Globethics Repository

A debate on the public role of religion and its social and gender implications

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

Item Type	Book
Authors	Casanova, Jose;Phillips, Anne
Publisher	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-09-22 07:37:44
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/178783

A Debate on the Public Role of Religion and its Social and Gender Implications

Contributors

José Casanova

Anne Phillips

Gender and Development
Programme Paper Number 5
September 2009

United Nations
Research Institute
for Social Development

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

This United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Programme Paper has been produced with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) and UNRISD core funds. UNRISD also thanks the governments of Denmark, Finland, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom for their core funding.

Copyright © UNRISD. Short extracts from this publication may be reproduced unaltered without authorization on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to UNRISD, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. UNRISD welcomes such applications.

The designations employed in UNRISD publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNRISD concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The responsibility for opinions expressed rests solely with the author(s), and publication does not constitute endorsement by UNRISD.

ISSN 1994-8026

Contents

Acronyms ii
Foreword/Avant-propos/Prólogo iii
Foreword iii
Avant-propos v
Prólogo viii

Part I Religion, Politics and Gender Equality: Public Religions Revisited 1
Summary/Résumé/Resumen 3
Summary 3
Résumé 4
Resumen 5
Introduction 7
1. Revisiting Public Religions from a Global Comparative Perspective 8
Rethinking secularization beyond the West: Toward a global comparative perspective 9
Public religions beyond ecclesiastical disestablishment and civil society 12
2. Gender Equality, Religious Politics and Public Religions 17
The gendered religious division of labour and power relations within religious regimes 20
Religion and sexism: Androcentric images of women in religious traditions 23
Conclusion 27
Bibliography 29

Part II Religion: Ally, Threat or Just Religion? 35
Summary/Résumé/Resumen 37
Summary 37
Résumé 37
Resumen 38
Introduction 39
Secularism, Agency and Respect 41
Demarcation 44
Religion's informal power 50
Internal reform movements 51
Alliances 53
Conclusion 55
Bibliography 57

UNRISD Programme Papers on **Gender and Development** 59

Acronyms

CE	Common Era
CEB	Christian-based communities
TAO	Treasure, Authority, Organization
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
US	United States

Foreword/Avant-propos/Prólogo

Foreword

Religious actors, institutions, movements and idioms have clearly gained renewed public and political visibility over the past three to four decades. A number of seemingly unrelated developments are often identified as signifiers of this shift, including the 1979 revolution in Iran; the rise of *Solidarnosc* in Poland; the role of Catholicism in the political conflicts of Latin America; and the public re-emergence of conservative evangelical Protestant groups and organizations (such as the Moral Majority) in the United States. It is clear by now that the narrative of declining faith and diminished public role for religion had only a partial and localized significance, thereby putting into question the grand predictions of sweeping secularization as the inevitable companion to modernization and development.

The present publication features a debate between two leading thinkers—José Casanova and Anne Phillips—on the relation between religion, politics and gender equality. In rethinking the relevance of secularism in his 1994 book, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, José Casanova introduced an early and useful analytical disaggregation between the different meanings and manifestations of secularization: secularization as the institutional differentiation of the secular spheres (of state, economy and science) from religious institutions and norms; secularization as the decline of religiosity (that is, individual beliefs and practices); and secularization as the "privatization" of religion. One of the key arguments emerging from Casanova's early analysis was that the "de-privatization" of religion is both empirically irrefutable and morally defensible—a position that he continues to maintain in his present contribution. He also considers a public role for religion to be compatible with democracy and gender equality in the context of a vibrant civil society where religious actors engage in open public debate on a range of common public concerns and issues.

Feminists, however, wonder where this leaves gender equality. Has the ascendance of politicized religion made it harder for women to pursue equality with men? Viewing the relationship between religion and politics in "quasi-corporatist terms"—a relationship between democratic political institutions on the one hand, and religious communities and authorities on the other—as Anne Phillips argues, pays far too little attention to the ways in which each of these may misrepresent or coerce their members. Hence for her, the relationship between religion and politics also needs to be viewed through the lens of *individual* rights and needs, including those of members of minority religious communities, rather than assuming that their interests are simply represented by the principles and practices as defined by religious leaders and spokespersons.

In view of the public visibility of religious forces and their contested implications for women's rights, it seems critical to examine the different manners in which politics and religion interface across diverse historical and national contexts, their effects on gender inequality, and how women as actors, both individually and collectively, engage in this arena to contest or reinforce patriarchal social norms. Hence, in 2006, with financial support from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe, UNRISD was able to initiate the research project *Religion, Politics and Gender Equality*, with a small regional component, embracing case studies on Poland, Serbia and Turkey. The project was able to expand its scope considerably in 2007, thanks to the financial and intellectual support given by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, which entered into partnership with UNRISD to carry out the full project, comprising eight additional country studies (Chile, India, Iran, Israel, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan and the United States) and the two thematic papers published here.

The relation between religion and gender is highly controversial, not only among scholars but also public actors. The divisions among scholars are profound and often revolve around the question of whether religion is "good" or "bad" for the status of women in society. On the one hand, there are those who argue that religiosity promotes gender inequality, and on the other, those who point to the long history of religious progressivism on a range of social issues and to the growing voices of religious feminists as indicators of the compatibility of

religion and gender equality. There are also questions about how to protect gender equality: some people argue that the separation of the state from religious bodies is enough to protect rights of all kinds, including women's rights, while others are less convinced that a "wall of separation" can hold or be a sufficient guarantee. The import of these questions is only intensified by the ways in which gender has become a central marker in national and international debates over religion and secularism, even as scholars have begun to rethink the premises of the religious-secular divide.

The project takes this debate forward through 11 country case studies exploring (i) how religion and politics have interfaced in different national settings, and (ii) the implications of this nexus for gender equality and feminist politics: that is, how women as actors—both individually and collectively—have contested (or reinforced) hegemonic norms and representations that may be inimical to their gender interests.

The case studies spanning diverse regional contexts, encompassing both developed and developing countries with populations belonging to diverse religious traditions (including Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim) reflect on these two key questions. In so doing, they engage with some of the most contested of contemporary issues—the promises of "actually existing" secularisms and their discontents, the social and political forces pushing religious organizations and discourses into the public and political arena, and the implications for human rights agendas, and women's rights agendas more specifically, when religions "go public".

