world wars gave way, in the second half of the twentieth century, to a process of economic and later political integration that was marked, quite at its beginning, by a renewed search for a collective European identity that racial imperialism, judeophobia and islamophobia had surrogated in the era of nationalism and imperialism.

Conclusion: A complex wisdom after a simple wisdom?

The most interesting character of the long-term trajectory of secularization just described is how slowly and reluctantly, even on the part of some of the intellectual heroes of European modernity, the idea of a Christian republic, the historical religious antecedent to the secular idea of Europe, came to be replaced by the consecration of a differentiation and separation of competencies between "religion" and "politics" within the emerging

nation-states, and how much this differentiation was ordained for the sake of cultural homogeneity. The prevalent post-Enlightenment understanding of religion, common now to the whole of Europe despite all differences, is intimately connected to these differentiation processes and, therefore, to the idea of a religious field regulating belief and practice, along with the range of social and cultural (but not political) competencies radiating from religious commitment. And here Casanova is right in reinterpreting secularization as a differentiation of social spheres, and not as an inevitable decline and privatization of religion, ergo – since religion is neither disappearing nor always privatized – as a process that favors a renewed public role of religion. In Europe today, this legally pinpointed differentiation and its accompanying institutional arrangements are the least common denominator representing the basic secular character of the institutional landscape, but they cannot account for the complexity and at times fluidity of the relationship between religious and political cultures. These have often to be combined, albeit in disguised ways, in order to meet imperatives of identity and order. Here Casanova's re-distillation of the theorem of secularization is put to a quite severe test. As maintained by Asad,

> If the secularization thesis no longer carries the conviction it once did, this is because the categories of "politics" and "religion" turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought. ... True, the "proper domain of religion" is distinguished from and separated by the state in modern secular constitutions. But formal constitutions never give the whole story (2003:201).

However penetrating Asad's critique, it does not confute, but indeed confirms, the possibility or even necessity of public religion theorized by Casanova. The condition for public religion to unfold and thrive is that the various religious groups and institutions are allowed to play a crucial role within the reproduction and negotiation of value systems. They indeed provide spaces for encounters on different levels and inform individual and collective strategies of social and political action. This is hardly surprising, since the counterpart to state control is the autonomy of actors within the boundaries of the religious field. The presupposition is that religious authorities accept and internalize this border. However, while the institutional and legal principle is clear, its implementation is far more ambiguous, and indeed Casanova himself admits that religious actors might have to redesign and make more porous the institutionally and legally rigid borders between private and public spheres. A rigid application of the principle of separation would indeed imply the full social paralysis of religious groups, since all social activities can be interpreted as having an at least implicit political potential. Again, the best example of the institutional limits to "public religion" in contemporary Europe is in the quite narrow range of activity allowed to "public Islam", yet the existence and endurance of social mobilization and public activism inspired by a variety of Islamic values proves that public religion is there to stay.

Nonetheless, we should heed Asad's warnings that the root of the problem, and of the limitation of the solutions currently traded, lies in the fact that secularity is not easily soluble into post-secular arrangements based on various types of "cultural dialogue", because its institutional kernel, the institutions of modern citizenship within nation-states, are intrinsically built on the European post-imperial, cultural self-understanding of majorities. These are intended – i.e., understand themselves – not merely as fluctuating political-electoral, but as stable cultural and national majorities. Every group not belonging to such a majority is therefore considered a minority to watch and monitor, constantly in need of proving its loyalty. Therefore, hopes for a cultural dialogue depend on whether a dialogic re-foundation of the European public sphere, by eroding the mythical, ethnic and cultural foundations of the nation-states, will dissolve the idea of cultural majorities and overcome the limitations of political and religious tolerance as conceived and practiced so far. Usually, however, a public dialogue and pattern of fairness cannot be founded just by the intrinsic virtue of a political program, but can only emerge through conflict.

These are not merely communicative conflicts. As shown by de-veiling laws, from Ataturk's Turkish republic to contemporary France, the conflict impinges on human bodies. Everywhere in Europe, there is a fierce struggle over the control of the public display and posture of "Muslim female" bodies between the women themselves (whom an ethical and humanist vision of human rights fails to make the sole owners of their bodies), their families, the state and self-appointed defenders of the Enlightenment (including "white" feminist groupings). The universality of human rights, at the moment they are inserted into the Euro-Islamic equation, appears to be shaken. This is not surprising, since, as Spinoza observed, rights are permanently at risk to become the new fetish of secularity, if one doesn't cope with their underlying powers. And one major source of symbolic power in Europe is still the post-Christian understanding of political-cultural majorities.

It seems that the wise king of Krinke Kesmes solved one problem, but created another at a deeper level: one that appears more intractable and is manifest in the current stalemate of the Euro-Islamic equation. It is difficult to deny that secularity encroaches on concrete life forms and modes of governance of populations and their bodies, and feeds into bio-political machineries. Secularity presupposes and continuously produces notions of agency, i.e., action and passion. Current liberal secular parlance – well reflected in the discourse of several NGOs – is entrenched in a specific legal notion of the agent, pointing to "the act of giving power to someone *and* to someone's power to act [that] becomes a metaphysical quality defining secular human agency" (Asad, 2003:79). There is not enough space yet in the official legal-public sphere for notions of empowerment and agency based on less subjectivist and more relational views, as those supported by Spinoza's political theory, but also those congenial to Islamic jurisprudence. Yet, these alternative notions do gain public space and make it more complex through individual and collective actors that reconstruct religious identities

and notions of justice. Among them, in today's Europe, are several Muslim groups playing on a number of levels (Salvatore, 2004).

While European societies are already post-secular due to the growing variety of religious and non-religious commitments of their populations, the institutional mechanisms of the state are at risk of being ever more entrenched in an ineffective vision of secularity. The syndrome of Krinke Kesmes is the actual predicament of the Euro-Islamic landscape. While Casanova's view of the legitimacy of public religion is analytically insightful and enriches the Euro-Islamic equation in promising ways, one cannot turn a blind eye on the dark side of the actual predicament, highlighted by Asad's warning:

> If Europe cannot be articulated in terms of complex space and complex time that allow for multiple ways of life (and not merely multiple *identities*) to flourish, it may be fated to be no more than the common market of an imperial civilization, always anxious about (Muslim) exiles within its gates and (Muslim) barbarians beyond (2003:180).

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