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Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere

Rosi Braidotti
Bolette Blaagaard
Tobijn de Graauw and Eva Midden

Postsecular Publics

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Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere

Postsecular Publics

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Introductory Notes

*Rosi Braidotti, Bolette Blaagaard, Tobijn de Graauw, and
Eva Midden*

This collection of edited essays aims to explore the so-called 'postsecular condition' from a variety of disciplinary angles and from different but intersecting theoretical and political perspectives. Originally coined by Jürgen Habermas, the term 'postsecular' has been adopted in a broad range of intellectual and theoretical traditions and has gained widespread currency. Of pivotal importance in this discourse is the 'secularization myth', so prominent in the West, which has been questioned by recent religious resurgence. This myth connects secularism with progress and modernity on the back of religious backwardness (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 2008). Secularism is moreover counted among the ideologies that spell danger to democracy in Europe by not sufficiently recognizing the importance of religious and multicultural identities and their implications for active citizenship (Modood, 2007). The postsecular turn seeks to provide a counter-discourse to the myth of secularism by developing a variety of critiques of the myth grounded in discussions on the current political, social, and technological condition in which Europe, in particular, and the Western world more generally, finds itself. What the concept – the postsecular – means and stands for, however, is far from clear. Even though much has been written recently on the postsecular turn or condition, there is no agreement on how to conceptualize the term and connect it to current developments in our societies.

Secularism by any other name

The starting position of this volume is to challenge, as all the contributors in this volume do, the consensus that seems to have emerged in the European public discourse about the privileged link between Christianity and secularism, or faith and reason. Canonized in the dialogue between

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Jürgen Habermas and (then) Cardinal Ratzinger in 2004 (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2005), this equation paves the road for a two-layered argument: the exceptional nature of the Christian religion in its relationship to rational thought and therefore the continuity between Christianity and secular critical thinking.

This Habermasian consensus, upheld also by Charles Taylor (2007) among others, rests on the notion that secularism both as an institutional practice – the separation of state from church – and as a philosophical frame is a distillation of Judeo-Christian precepts, notably respect for the law, for the intrinsic worth of the individual person, the autonomy of the self, moral conscience, rationality, and the ethics of love. These values are held by Habermas and Ratzinger as central also to European identity and history and have allowed for the Enlightenment and the ensuing scientific process which has made this continent so important.

In other words, the Christian faith allows for rational thought, based on a teleological or evolutionary vision of the future and on humanist faith in human reason's capacity to self-regulate and steer social progress. This value system defines Humanism as both personal and civilizational ideal in terms of the respect for liberal individualism. It moreover connects both Humanism and secularism to notions of equality and democracy, which lie at the core of European modernity and the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment. It could be argued, then, that the value system of European secular Humanism is intrinsically religious, albeit by opposition and negation. This is what Habermas has in mind when he speaks of the spiritual roots of critical reason and of Western philosophy in general. This line of reasoning leaves all other monotheistic religions, notably Islam, in the singular position of being de-linked from rationality and hence incapable of engendering secularist distinctions. By extension, religions like Islam would have no claim to modernity, emancipation, or human rights. This, as Gellner (1992) and Talal Asad (2003) noted, is not only far from unproblematic politically but also historically false.

The Habermasian claim defines the postsecular turn in the narrowest possible Eurocentric terms and it universalizes a specific brand and historical manifestation of secularism, which is part of the reason why we find it unacceptable. As William Connolly (1999) astutely remarked, this strategy has passed off Western secular systems as achieving absolute moral authority and the social status of a dominant norm.

There are, however, other objectionable aspects to that equation, in that it contains an ambiguous relationship to the project of Western

modernization and more specifically to its emancipatory politics. Habermas's position displayed clear signs of postsecular anxiety and it expressed moral panic at the sight of the horrors of the clash of civilizations, on the one hand, and the structural injustices of the global economy, on the other (Borradori, 2003). Even more problematic for Habermas and Ratzinger are the effects of contemporary biotechnological advances. The future of human 'nature' has become the subject of deep concern in the public debate of our globalized times. Habermas coined the term 'postsecular societies' also in order to signal the urgency of a critical and ethical reconsideration of the function of scientific belief systems in the contemporary world. Fear of genetic manipulations, which Habermas (2003) shares with champions of contemporary liberalism like Fukuyama (2002), and a more anarchical-minded thinker like Sloterdijk (2009), implicitly endorses one of the axioms of all monotheistic religions, namely the sacred nature of human life and procreation. This technophobic reaction to our biotechnological progress has led to a return to Kantian moral universalism in critical theory, notably through the work of Martha Nussbaum (1999, 2006), Seyla Benhabib (2002), Nicholas Rose (2001), and others.