The project questions whether religion was ever a purely private matter, and whether it was indeed absent from the actually existing *secularisms* that took hold, which were themselves highly diverse and often developed in relation to particular *religious* formations (be it Protestantism in the United States, Hinduism in India, or Sunni Islam in Turkey). Modernist and secularist pretensions notwithstanding, few "secularist" states were willing to risk their political survival by radically interfering in matters of the family, marriage and personal laws, which were widely seen as the domain of religious authorities and where religious precepts continued to hold sway. The price paid for this pragmatic non-interference on the part of the state was the official endorsement of formal gender inequality in family/personal status (and sometimes also criminal) laws.

In the process of establishing nation-states, modern states have constantly searched for legitimizing ideologies and power bases, including religious ones that are often closely associated with ethnic nationalisms. Recourse to religion has become attractive to political elites as a legitimizing force in contexts of state weakness and failure, and in opposition to global "imperial" domination variously understood to include military, political, economic and cultural manifestations. Where the state in its modern and secular guise has failed to deliver physical security, welfare provisioning or a sense of national purpose and belonging, traditionalist and religious-based groups and scripts have enjoyed a revival as they have rushed in to fill the gaps. At the same time, the resilience of these institutions, their ingenuity in substituting for state services (be it health, education, or some minimal form of social protection) and their effectiveness in providing members with a sense of dignity and purpose can render them indispensable to the communities they serve.

What this project underlines is that from the point of view of women's rights to equality, autonomy and bodily integrity, there is much at stake in how religion and politics interface. The nationalist thrust underpinning the use of religious forces and idioms, as several of the country studies illustrate, has had socially exclusive and divisive outcomes, marginalizing ethnic and religious minorities, and rescinding women's rights across communities, given the fact that cultural/religious norms and identities are often expressed in ways that deeply impinge on women's roles and freedoms.

How are we to square the pursuit of such a closed and exclusive social order, with evidence of religious forces taking an oppositional stance against authoritarian states, sometimes in defence of subaltern groups? The Catholic Church, for example, played a historically

prominent role in opposition to foreign domination and state authoritarianism in countries such as Poland, providing a much-needed space or refuge (physical and discursive) for a variety of oppositional forces (including trade unionists). Likewise, liberation theology has been an important oppositional strand in Latin America, contesting "dependency" and struggling for the emancipation of subaltern groups through Christian Base Communities in which women have also been very active.

Hence, fundamentalism seems to be too narrow a category within which to locate the diverse range of interfaces between religion and politics documented by contextualized accounts. Yet there is unmistakably a recent culturalist turn and narrowing of agendas of various (though by no means all) religious actors and movements around an exclusive moral, ideological and identity-based politics that is producing highly inegalitarian and illiberal outcomes: not only do these groups and movements have little to offer in the domain of political economy (notwithstanding their distributive populism), but their agendas increasingly converge and impinge on women's rights in ways that show clear signs of the restriction of freedoms and increasing gender inequality. At the global level this convergence has been evident in the alliance forged between some Islamist states and the Vatican (in the context of the United Nations conferences of the 1990s) in opposition to the demands of global women's movements for gender equality, and most explicitly in reproductive and sexual rights.

While arguments for banning religion from the public arena of citizen deliberation and association (along the lines of the wall of separation) are problematic from a democratic point of view and ultimately counter-productive, seeing the arena of public debate and contestation as a "power-free" and non-hierarchical domain, where discussants deliberate as peers, is also deeply suspect, to say the least. While there are, in most countries, counter-hegemonic discourses and "counter-publics" articulating new social visions, breaking taboos on gender roles, family forms and sexuality, and making rights-based claims on behalf of marginalized groups (be they women, religious minorities, or gays/lesbians), their voices are often muffled. It would thus be dangerous to rely exclusively on civil society to produce egalitarian visions and projects.

Shahra Razavi
Research Coordinator
Programme on Gender and Development
UNRISD

Avant-propos

Les acteurs, les institutions, les mouvements et le langage religieux sont manifestement revenus sur le devant de la scène publique et politique au cours des trente à quarante dernières années. Un certain nombre d'événements apparemment sans lien sont souvent cités comme caractéristiques de ce changement, notamment la révolution de 1979 en Iran, la montée de *Solidarnosc* en Pologne, le rôle du catholicisme dans les conflits politiques en Amérique latine et le retour sur la scène publique, chez les protestants des Etats-Unis, de groupes et d'organisations évangéliques conservateurs (désignés comme la majorité morale). Il est clair désormais que le discours sur le déclin de la foi et le rôle public restreint de la religion n'était que partiellement juste, et seulement dans des contextes locaux spécifiques, et qu'ainsi les prédictions de laïcisation générale allant nécessairement de pair avec la modernisation et le développement se trouvent remises en question.

La présente publication confronte deux penseurs éminents—José Casanova et Anne Phillips—sur les rapports entre la religion, la politique et l'égalité entre les genres. En repensant la pertinence de la laïcité dans son ouvrage de 1994, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, José Casanova a introduit une première différenciation, utile pour l'analyse, entre les différents sens et manifestations de la laïcisation: comme mode institutionnel de différenciation entre les sphères laïques (celles de l'Etat, de l'économie et des sciences) et les institutions et normes religieuses, comme déclin du sentiment religieux (autrement dit des

croyances et pratiques individuelles) et comme "privatisation" de la religion. De cette première analyse, José Casanova concluait notamment que la "déprivatisation" de la religion était à la fois irréfutable d'un point de vue empirique et moralement défendable—position qu'il continue à défendre dans sa présente contribution. Il estime aussi qu'un rôle public pour la religion est compatible avec la démocratie et l'égalité des genres lorsque la société civile est dynamique et que les acteurs religieux participent à un libre débat public sur tout un éventail de préoccupations communes et de questions intéressant la collectivité.

Les féministes, en revanche, se demandent ce qu'il reste alors de l'égalité des genres. L'ascendant pris par la religion politisée a-t-il rendu la recherche de l'égalité avec les hommes plus difficile pour les femmes? Considérer les rapports entre religion et politique sous un angle "quasi corporatiste"—entre des institutions politiques démocratiques, d'une part, et des communautés et des autorités religieuses, de l'autre—comme l'explique Anne Phillips, c'est négliger la manière dont chacune d'elles peut fausser la perception de ses membres ou les contraintes qu'elle peut exercer sur eux. Aussi, Anne Phillips estime-t-elle qu'il faut considérer aussi les rapports entre religion et politique à travers le prisme des droits et des besoins *individuels,* y compris ceux des membres des minorités religieuses, et que cela vaut mieux que de partir de l'hypothèse que ce sont simplement les intérêts des fidèles que défendent les principes et pratiques définis par les chefs et porte-parole religieux.