Several issues are conflated in this discussion: firstly, there is the legacy of the Enlightenment and the Christian urge to uphold natural law, in opposition to the ravages of technological modernity. Morality becomes mobilized in defence of 'Life' and opposed to technological manipulations. Secondly, the moral and political test case for this belief is the legacy of secularism, which is linked to Christianity by negation. Thirdly, there is the specific issue of the legal and social status of women and LGBT people who have been, together with the anti-slavery and de-colonization movements, the motors of emancipation in modernity (Braidotti, 2008). Last but not least is the acknowledgement that some of the most pertinent critiques of globalization and of advanced capitalism today and of the structural injustices of globalization are voiced by religiously driven social movements. This tendency has intensified in Christianity since the election of Pope Francis, voted 'person of the year' by *Time* magazine in December 2013.

Habermas's postsecular argument, however, displays a topsy-turvy sequence of internally contradictory claims that express deep anxieties about secularism, faith, and the project of Western modernity. Much as the contributors of this volume welcome the ethical aspirations that support these claims, we do not share the Christian exceptionalism of their premises nor the neo-universalism of their ethics. We advocate critical distance both on theoretical and political grounds from

the ethnocentrism of this position and also the technophobic fear it expresses (Braidotti, 2002, 2006). The Habermasian claims also mystify the genuine historical achievements of Western emancipatory politics. We would all be better off acknowledging instead that both the modernization process and the emancipation of women and LGBTs are still very much in process in the West and that racism and neo-imperialism are alive and well on the world stage today. Consequently, no simplified dichotomies should be set up between an allegedly progressive Christian tradition and the allegedly backward others, starting with the Muslim.

The counter-consensus expressed in this volume is that the Western secularization model may not be the only or the best one: multiple modernities are actually at stake (Bracke, 2012; Eisenstadt, 2000; Modood, 2007). Therefore, different forms of secularism may be engendered by multiple models of modernity. This allows us to venture the idea that the postsecular condition is diverse, multicultural, and internally differentiated and that no single analysis or blueprint should be taken as the definitive and comprehensive one.

Aims

This volume, therefore, not only builds on the assumption that we need to critique fixed notions of what secularism is but also seeks to bring about the prefix 'post' as a sort of question mark that follows the subsequent central considerations: How does this postsecular critique throw into relief notions of agency in political struggles linked to colonialism, female emancipation, and racism? How does the postsecular challenge existing schemes of political economies, and how may we map out the power structures that make up the European scholarship on the intersection of race, gender, and religion in relation to the political reality of class and social stratification of European societies today? In this context, we would argue that the 'post' in postsecular does not refer to a condition that could be characterized as 'after' secularism in a linear, temporal dimension, but rather to a critical reflection of secularism. In order to provide answers, this volume offers a selection of postsecular discourses and practices through which it seeks to bring attention to the many productive intersections between the political ideas and developments of the postsecular and those in postcolonial and feminist discourse.

Thus, the volume frames the discussion on the postsecular with reference to the idea of globalization in general and more specifically on the many productive intersections between the multiple practices and the complex realities of diasporic conditions and discourse. By approaching

the concept in this way, the volume targets specific problems faced by contemporary Europe in terms of the political right-turn it is witnessing. This turn is, for instance, evidenced in the European Parliamentary election in 2009; the rise of neoconservative politics and the financial crisis; and the crisis of multicultural policies in the wake of 9/11 are also paradoxically an expression of the increasingly multicultural and religious space of European nations nowadays. The postsecular condition challenges European political theory, in general, and multiculturalism and feminism, in particular, because it questions the axiom that equates secularism with emancipation. Recent political as well as intellectual developments have seen sexual liberties be appropriated to European national imaginaries. Homophobia and gender violence is represented as belonging to radical Islam only, and thus the new imaginary plays into the hands of the political right that pledge to reinforce the boundaries between us and them – the secular and the religious. It is therefore pivotal that the concept of the postsecular is challenging this binary position, and that the myth of the modern secular individual versus the backwards religious people is exposed. A postsecular approach makes manifest the notion that agency, or political subjectivity, can actually be conveyed through and supported by religious piety and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality.