Etant donné la présence visible des forces religieuses dans l'espace public et leur incidence controversée sur les droits des femmes, il semble indispensable d'examiner les différents rapports qu'entretiennent politique et religion selon les contextes historiques et nationaux, leurs effets sur l'inégalité entre les genres et la manière dont les femmes interviennent dans ce domaine comme acteurs à la fois individuels et collectifs pour contester ou conforter les normes sociales patriarcales. C'est pourquoi l'UNRISD a pu lancer en 2006 le projet de recherche *Religion, politique et égalité des sexes*, avec l'appui financier du Bureau régional du Fonds de développement des Nations Unies pour la femme (UNIFEM) pour l'Europe centrale et orientale, et lui donner une modeste composante régionale avec des études de cas sur la Pologne, la Serbie et la Turquie. Le projet a pu sensiblement s'étendre en 2007, grâce à l'appui financier et intellectuel de la Fondation Heinrich Böll, qui a conclu un partenariat avec l'UNRISD pour l'exécution de l'ensemble du projet qui, en tout, a englobé huit études de pays supplémentaires (Chili, Inde, Iran, Israël, Mexique, Nigéria, Pakistan et Etats-Unis) et les deux études thématiques publiées ici.

Le thème des rapports entre religion et genre suscite de vives controverses, non seulement entre universitaires mais aussi entre acteurs publics. Les divisions entre les universitaires sont profondes et tournent souvent autour de la question de savoir si la religion est "bonne" ou "mauvaise" pour la condition de la femme dans la société. D'un côté, il y a ceux qui prétendent que la religiosité favorise l'inégalité entre les hommes et les femmes et, de l'autre, ceux qui évoquent la longue histoire du progressisme religieux sur tout un éventail de questions sociales et le nombre croissant de féministes religieuses qui se font entendre, signe de la compatibilité de la religion avec l'égalité des genres. Des questions se posent aussi sur la manière de protéger cette égalité: d'aucuns estiment qu'il suffit que l'Etat soit séparé des organismes religieux pour que les droits de toutes sortes, y compris ceux des femmes, soient protégés, tandis que d'autres sont moins convaincus qu'un "mur de séparation" puisse tenir ou constituer une garantie suffisante. Le fait que la condition de la femme soit devenue un marqueur central dans les débats nationaux et internationaux sur la religion et la laïcité, alors même que les intellectuels commencent à repenser les prémisses du fossé entre religieux et laïcs, augmente encore l'importance de cette question.

Les 11 études de pays ont permis de pousser plus loin le débat. Elles ont porté sur (i) le fonctionnement du couple religion et politique dans les contextes nationaux et (ii) les incidences de ce couple sur l'égalité entre hommes et femmes et la politique féministe, autrement dit sur le point de savoir en quoi les femmes comme acteurs individuels et collectifs ont contesté (ou conforté) des normes et représentations hégémoniques qui peuvent être contraires à leurs intérêts.

Ces deux questions ont donné lieu à une réflexion dans les pays étudiés, qui appartiennent à diverses régions, comprennent des pays développés et des pays en développement et ont une population issue de diverses traditions religieuses (notamment chrétienne, hindoue, juive et musulmane). Les chercheurs ont été amenés à aborder certaines des questions les plus contestées de notre époque—les promesses des formes déjà présentes de laïcité et les mécontentements qu'elles suscitent, les forces sociales et politiques qui poussent les organisations et discours religieux sur la scène publique et politique, et les conséquences de l'entrée des religions dans l'espace public pour le traitement des droits de la personne et surtout de la femme.

Le projet amène à se demander si la religion n'a jamais été une affaire strictement privée et si elle était réellement absente des formes de *laïcité* qui se sont imposées. Très diverses, celles-ci se sont souvent développées en relation avec des formations *religieuses* particulières (le protestantisme aux Etats-Unis, l'hindouisme en Inde ou l'islam sunnite en Turquie). Nonobstant les prétentions modernistes et laïques, rares ont été les Etats "laïques" prêts à risquer leur existence politique en intervenant de manière radicale dans les lois sur le mariage, la famille et la morale personnelle, questions considérées par un large public comme du ressort des autorités religieuses ou dans lesquelles les préceptes religieux gardaient toute leur emprise. L'Etat a payé son choix de ne pas intervenir en devant sanctionner l'inégalité des hommes et des femmes dans les lois relatives à la personne, à la famille et parfois même dans le droit pénal.

Dans la formation des Etats-nations, les Etats modernes ont constamment cherché des idéologies et des clientèles politiques qui puissent les légitimer, même si elles étaient religieuses et souvent associées à des nationalismes ethniques. La religion est devenue une force d'attraction pour les élites politiques qui y voient un moyen de légitimer leur pouvoir là où l'Etat est faible ou en faillite et qui s'opposent à une domination "impérialiste" mondiale se manifestant, selon les interprétations, sur le terrain militaire, politique, économique et culturel. Là où l'Etat, sous sa forme moderne et laïque, n'a pas réussi à apporter la sécurité matérielle, physique et sociale ou à donner à la nation un sentiment d'unité et d'appartenance, les groupes traditionalistes et d'inspiration religieuse ont connu un formidable succès lorsqu'ils se sont précipités pour remédier à ces carences. En même temps, par leur résilience, leur ingéniosité à se substituer à l'Etat (que ce soit dans la santé, l'éducation ou pour apporter une forme minimale de protection sociale) et leur habileté à donner un but et un sentiment de dignité à leurs membres, ces institutions peuvent se rendre indispensables aux communautés qu'elles servent.

Ce projet souligne que, selon la façon dont s'organisent les rapports entre religion et politique, les femmes ont beaucoup à gagner ou à perdre sur le plan de leurs droits à l'égalité, à l'autonomie et à l'intégrité physique. La poussée nationaliste qui sous-tend le recours aux forces et au langage religieux, comme le montrent plusieurs des études nationales, a eu pour effet d'exclure et de diviser sur un plan social, de marginaliser des minorités ethniques et religieuses, d'abolir les droits des femmes dans diverses communautés car les normes et identités culturelles/religieuses affectent souvent les rôles et les libertés des femmes.

Comment concilier intellectuellement la poursuite d'un ordre social aussi clos et exclusif avec des témoignages montrant que des forces religieuses se sont opposées à des Etats autoritaires, parfois pour défendre des couches sociales subalternes? L'Eglise catholique, par exemple, a joué un rôle historique en s'opposant à la domination étrangère et à l'autoritarisme d'Etat dans des pays comme la Pologne, offrant un espace plus que nécessaire ou un refuge (physique et discursif) à diverses forces d'opposition (y compris aux syndicalistes). De même, la théologie de la libération a été un courant important de l'opposition en Amérique latine, contestant la "dépendance" et luttant pour l'émancipation de groupes subalternes dans des communautés de base chrétiennes où des femmes aussi ont été très actives.

C'est pourquoi le fondamentalisme semble être une catégorie trop étroite pour y ranger les divers modes d'organisation des rapports entre religion et politique que mettent en évidence les études de différents contextes. Pourtant, il n'y a pas à s'y méprendre. Les programmes de

divers acteurs et mouvements religieux (heureusement pas tous) ont pris récemment un tour culturaliste et se sont refermés, se réduisant à une politique d'exclusion morale, idéologique et identitaire dont les résultats sont très inégalitaires et liberticides: non seulement ces groupes et mouvements n'ont pas grand-chose à offrir dans le domaine de l'économie politique (malgré leur populisme en matière de distribution), mais leurs intérêts convergent de plus en plus et empiètent considérablement sur les droits des femmes pour restreindre manifestement les libertés et aggraver les inégalités entre hommes et femmes. Le monde a été témoin de cette convergence lors des conférences des Nations Unies des années 1990 où certains Etats islamistes et le Vatican se sont alliés pour s'opposer aux revendications des mouvements féminins mondiaux d'égalité avec les hommes. Sur les droits en matière de procréation et de sexualité, cette opposition a été particulièrement ouverte.

Si les arguments pour un bannissement de la religion de l'espace public où les citoyens délibèrent et s'associent (selon l'idée du mur du séparation) sont problématiques d'un point de vue démocratique et finalement contraires au but recherché, le fait de considérer le lieu du débat et de la contestation publics comme un domaine sans hiérarchie ni pouvoirs, où les participants au débat délibèrent en égaux est aussi, pour le moins, très suspect. S'il y a, dans la plupart des pays, des discours qui s'élèvent contre l'hégémonie et des "contre-publics" qui esquissent de nouvelles visions de la société, brisent les tabous relatifs aux rôles des femmes et des hommes, aux formes de la famille et à la sexualité, revendiquant la jouissance de droits pour les groupes marginalisés (qu'il s'agisse des femmes, des minorités religieuses, ou des gays et des lesbiennes), ces discours et ces voix sont souvent étouffés. Il serait donc dangereux de compter uniquement sur la société civile pour produire des visions et des projets égalitaires.

Shahra Razavi
Coordonnatrice de recherches
Programme Genre et développement
UNRISD

Prólogo

Los actores, instituciones, movimientos y lenguajes religiosos han a todas luces renovado su visibilidad pública y política en los últimos treinta o cuarenta años. A menudo se menciona una serie de acontecimientos aparentemente inconexos como indicadores de este cambio, entre los que destacan la revolución del Irán en 1979, el surgimiento del sindicato Solidarinosc en Polonia, el papel del catolicismo en los conflictos políticos de América Latina, y el público resurgimiento de las organizaciones y grupos protestantes evangélicos conservadores (como la Mayoría Moral) en Estados Unidos. Resulta claro ahora que el discurso sobre el declive de la fe y el reducido papel público de la religión tenía apenas una importancia localizada y parcial, lo que lleva a cuestionar las grandes predicciones de una secularización avasallante como acompañante ineluctable de la modernización y el desarrollo.

La presente publicación recoge un debate entre dos de los principales teóricos de la materia—José Casanova y Anne Phillips—sobre la relación entre la religión, la política y la igualdad de género. Al replantearse la importancia del laicismo en su libro de 1994 titulado *Religiones públicas en el mundo moderno*, José Casanova propuso una útil separación analítica inicial entre los distintos significados y manifestaciones de la secularización: La secularización como diferenciación institucional de las esferas seglares (el Estado, la economía y la ciencia) respecto de las instituciones y normas religiosas; la secularización como declive de la religiosidad (vale decir, de las creencias y prácticas individuales); y la secularización como "privatización" de la religión. Uno de los argumentos clave que se plantean en el análisis inicial de Casanova es que la "desprivatización" de la religión es empíricamente irrefutable y, al mismo tiempo, moralmente defendible, posición que el autor continúa manteniendo en esta nueva contribución suya. De igual manera, el autor contempla para la religión un papel público compatible con la democracia y la igualdad de género en el contexto de una sociedad civil de gran vitalidad en la cual los actores religiosos participan en el debate abierto sobre una serie de inquietudes y temas comunes a todo el público.

No obstante, las feministas se preguntan dónde queda la igualdad de género en todo esto. ¿El creciente influjo de una religión politizada ha dificultado los esfuerzos de las mujeres por lograr la igualdad con los hombres? Al enfocar la relación entre religión y política desde una perspectiva "cuasi-corporativista"—la relación entre, por una parte, las instituciones políticas democráticas y, por la otra, las comunidades y autoridades religiosas— como sostiene Anne Phillips en su argumentación, es muy poca la atención que se presta a las formas en que cada una de estas puede representar mal o coartar a sus miembros. De allí que, para Phillips, la relación entre religión y política debe enfocarse también desde la perspectiva de los derechos y las necesidades *individuales*, incluidos los de aquellos miembros de comunidades religiosas minoritarias, en lugar de suponer que sus intereses simplemente están representados por los principios y las prácticas que definen los líderes y voceros religiosos.

Habida cuenta de la visibilidad de las fuerzas religiosas y sus cuestionadas implicaciones para los derechos de la mujer, parecería fundamental examinar las distintas maneras en que la política y la religión interactúan en diversos contextos nacionales e históricos, sus efectos sobre la igualdad de género y la forma en que las mujeres, como actores individuales y colectivos, participan en este ámbito para combatir o reforzar las normas sociales patriarcales. De allí que, con el apoyo financiero de la Oficina Regional para Europa Central y Oriental del Fondo de Desarrollo de las Naciones Unidas para la Mujer (UNIFEM), UNRISD pudo en 2006 iniciar el proyecto de investigación *Religión, política e igualdad de género*, en el que se inserta un pequeño componente regional que incluye estudios de casos sobre Polonia, Serbia y Turquía. El proyecto pudo ampliar su alcance considerablemente en 2007, gracias al apoyo financiero e intelectual que brindara la Fundación Heinrich Böll para, en asociación con UNRISD, ejecutar la totalidad del proyecto, con ocho estudios de caso adicionales (Chile, Estados Unidos, India, Irán, Israel, México, Nigeria y Pakistán) y los dos documentos temáticos que aquí se publican.