In terms of gender relations, the undoing of the secular myth has two important corollaries – firstly, that we need to question the axiomatic belief that women's emancipation is directly indexed upon sexual freedom, in keeping with the European liberal tradition of individual rights and self-autonomy. This historically specific model cannot be universalized and more sober accounts are needed of its contingent and hence partial applicability. Most prominent among the questions left unresolved by militant, idealized secularism are: 'How does secularism posit the relationship between equality and difference? And what are we to make of the fact that, both logically and historically, one does not at all guarantee the other?' (Scott, 2007). The second corollary is that political agency need not be critical in the negative sense of oppositional and thus may not be aimed solely or primarily at the production of counter-subjectivities. Subjectivity is rather a process ontology, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability (Braidotti, 1992, 2013). Consequently, there exists a necessity to question the 'idealized secular', or the ideology of secularism (Modood, 2007) and its political manipulations by politicians and populists today (Connolly, 1999). This postsecular paradox opens up spaces for new forms of reflection of religion

in the public sphere. The concept of the postsecular, thus, brings challenging new perspectives to the discussion about European identity and culture in a globalized world.

The historical route to the postsecular

In order to fully explore the theoretical premises of the postsecular turn it is necessary first to provide its historical background, which can be divided into five overlapping and mutually enriching developments. Firstly, the end of the Cold War has played a major role in the development of the myth of secularism. The subsequent defeat of communism led to the hegemony of a neoliberal discourse that promotes consumerist capitalism as the allegedly most evolved form of human development. Secondly, economic and cultural globalization caused strong movements of resistance in the form of resurgent nationalisms at the macro as well as the micro levels. This led to a resurgence of civilization discourses about Western traditional values which produce, once again, hierarchies of identities, cultures, and even ethnic belongings. In constant fear of the (cultural, ethnic) other, these developments also provoked the rise of a perpetual state of 'new' wars against terror or internal enemies. Finally, a pervasive state of technological mediation has penetrated most aspects of social life, with the convergence between information and biotechnologies as the core issue.

The historical defeat of communism has two major implications for the debate on the postsecular: firstly, the role of the former Eastern European churches – from the Orthodox to the Catholic under double leadership of the Polish trade-union movement *Solidarność* and the Polish-born Pope John Paul II in bringing down the iron curtain. This alone shifts the balance of political power between church and state in former Eastern Europe and contributes to a reappraisal of the political relevance of religiously based activism. Secondly, it brings about serious questioning of the militant atheism of the Marxist tradition. Resting on Hegel's philosophy of history, Karl Marx saw the dismissal of religion by dialectical reason's unfolding upon human history as an inevitable aspect of human progress and emancipation. Nature and religion, need and superstition are part of the oppressive legacy we need to leave behind. Marx supports the working of reason against 'the opium of the masses' as a necessary component of the political project of human liberation. Simone de Beauvoir will follow suit.

After the downfall of communism, neoliberalism reinforced its opportunistic ideology that considers financial success as the sole indicator of

the status of development of a society, including of its women. Economic failure is accordingly perceived as a sign of underdevelopment and as a lack of emancipation, as money and individual accumulation alone is taken as the indicator of both freedom and progress. The global celebration of the absolute value of profit as the motor of human and of women's progress implies that even the most basic social democratic principle of solidarity is misconstrued as old-fashioned welfare support and dismissed accordingly. And as the financial crises bring European economies to their knees, the neofascist movements rise.

The emphasis on liberal individualism and capitalism makes neoliberalism profoundly ethnocentric: it takes the form of a contradictory and ethnocentric position, which argues along civilization or ethnic lines (Huntington, 1998). It is complicit with a neoliberal discourse about white supremacy, namely that our women (Western, Christian, mostly white, and raised in the tradition of secular Enlightenment) are already liberated and thus do not need any more social incentives or emancipatory policies. 'Their women', however, (non-Western, non-Christian, mostly not white, and alien to the Enlightenment tradition) are still backwards and need to be targeted for special emancipatory social actions or even more belligerent forms of enforced 'liberation'. Hence the bodies of women, as bearers of authentic ethnic identity, get both sexualized and racialized within a neo-imperial discourse of triumphant Western sovereignty. This simplistic and belligerent position, defended by people as different as Cherie Blair in Britain and Ayaan Hirsi Ali in the Netherlands, to name but a few, reinstates a world view based on colonial lines of demarcation. It fails to see the great grey areas in between the pretentious claim that feminism has unitary goals that have already succeeded in the West and the equally false statement that feminism is non-existent outside this geopolitical region.