La relación entre religión y género es un tema sumamente controvertido, no solo entre estudiosos de la materia, sino también entre distintos actores públicos. Las diferencias entre los intelectuales son profundas, y a menudo giran en torno a la cuestión de si la religión es "buena" o "mala" para la situación de la mujer en la sociedad. De un lado se colocan aquellos que sostienen que la religiosidad promueve la desigualdad de género, y del otro quienes hablan de la larga historia del progresivismo religioso en una serie de áreas sociales, así como de las crecientes opiniones de feministas religiosas como indicadores de la compatibilidad entre la religión y la igualdad de género. También surgen preguntas en cuanto a la manera de proteger la igualdad de género: hay quienes sostienen que basta con la separación entre el estado y los entes religiosos para proteger los derechos de todo tipo, incluidos los derechos de la mujer, mientras otros se muestran menos convencidos de que un "muro de separación" pueda soportar la presión o ser garantía suficiente. La importancia de estos temas no hace más que intensificarse por las distintas formas en que el género se ha convertido en un elemento central de los debates nacionales e internacionales sobre religión y laicismo, al punto que los estudiosos del tema han comenzado a replantearse las premisas de la brecha religioso-seglar.

El proyecto permite profundizar este debate por medio de 11 estudios de casos de países en los cuales se exploran (i) la forma en que la religión y la política han interactuado en distintos entornos nacionales y (ii) las implicaciones de este nexo para la igualdad de género y la política feminista: en otras palabras, cómo las mujeres en tanto que actores—tanto individual como colectivamente—han combatido (o reforzado) las normas y representaciones hegemónicas que pudieran resultar hostiles hacia sus intereses de género.

En los estudios de caso, que abarcan diversos contextos regionales y cubren tanto países desarrollados como en desarrollo con poblaciones de diversas tradiciones religiosas (cristiana, hindú, judía y musulmana), se reflexiona sobre estas dos cuestiones clave. Y en ese proceso de reflexión, se abordan algunos de los temas contemporáneos más controvertidos: las promesas de los laicismos "realmente existentes" y sus sinsabores, las fuerzas políticas y sociales que empujan a las organizaciones religiosas y sus discursos hacia el ámbito público y político, y las implicaciones que el ingreso de la religión a la arena pública tiene para las agendas de derechos humanos y, más específicamente, de los derechos de la mujer.

El proyecto indaga si la religión fue en algún momento una materia puramente privada y si, en efecto, estuvo ausente de los *laicismos* realmente existentes que se impusieron, estos mismos sumamente diversos y desarrollados a menudo en relación con determinadas formaciones *religiosas* (trátese del protestantismo en Estados Unidos, el hinduismo en la India o el sunismo en Turquía). No obstante sus pretensiones modernistas y seglares, pocos estados laicos estaban dispuestos a poner en riesgo su supervivencia política al interferir radicalmente en asuntos de la familia, el matrimonio y las leyes personales, que muchos consideraban jurisdicción de las autoridades religiosas y en los cuales los preceptos religiosos seguían predominando. El precio que el estado pagó por esta no interferencia pragmática fue el endoso oficial de la desigualdad de género formal en las leyes relativas al estatus familiar o personal (y en algunos casos incluso en las leyes penales).

En el proceso del establecimiento de los estados-naciones, los estados modernos han buscado constantemente la legitimación de las ideologías y las bases de poder, incluidas las religiosas, que a menudo se asocian íntimamente con nacionalismos étnicos. El recurso a la religión ha cobrado atractivo entre las élites políticas como fuerza legitimadora en contextos de debilidad o fracaso del estado, y en oposición a la dominación "imperial" mundial que en diversas interpretaciones incluye las manifestaciones militares, políticas, económicas y culturales. En aquellos casos donde el estado, bajo su manto moderno y laico, no ha logrado brindar seguridad física, bienestar social o un sentido de propósito y pertenencia nacionales, los grupos tradicionalistas y religiosos han vivido un resurgimiento al apresurarse a llenar esos vacíos. Al mismo tiempo, la resiliencia de estas instituciones, su creatividad e ingenio para sustituir los servicios estatales (ya sea en salud, educación o algunas formas mínimas de protección social) y su eficacia para ofrecer a sus miembros un sentido de dignidad y propósito pueden convertirlas en entes imprescindibles para las comunidades a las que sirven.

Lo que este proyecto resalta es que, desde el punto de vista de los derechos de la mujer a la igualdad, la autonomía y la integridad corporal, es mucho lo que se pone en juego con la forma en que interactúan la religión y la política. El impulso nacionalista que sustenta el uso de las fuerzas y lenguajes religiosos, como bien lo ilustran varios de los estudios de países, ha tenido efectos socialmente excluyentes y divisores, al marginar a las minorías étnicas y religiosas y abolir los derechos de las mujeres en las comunidades, dado que las normas e identidades culturales y religiosas se expresan a menudo en formas que vulneran profundamente las funciones y libertades de la mujer.

¿Cómo conciliar la búsqueda de un orden social tan cerrado y excluyente con las pruebas que se tienen sobre fuerzas religiosas que adoptan posiciones antagónicas a aquellas de estados autoritarios, algunas veces en defensa de grupos menores? La iglesia católica, por ejemplo, desempeñó un papel históricamente prominente de oposición a la dominación extranjera y al autoritarismo de estado en países como Polonia, ofreciendo un muy necesitado espacio o refugio (físico y discursivo) para una serie de fuerzas de oposición (incluidos los sindicalistas). Igualmente, la teología de la liberación ha sido una importante corriente de oposición en América Latina al resistirse a la "dependencia" y luchar por la emancipación de grupos más pequeños a través de comunidades cristianas en las cuales las mujeres también han sido muy activas.

Así las cosas, el fundamentalismo parece ser una categoría demasiado limitada en la cual colocar la diversa gama de interrelaciones entre la religión y la política que se documentan en los contextos analizados. Sin embargo, no cabe duda de que estamos ante un reciente giro culturalista y una concentración de las agendas de varios actores y movimientos religiosos (aunque de ninguna manera todos) en torno a una política excluyente desde el punto de vista moral, ideológico y de identidad que está teniendo serios efectos perniciosos sobre la igualdad y las libertades. Estos grupos y movimientos tienen poco que ofrecer en el plano de la economía política (a pesar de su populismo distributivo), y lo que es más, sus agendas coliden con los derechos de las mujeres y los vulneran en grado creciente, dejando indicios claros de restricción a las libertades y una desigualdad de género en auge. A nivel mundial, estos choques se han hecho patentes con la alianza forjada entre algunos estados islámicos y

el Vaticano (en el contexto de las conferencias de las Naciones Unidas de los años noventa) en oposición a las demandas de los movimientos internacionales de mujeres en pro de la igualdad de género, y más explícitamente en relación con sus derechos reproductivos y sexuales.

Si bien las propuestas a favor de la exclusión de la religión del foro público de deliberación y asociación ciudadanas (en forma análoga al muro de separación) resultan, desde el punto de vista democrático, problemáticas y, a la postre, contraproducentes, pretender que la arena del debate público y la contestación es un escenario "exento de las luchas de poder" y de las jerarquías, donde los participantes deliberan en igualdad de condiciones, resulta, cuando menos, profundamente sospechoso. Si bien existen, en casi todos los países, discursos contrahegemónicos y "contra-públicos" que proponen nuevas visiones sociales, rompen tabúes sobre el papel de género, las formas familiares y la sexualidad y defienden los derechos de los grupos marginados (trátese de mujeres, minorías religiosas o gays y lesbianas), sus voces son a menudo acalladas. Sería, pues, peligroso confiar exclusivamente en la sociedad civil para que produzca visiones y proyectos igualitarios.

Shahra Razavi
Coordinador de Investigación
Programa sobre Género y Desarrollo
UNRISD

Part I

Religion, Politics and Gender Equality: Public Religions Revisited

José Casanova

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

The paper offers a revision of the thesis of the "de-privatization of religion" first presented in *Public Religions in the Modern World* in response to two new challenges: (i) the global imperative to develop comparative analytical frameworks which are applicable beyond Western Christian contexts; and (ii) the need to place the politics of gender equality and the related religious/secular debates into the centre of any discussion of "public religion" anywhere in the world today.

The paper offers, first, a critical reconstruction of the particular Western Christian genesis of the religious/secular system of classification of reality, and its subsequent globalization, in order to facilitate a less Western-centric comparative historical analysis of processes of secularization beyond the West.

Next, the paper questions previous attempts to contain public religions within the public sphere of civil society, without allowing them to spill over to political society or the democratic state. Reflecting upon the complexity of institutional arrangements one finds in existing Western democracies, the paper argues that the secular separation of religion from political society or even from the state are not universalizable maxims, in the sense that they are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for democratic politics. The free exercise of religion is the primary, fundamental and necessary democratic norm, while the secular principle of separation and "no establishment" is a secondary conditional norm whose instrumental purpose is to facilitate the free exercise of religion of each individual citizen. The paper adopts Stepan's model of the "twin tolerations" as a more flexible framework able to encompass better the wide variety of institutional patterns of relations between democratic political institutions and religious institutions across religions, and across national and civilization contexts.

It is neither possible nor advisable to restrict empirically or normatively the religious politics of gender equality to the public sphere of civil society. What is desirable is to subject religious discourses legitimating patriarchal customs or discriminatory gender practices to open public debate and to political contestation. But this in itself is a form of de-privatization of religion that thrusts religion necessarily into the political arena. What makes blatant gender discrimination and patriarchal practices objectionable is not the fact that they may be grounded in religious discourse, but the fact that they violate basic democratic and legal norms of equality. The democratic solution cannot be to outlaw religious discourse or patriarchal norms, but to subject such a discourse to public debate and to subject collective norms to legal-political democratic processes.

The second part of the paper offers a framework for a critical analysis of the religious politics of gender within the comparative context of Catholicism and Islam as religious regimes and as discursive normative traditions.

Without questioning the need of subjecting all religious traditions to external secular feminist critiques, the paper stresses the need and effective relevance of internal feminist religious critiques, that is, from within the normative claims of religious traditions, particularly in those contexts in which religious traditions and institutions may have discursive hegemony.

The paper distinguishes three different sets of issues in the religious politics of gender: (i) the gendered religious division of labour and power relations within religious regimes; (ii) sexism and the andocentric images of women within religious traditions; and (iii) women as religious subjects, historical agents and political actors, and their roles in the contemporary reproduction and transformation of their religious traditions and in the insertion of religious discourses, resources and practices in the contested politics of gender equality.

José Casanova is Professor of Sociology and Senior Fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, United States.

Résumé

L'étude propose une révision de la thèse de la "déprivatisation de la religion", exposée pour la première fois dans *Public Religions in the Modern World,* en réponse à deux défis nouveaux: 1) l'impératif général de concevoir des grilles d'analyse comparative qui soient applicables aussi ailleurs que dans l'Occident chrétien; et 2) la nécessité aujourd'hui de placer, partout dans le monde, les aspects politiques de l'égalité des genres et les débats religieux/laïques sur ces questions au centre de toute discussion sur la "religion publique".

L'auteur commence par proposer une reconstruction critique de la genèse, propre à l'Occident chrétien, du système de classification de la réalité entre religieux et laïque, et de sa mondialisation ultérieure, pour faciliter une analyse historique comparative moins occidentalo-centrique des processus de laïcisation en cours ailleurs qu'en Occident.

Ensuite, il met en question les tentatives faites par le passé pour contenir les religions publiques dans l'espace public de la société civile et éviter qu'elles ne débordent sur la société politique ou l'Etat démocratique. Réfléchissant à la complexité des mécanismes institutionnels dans les démocraties occidentales, l'auteur fait valoir que la séparation laïque entre la religion et la société politique ou même l'Etat n'est pas une maxime universalisable, en ce sens qu'elle n'est ni nécessaire ni suffisante pour la démocratie politique. La libre pratique de la religion est la norme première, fondamentale et nécessaire en démocratie, alors que le principe laïque de la séparation stricte avec les institutions de l'Etat est une norme secondaire, conditionnelle, qui n'a pas d'autre objet que de faciliter une libre pratique religieuse pour chaque citoyen(ne). L'auteur adopte le modèle de Stepan de la "double tolérance" comme grille flexible dans laquelle puisse entrer la grande diversité des modes d'organisation que présentent les rapports entre les institutions politiques démocratiques et les institutions religieuses, selon les religions, les pays et les civilisations.