One of the recent emblems of this situation is the *burqa*-clad bodies of the Afghan women in defence of whom such an anti-abortionist, conservative, and anti-feminist president as George W. Bush claimed to launch one of his many commercially driven wars of conquest. What cynic would believe the claim that the war was fought to help out the poor oppressed masses of Islamic women? And yet, this is the political discourse that circulates in the global economical world disorder: one in which sexual difference defined as the specificity of women's condition is again the terrain on which power politics is postulated. The 'new' wars of the third millennium are consequently also religious crusades, fought on the principles stated in all the points mentioned above. The so-called 'clash of civilizations' pitches religious 'fundamentalism' as an Eastern

problem against secularism as the defining feature of the Western world in a mutually exclusive confrontational discourse.

More complexity is needed in the debate about women's self-determination and feminist agency, especially in view of the impact of technologies – both information and biogenetic – in the making of subjectivity in our globally mediated world (Braidotti, 2006). The lessons imparted by postcolonial and race studies on issues of identity formations and othering are crucial to this discussion and their intersection with feminist approaches absolutely necessary. While technologies may enhance our ability to connect and form new relationships that in turn may support active citizenship and a strong civil society, they are simultaneously enabling anonymous bullying and racial-centric, ethnocentric, and misogynist networks to flourish (Levmore and Nussbaum, 2010). On this score, the European dimension demands attention to which the case of the Norwegian mass murderer, Anders Breivik, testifies. Breivik's international, Islamophobic, online network calls into question the political implication of international, online communities as it 'reveals a subculture of nationalistic and Islamophobic websites' (Brown, 2011). In his infamous manifesto, Breivik linked extensively to scholars on secularism, such as Samuel P. Huntington's clashes of civilizations, and to politicians such as Dutch MP Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali (featuring along with European political icons such as Winston Churchill).

Large parts of the scholarship on secularism are related to the wave of anti-Muslim intolerance that is sweeping across Europe today. This gives rise to a tendency in public discussions on the postsecular condition to concentrate almost exclusively on Islam, making it the most targeted of monotheistic religions, although the case of Breivik has shed light on the complexities of extremism. The focus on Islam accomplishes a double reduction: firstly of the postsecular condition to exclusively religious principles and secondly of the postsecular condition itself to the 'Muslim issue'. This reduction needs to be questioned, especially in a context of a war on terror that results in the militarization of the social space.

By extension this volume rests on the conviction that any unreflective brand of normative secularism in Europe today runs the risk of complicity with anti-Islam racism and xenophobia. The newly forged connection between homosexual lifestyles and anti-Islam is, in particular, clear in the developments of homo-nationalism, as seen in the example of right-wing parties' attachment to gay pride and the homosexual milieu in larger European towns, such as in Copenhagen, Denmark. These

developments dovetail the heated debates about freedom of expression and other Western liberties, which are mounted as incorruptible and indisputable ideas and qualities of European democracies and placed in direct opposition to what is perceived as inherently violent and gender segregating practices of Islam. What is needed, therefore, is a more balanced kind of analysis and a more diversified approach that not only includes all the monotheistic religions but also contextualizes them within shifting global power relations and within more complex social dynamics and problems.

Structure of the book

To Jürgen Habermas (2008), the term postsecular society could only apply to affluent, westernized nations, because of the lapse of religious ties in the post-war period. Challenging the secularization myth based in the assumed link between modernity and secularism, Habermas argues that secular citizens must acknowledge and accept religious influence and this is particularly the case, because the identity of Western societies is rooted in Judeo-Christian values (Habermas, 2008). The first contributions on the political implications of the postsecular condition offer three different analyses of how westernized, postsecular societies may cope with their condition.

Tariq Modood approaches the topic of the postsecular by means of the multicultural challenge. Rather than a performed identity or a reawakened Enlightenment critique, the postsecular condition is a necessary way of coping with the arrival and settlement of Muslims and therefore the change of social structures in Western European societies. This, Modood argues, is perhaps a struggle for radical secularism; however, to the 'dominant version' of political secularism this multicultural challenge is a resource.

Anders Berg-Sørensen finds the roots of the secularism myth in the narrative of the European Enlightenment and bases his analyses on the question of how the Enlightenment critique of religion has been reawakened. This perspective draws Berg-Sørensen to connect firmly secularism to democracy and to bring about an analysis of the implications of the reawakening of religious sentiments in the public sphere. Drawing on both the Enlightenment's critique of religion and on critiques levelled against secularism, he argues for shift in discourses from an unreflexive critique of secularism towards a critical secularism.

Following on from Habermas's argument, Ernst van den Hemel in this volume argues that the postsecular identity may be seen as a

'performative construction', for which (neo)conservative politicians in the Netherlands, in particular, have proven gifted. Van den Hemel discusses how postsecular politics rest on a historical construction, which is being enacted through reiterations of religious-cultural values considered to be inherently secular.

Following the work of among others Saba Mahmood, Christoph Baumgartner develops an understanding of 'blasphemy' as violence that makes it possible to better understand the significance and the kind of injury that many believers feel in view of 'blasphemous' acts and artifacts they consider 'blasphemous' or profoundly offensive. Liberal-secularist explanations of why believers feel injured in cases such as the Muhammad cartoon controversy in Denmark do not suffice, Baumgartner argues.

Not only do they not suffice, the liberal-secularist tradition may be used for misconstruing the relationship between human freedom and religious belief, argues William Egginton. Following on from the seminal work on religious agency by Saba Mahmood (2005), Egginton raises the critique of liberal-secular thought's failure to grasp the extent to which religious fundamentalism today may be inspired and fed not by its attachment to an opposing tradition of thought but by the very system of accumulation and exclusion necessitated by capitalism, and at least in part defended by liberal thought.

In a close and complex reading of Alain Badiou's critique of the philosophy of Emmanuelle Levinas, Gregg Lambert explores phenomenological engagements with multiculturalism and neoliberalism. He emphasizes especially the implications of these debates for new understandings of postsecular ethics.

The two following chapters bring together two highly important aspects of the postsecular turn: the role of media in the discourses about religion and secularism in Western societies, and the intersection of religion with other axes of identities, mainly 'race' and ethnicity. Lentin and Titley focus on the association of religion with backwardness in popular media and recent films such as Geert Wilders's *Fitna* and *Innocence of Muslims*. Leurs and Ponzanesi, on the other hand, show how digital media provide ethnic and religious minorities with a space where they can discuss their own experiences, develop their own interpretations of Islam, and discuss how to live in a secular society.

Moreover, Lentin and Titley engage with the argument that 'the postsecular' is often being reduced to the 'Muslim issue'. They argue that in order to widen the terrain of postsecular life, it is not enough to struggle for a more inclusive public sphere; one also has to develop an

understanding of the racialization of the debates about Islam in Europe. The authors connect this racialization to multiculturalism in Europe and discussions about 'good' and 'bad' diversity.

Leurs and Ponzanesi also counter the idea that the return of religion is a 'Muslim issue' that challenges democracy, secularism, and progress. They show that through digital practices, Moroccan-Dutch youth manage to produce an Islam that is a cool affective marker, not an essentialized category, and is connected in multiple ways to other aspects of their identities (such as ethnicity, nationality, and class).

Klassen argues that even the First Nations in early twentieth century were already postsecular. Despite this different evaluation of the postsecular condition we are in, this author also investigates how religious communities with diverse mentalities relate to the secular. She argues that in order to make a proper analysis of 'postsecular publics' in colonial context, one has to take into account the significance of Christianity regarding norms of communication and comprehension. She envisions that the postsecular could help to reimagine the clash and mixture of mentalities and practices, giving more space to First Nations.

Eisenlohr writes about religious pluralism and how secularism manages this. Contrary to Klassen, the author argues that we have not moved beyond secularism, as the considerable range of policies and practices that are labelled as 'secular' show. He especially emphasizes the importance of the concept in postcolonial contexts. Eisenlohr refers to his fieldwork in India and Mauritius to show the relationship between globalization, religious networks, and secularism.

Midden criticizes the use of a strict secularism/religion binary by some feminists and starts from postsecular critique to develop a feminism that accommodates differences in an affirmative manner. She brings the debates about the postsecular turn together with her empirical research among women in the Netherlands in order to discuss the possibilities of such an inclusive feminism.