Il n'est ni possible ni conseillé de restreindre de manière empirique ou normative les aspects politico-religieux de l'égalité des genres à l'espace public de la société civile. Il est souhaitable en revanche de soumettre les discours religieux légitimant des coutumes patriarcales ou des pratiques discriminatoires envers les femmes à un libre débat public et à la contestation politique. Mais il s'agit là d'une forme de déprivatisation de la religion qui propulse nécessairement la religion dans l'arène politique. Les discriminations flagrantes envers les femmes et les pratiques patriarcales sont choquantes non pas parce qu'elles peuvent être ancrées dans le discours religieux mais parce qu'elles violent les normes fondamentales, démocratiques et légales, de l'égalité. La solution démocratique ne saurait être de bannir le discours religieux ou les normes patriarcales mais consiste à soumettre ce discours au débat public et les normes collectives aux processus démocratiques, législatifs et politiques.

Dans la seconde partie de son étude, l'auteur propose une grille d'analyse critique des aspects politico-religieux des rapports sociaux entre hommes et femmes en comparant le catholicisme et l'islam comme régimes religieux et comme traditions dont le discours est normatif.

Sans remettre en question la nécessité de soumettre toutes les traditions religieuses aux critiques extérieures de féministes laïques, l'auteur souligne la nécessité, l'efficacité et la pertinence des critiques internes de féministes religieuses, autrement dit formulées dans le cadre des prétentions normatives de leur tradition, surtout là où les traditions et institutions religieuses ont un discours hégémonique.

Parmi les aspects politico-religieux des rapports sociaux entre hommes et femmes, l'auteur distingue trois séries de questions: (i) la division du travail et les rapports de pouvoir entre les genres dans les régimes religieux; (ii) le sexisme et les images androcentriques des femmes dans les traditions religieuses; et (iii) les femmes comme sujets religieux, agents historiques et

acteurs politiques, et leurs rôles dans la reproduction et la transformation contemporaines de leurs traditions religieuses et dans l'introduction de ressources, de pratiques et d'un discours religieux dans le débat politique sur l'égalité des genres.

José Casanova est professeur de sociologie et associé principal au Centre Berkley pour la religion, la paix et les affaires mondiales à l'Université de Georgetown, Etats-Unis.

Resumen

El presente documento contiene un replanteamiento de la tesis de la "desprivatización de la religión" que se presentase originalmente en la obra *Public Religions in the Modern World*, en respuesta a dos nuevos desafíos: (i) el imperativo mundial de crear marcos analíticos comparativos que puedan aplicarse más allá de los contextos cristianos occidentales; y (ii) la necesidad de colocar la política de la igualdad de género y los debates religiosos y laicos conexos en el centro de cualquier discusión sobre "religión pública" en cualquier parte del mundo hoy día.

El documento ofrece, en primer lugar, una reinterpretación crítica de la particular génesis cristiana occidental del sistema religioso o laico de clasificación de la realidad, y su posterior mundialización, con el objeto de facilitar el análisis histórico comparativo menos centrado en el Occidente de los procesos de secularización allende el Oeste.

Seguidamente se ponen en tela de juicio los intentos anteriores por contener a las religiones públicas dentro de la esfera pública de la sociedad civil, sin permitir que se desbordaran hacia la sociedad política o el estado democrático. A partir de una reflexión sobre la complejidad de los arreglos institucionales que se observan en las democracias occidentales actuales, se argumenta en este trabajo que la separación seglar entre la religión y la sociedad política, e incluso entre aquella y el estado, no son máximas universalizables, en el sentido de que no son condiciones necesarias ni suficientes para la política democrática. El libre ejercicio de la religión es la norma democrática primaria, fundamental y necesaria, mientras que el principio laico de separación y "no establecimiento" es una norma condicional secundaria cuyo propósito práctico consiste en facilitar el libre ejercicio de la religión por parte de cada ciudadano. El documento adopta el modelo de Stepan de la "mutua tolerancia" por ser un marco más flexible que puede abarcar mejor la amplia variedad de modelos institucionales de relaciones entre las instituciones políticas democráticas y las instituciones religiosas de distintas religiones y en distintos contextos nacionales y de civilización.

No es posible ni aconsejable el restringir, empírica o normativamente, la visión religiosa de la igualdad de género al ámbito público de la sociedad civil. Lo conveniente sería someter los discursos religiosos que legitiman las costumbres patriarcales al debate público abierto y a la contestación política. Pero esto es en sí mismo una forma de desprivatización de la religión que necesariamente lanza a esta a la arena política. Lo que hace de la flagrante discriminación por género y el comportamiento patriarcal prácticas objetables no es que puedan fundarse en el discurso religioso, sino que violan las normas democráticas y jurídicas básicas de igualdad. La solución democrática no se halla en proscribir el discurso religioso o las normas patriarcales, sino en llevar dicho discurso al debate público y someter las normas colectivas a los procesos jurídico-políticos democráticos.

La segunda parte del documento contiene un marco para el análisis crítico de las políticas religiosas desde la perspectiva de género en un contexto comparativo del catolicismo y el Islam como regímenes religiosos y como tradiciones normativas de discurso.

Sin pretender cuestionar la necesidad de someter a todas las tradiciones religiosas a las críticas feministas laicas externas, el documento recalca la necesidad y verdadera pertinencia de conocer las críticas religiosas feministas internas, sobre todo en aquellos contextos en los cuales las tradiciones e instituciones religiosas pueden ejercer una hegemonía sobre el discurso.

En el documento se distinguen tres problemas diferentes relacionados con las políticas religiosas desde la perspectiva de género : (i) la división del trabajo y las relaciones de poder con un sesgo religioso de género al interior de los regímenes religiosos; (ii) el sexismo y las imágenes androcéntricas de la mujer en las tradiciones religiosas; y (iii) la mujer como sujeto religioso, agente histórico y actor político, y sus funciones en la reproducción contemporánea y la transformación de sus tradiciones religiosas, así como en la inserción de los discursos, recursos y prácticas religiosos en la política debatida de la igualdad de género.