Korte, on the other hand, approaches the topic of gender in relation to religion and secularism from a different angle. She starts from the provocative performance of Madonna, staging a crucifixion scene during her *Confessions on a Dance Floor* tour. She shows that it is not the fact that Madonna, as a woman, stands in the place of Jesus Christ that makes it a blasphemous act. It is rather, the particular details of the representation, such as its detached stance towards suffering, that make it problematic. Hence, just as Midden does, Korte deconstructs the rigorous secularism/religion binary and the role of gender in it, but where Midden

focuses on the role of feminism, Korte's account analyzes a show that brings together the saint, the idol, and the icon in a remarkable way. This way she manages to account for traditional readings of crucifixion scenes and the role of women in them.

In her postface to the volume, Braidotti strikes an affirmative note by exploring the residual spirituality of critical theory. She argues that this non-theistic faith in the value of critique constitutes one of the main aspects of the postsecular predicament. This is understood in the light of vital materialism and feminist neo-materialism as leading to a reappraisal of the affective roots of the work of critique.

Thus the volume progresses from a political anatomy of the multi-faceted crises of secularism in a European contest, through postcolonial perspectives, into a more global reappraisal of the multiple ways in which the 'post' of the postsecular functions. Next to the (too) many reactive meanings of the term as indicating not only a return of religion in the public sphere but also a belligerent and aggressive manipulation of such a 'return' – the volume also points to some affirmative aspects of the same phenomenon. These include ironical replays, subversive and even blasphemous deconstructions, and open, political contestations of a normative vision of the secular. In this respect, the 'post' in the postsecular also marks a positive longing – as in 'going after' – a new, more inclusive, social practice of the secular in the third millennium.

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1

Is There a Crisis of 'Postsecularism' in Western Europe?

Tariq Modood

By secularism or more specifically, political secularism, I mean institutional arrangements such that religious authority and religious reasons for action and political authority and political reasons for action are distinguished; so, political authority does not rest on religious authority and the latter does not dominate political authority. Support for such arrangements can be derived from a religion or a religious authority, and certainly are supported by many religious people.[1] On this very broad conception of political secularism, there is no necessary, absolute separation of religion and political rule, let alone that the state should be hostile to religion, though, of course, such radical views are also amongst those recognizable as political secularism. Many different institutional arrangements and many different political views and ideologies, democratic and anti-democratic, liberal and illiberal, pro-religion and anti-religion, are consistent with this minimal conception of secularism: the non-domination of political authority by religious authority. I take subscription to this idea to be central to modernity and therefore one of the dominant ideas of the twentieth century. I do not mean that everybody in modern societies agrees with this view and, of course, like all ideas, it is not perfectly or purely manifested in any actual case, and people will disagree about the specific cases. Nevertheless, like democracy, political secularism is a hegemonic idea that most people actively and passively support and few argue against in a full-throated way.

An increasing number of academics think that in recent years something highly significant, possibly epochal, has happened to this state of affairs. Established modern societies are producing critics of this taken-for-granted idea in their midst and emergent modern societies do not seem to be smoothly following in the path that led to the historical ascendancy of political secularism. My interest is specifically in Western

Europe. Jürgen Habermas, who has Western Europe very much at the forefront of his mind, has famously announced we are currently witnessing a transition from a secular to a 'postsecular society' in which 'secular citizens' have to express a previously denied respect for 'religious citizens', who should be allowed, even encouraged, to critique aspects of contemporary society and to find solutions to its problems from within their religious views (Habermas, 2006). Instead of treating religion as subrational and a matter of private concern only, religion is once again to be recognized as a legitimate basis of public engagement and political action. Some have gone further and speak of a global crisis. Even quite sober academics speak today of 'a contemporary crisis of secularism' (Scherer, 2010: 4) and that 'today, political secularisms are in crisis in almost every corner of the globe' (Jakelić, 2010: 3). Olivier Roy, in an analysis focused on France writes of 'the crisis of the secular state'(Roy, 2007) and Rajeev Bhargava of the 'crisis of the secular state in Europe' (Bhargava, 2010, 2011).[2]

Of course there is a larger and more specifically sociological thesis about 'desecularization' across the world, about the development of modern economies and institutions without a decline, and indeed by some reversal of an earlier decline in religious belief and practice (Berger, 1999). My interest is limited to the phenomenon of public religion and of how religion is fighting back from its political marginalization. Across the globe, religious groups are protesting against perceived demotion or marginalization in the public space. There is a sense of actual or potential marginality, both culturally and politically, of losing the public space that should rightfully, at least partly, belong to one (Jurgensmeyer, 1994; Marty and Appleby, 1994). This can lead to protest and even anger and an assertive politics. Yet, while in most parts of the world the protestors seek to restore a real, or more probably imagined past – a golden age before the marginalization – this is not the case in Western Europe.[3] More fundamentally, while in the other regions there is a sense that a religious majority has been or is being marginalized, in Western Europe, the group most expressing its sense of marginalization is a minority. So, while the religionist agitation in the US, the Muslim world, and India is about the status and re-empowerment of the religious majority, of making the country in the image of the religious majority, the issue in Europe is about the status of a minority and its right to change the countries that it has recently become part of or is trying to be accepted as part of. In so far as the dominant religion, Christianity, exhibits a new found political assertiveness, it is in reaction to the minority presence and politics and in a context of continuing decline in Christian religiosity and

church membership. The majoritarian reaction is sometimes in terms of a sympathetic multiculturalist or multifaith accommodation but all too often, and growingly, in secularist and Christianist oppositional modes. The majority are reacting to the minority, not to the felt constraints of 'secularism' and so the form of the challenge is not a religious resurgence but an ethno-religious multiculturalism – indeed, not postsecularism but secularism, or neo-secularism, is one of the leading majoritarian responses, especially in France.

The accommodation of Muslims in Western Europe

There is no endogenous slowing down in secularization in relation to organized religion, attendance at church services, and traditional Christian belief and practice in Western Europe. For example, to illustrate with the British case, church attendance of at least once a month amongst white people has steadily declined from about 20 per cent in 1983 to about 15 per cent in 2008 and with each younger age cohort (Voas and Crockett, 2005; BRIN, 2011; Kaufmann, Goujon, and Skirbekk, 2013). Which is not to say that religion has disappeared or is about to but for many it has become more in the form of 'belief without belonging' (Davie, 1994) or spirituality (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) or 'implicit religion' (Bailey, 1997). For example, while belief in a personal God has gone down from over 40 per cent in the middle of the twentieth century to less than 30 per cent by its end, belief in a spirit or life source has remained steady at around 35–40 per cent and belief in the soul has actually increased from less than 60 per cent in the early 1980s to an additional 5–10 per cent today (BRIN, 2011). All these changes, however, are highly compatible with political secularism if not with scientism or other rationalistic philosophies. Whether the decline of traditional religion is being replaced by no religion or new ways of being religious or spiritual, neither is creating a challenge for political secularism. Non-traditional forms of Christian or post-Christian religion in Western Europe are, in the main, not attempting to connect with or reform political institutions and government policies; they are not seeking recognition or political accommodation or political power.[4]

In recent decades, Western Europe has come to share the post-immigration racial and ethnic urban diversity, which has long been a characteristic of the United States.[5] Currently, most of the largest, especially the capital, cities of north-west Europe are about 20–35 per cent non-white (i.e., people of non-European descent, including Turks). Even without further large-scale immigration, being a young, fertile population, these

proportions will grow for at least one or two generations more before they stabilize, reaching or exceeding 50 per cent in some cities in the next few decades or sooner. The trend will include some of the larger urban centres of southern Europe. A significant difference between Western Europe and the US, however, is that the majority of non-whites in the countries of Europe are Muslims.[6] With estimates of 12 million to over 17 million Muslims in Western Europe today, the Muslim population in the former EU-15 is only about three to five per cent and is relatively evenly distributed across the larger states (Peach, 2007; Pew Forum, 2010). In the larger cities, the proportion which is Muslim, however, is several times larger and growing at a faster rate than most of the population (Lutz, Skirbekk, and Testa, 2007). In this context, with the riots in the suburbs (*banlieues*) of Paris and elsewhere, the Danish cartoon affair and other issues about offence and freedom of speech, and the proliferating bans on various forms of female Muslim dress just being a few in a series of conflicts focused on minority-majority relations, questions about integration, equality, racism, and Islam, and their relation to terrorism, security, and foreign policy, have become central to European politics.

The issue, then, driving the sense of a crisis of secularism that some sense in Western Europe is the place of religious identities, or identities that are or are perceived to be an ethno-religious identity (like British Asian Muslim or Arab Muslim in France), in the public life of the countries of the region. This multicultural challenge to secularism, is amongst the most profound political and long-term issues to arise from the post-war Western European hunger for labour migrants and the reversal of the population flows of European colonialism. The challenge is far from confined to secularism. It is a broad one: from socio-economic disadvantage and discrimination in the labour markets at one end to a constitutional status or corporate relationship with the state at the other. Moreover, the awareness of this challenge is not due to terrorism, as it began to manifest itself and was perceived before events such as 9/11; nor is it due to the fact that some Muslims, unlike other post-immigration groups, may have been involved in rowdy demonstrations and riots, because some African-Caribbeans were associated with these without raising such profound normative questions. Nor is it due to (Muslim) conservative values, especially in relation to gender and sexuality, though it is related to it.

The core element of the challenge is the primacy given by some muslims to religion as the basis of identity, organization, political representation, normative justification, etc. These matters were thought to

be more or less settled (except in a few exceptional cases like Northern Ireland) till some Muslims started to assert themselves as Muslims in the public sphere of various West European countries. Some have thought that primacy could be given to, say, gender, ethnicity, or class; others have thought that primacy should not be given to any one or even a few of these social categories as identity self-concepts, but very few thought that religion should be in the select set (Modood, 2005; Modood, Triandafyllidou, and Zapata-Barrero, 2006).

Multiculturalism

It is not the mere presence of Muslims or Islam that creates a challenge all by itself. It is the presence of Muslims mediated by or in interaction with contemporary values of European states and politics. In particular, we should attend to two key complexes of political ideas, norms and practices which predate and are independent of Muslim immigrant politics but which make available a certain political opportunity structure for Muslims to make claims which create majoritarian and secularist anxieties. Muslims have been able to adapt and utilize these evolving political complexes and this gives a distinctive character to the phenomenon of interest.

The first one of these is not to do with secularism or desecularization or public assertive religious, *per se*, but with claims for accommodation from within Western polities and normative viewpoints in relation to minorities generally. Let us call these debates and activities 'multiculturalism'. These discourses and practices of non-discrimination, rights, equal accommodation, and respect are largely discourses from within Western European normative debates, norms, and laws (though influenced by a larger climate of opinion led particularly by Anglophone, colonial settler, and immigration-based countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia). They are picked up post-immigration and when Muslims or other groups utilize them, the reference is to the status and resources available to other groups in the West, not 'homelands'.[7] The second complex I have in mind is the religion-state linkages and support structures that exist in Western European countries, which I will call 'moderate secularism'.

Multicultural citizenship refers to the presence of ideas, ethos, and politics of 'difference', which allows for the articulation and legitimacy (and illegitimacy) of dealing with certain kinds of claims, in ways that are deemed acceptable and satisfactory. Briefly, I mean three things

here (for further details, see Modood, 2007). Firstly, there is the critique of those portrayals of political systems, including contemporary liberal democratic states like those of Western Europe, as consisting of universal norms and rights. The critique is that such norms and rights are inflected by particular historical traditions and national cultures which give distinctive interpretations to ideas such as individual and group, public and private, rights and obligations, and so create a *de facto* second-class citizenship for those who do not identify with that culture or are not privileged within it. Secondly, that despite legal definitions and idealized norms of equality between all individuals, many people see either themselves and/or other citizens not just as individuals or citizens but in terms of membership of groups, such as women, black people, or Muslims. These identities are often imposed upon individuals as markers of social inferiority but equally (and simultaneously) can be forms of self-identity and pride and indeed resistance to inferiorization. Given this, thirdly, the challenge of creating equality between historically privileged and disadvantaged groups within a citizenry is unlikely to be achieved by acting as if group identities no longer exist. In relation to colour racism such pretence is called the pursuit of colour-blind policies and, by analogy, one can speak of gender blindness and Muslim blindness in relation to citizenship equality. It is contended that full civic equality will require not just policies treating all citizens as individuals but, additionally, policies, institutions, and discourses which 'recognize' (Taylor, 1994) that certain group identities are victims of negative treatment, are not going to disappear, and should not be required to disappear. So the best approach is a politics of respect which turns these negative identities into positively valued ones and to remake our sense of common citizenship and nationality to include them. This is my understanding of political multiculturalism based on the ideas of political theorists such as Charles Taylor, Bhikhu Parekh, Iris Young, and Will Kymlicka, though I understand that it is not what many Western European politicians, journalists, and social commentators who are critical of multiculturalism may mean by multiculturalism (Modood, 2007, 2011a). My point is that it is the presence, adaptation, and disputation of these ideas and rhetorics which gives the question of the accommodation of Muslims the character it has, namely a multiculturalist character. The result is that to talk about the integration of Muslims in Western Europe today is to argue about multiculturalism. Indeed, the converse has also become true. To talk about multiculturalism today in Western Europe is to talk about – pro and con – the accommodation of Muslims.