José Casanova es Profesor de Sociología y *Senior Fellow* del Centro Berkley sobre Religión, Paz y Asuntos Mundiales de la Universidad Georgetown, Estados Unidos.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to revisit the argument first presented in *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Casanova 1994) in order to ascertain the extent to which the theoretical-analytical framework developed there needs to be critically revised and expanded in response to two main challenges. The first challenge arises from the global imperative to develop comparative analytical frameworks which are applicable beyond Western Christian contexts. The second challenge derives from the equally urgent need to place the politics of gender equality and the related religious/secular debates into the centre of any discussion of "public religion" anywhere in the world today.

The central thesis of the book was that we were witnessing a process of "de-privatization" of religion as a relatively global trend. As an empirical claim, the thesis has been amply confirmed by subsequent developments practically everywhere. In a sense, the best confirmation of the thesis can actually be found in the heartland of secularization, that is, in Western European societies. Even though there is very little evidence of any kind of religious revival among the European population, if one excludes the significant influx of new immigrant religions, nonetheless religion has certainly returned as a contentious issue to the public sphere of most European societies (Casanova 2007a, 2007b). Most importantly, one can sense a noticeable shift in the European *Zeitgeist*. When first presented 15 years ago, the thesis did not find much resonance among European audiences. The privatization of religion was simply taken for granted both as a normal empirical fact and as the norm for modern European societies. The concept of modern public religion was still too dissonant, and the public resurgence of religion elsewhere could simply be explained, or rather explained away, as the rise of fundamentalism in not yet modern societies. But more recently, there has been a noticeable change in the attitude and the public attention given to religion throughout Europe (Casanova 2006a). There are very few voices in Europe today simply restating the old thesis of privatization. Prominent intellectuals, such as Jürgen Habermas, not only are ready to accept some role for religion in the public sphere of modern democratic societies, but have initiated a discourse on "post-secular society" (Habermas 2008). Even the self-assured French *laïcité* is on the defensive and ready to make some concessions.

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

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

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

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

While I still think that the analytical-theoretical framework developed in *Public Religions* is generally useful and still defensible today, nonetheless the framework needs to be revised critically and expanded in order to address specifically the issues of globalization and gender equality. I can see three main shortcomings or limitations of the argument I developed there: (i) its Western-Christian centrism; (ii) the attempt to restrict, at least normatively, modern public religions to the public sphere of civil society; and (iii) the empirical framing of the study as church-state-nation–civil society relations from a comparative national perspective, neglecting the transnational global dimensions. This paper will first offer a revision and expansion of the analytical framework of public religions in order to make it more amenable to a global comparative perspective beyond the Christian West.[1] The second part of the paper will attempt to address some of the ways in which the central issue of gender equality impacts upon religious politics and some of the ways in which the de-privatization of religion may in turn affect the politics of gender equality.

1. Revisiting Public Religions from a Global Comparative Perspective

Since my comparative historical study was focused on the two main branches of Western Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, it could function with a relatively unreflexive category of religion. The moment one adopts a global comparative perspective, however, this is no longer possible. Yet there are well-known difficulties of formulating a satisfying general definition of religion, and even more serious difficulties of constructing an adequate general theory of religion. In fact, while the social sciences—particularly the sociology of religion—still function with an unreflexive category of religion, within the newer discipline of religious studies, the very category of religion has undergone numerous challenges, as well as all kinds of critical genealogical deconstructions.

This is not the place to revisit the debates of the last two decades concerning the competing genealogies of the modern category of religion, and its complex relation to the pluralization of Christian confessions and denominations in early modernity; to the Western colonial expansion

[1] This section builds upon the analysis first developed in Casanova (2008c).

and the encounter with the religious "other"; to the triumph of secular reason, the hegemony of the secular state and the disciplinary institutionalization of the scientific study of religion; as well as to the Western "invention of the world religions" and the classificatory taxonomies of religion which have now become globalized.[2] But it is appropriate to begin a discussion of religion in the contemporary global age with the recognition of a paradox, namely, that scholars of religion are questioning the validity of the category of religion, at the same time that the discursive reality of religion is more widespread than ever and has become, for the first time, global (Beyer 2006). I am not claiming that people today everywhere are either more or less religious than they may have been in the past. Here I am putting aside altogether the question which has dominated most theories of secularization, namely whether religious beliefs and practices are declining or growing as a general modern trend. I am only claiming that religion as a discursive reality, indeed as an abstract category and as a system of classification of reality, used by modern individuals as well as by modern societies across the world, has become an undisputable global social fact.

It is obvious that when people around the world use the category of religion they actually mean very different things. The actual concrete meaning of whatever people denominate as religion can only be elucidated in the context of their particular discursive practices. But the very fact that the same category of religion is being used across cultures and civilizations testifies to the global expansion of the modern secular-religious system of classification of reality which first emerged in the modern Christian West. This implies the need to reflect more critically upon this particular modern system of classification, without taking it for granted as a general universal system valid for all times and places.

Rethinking secularization beyond the West: Toward a global comparative perspective

While the two minor subtheses of the theory of secularization, namely "the decline of religion" and "the privatization of religion", have undergone numerous critiques and revisions in the last 15 years, the core of the thesis, namely the understanding of secularization as a single process of functional differentiation of the various institutional spheres or sub-systems of modern societies, remains relatively uncontested in the social sciences, particularly within European sociology. Yet one should ask whether it is appropriate to subsume the multiple and very diverse historical patterns of differentiation and fusion of the various institutional spheres (that is, church and state, state and economy, economy and science) that one finds throughout the history of modern Western societies into a single teleological process of modern functional differentiation.[3]

Talal Asad drew attention to the fact that "the historical process of secularization effects a remarkable ideological inversion…. For at one time 'the secular' was a part of a theological discourse (*saeculum*)," while later "the religious" is constituted by secular political and scientific discourses, so that religion itself as a historical category and as a universal globalized concept emerges as a construction of Western secular modernity (Asad 2003:192). Thus, any thinking of secularization beyond the West has to begin with the recognition of this dual historical paradox. Namely, that the secular emerges first as a particular Western Christian theological category, while its modern antonym, the religious, is a product of Western secular modernity.

But as I pointed out in my response to Asad's critique, contemporary genealogies of secularism fail to recognize the extent to which the formation of the secular is itself inextricably linked with the internal transformations of European Christianity, from the so-called Papal Revolution to the Protestant Reformation, and from the ascetic and pietistic sects of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the emergence of evangelical, denominational Protestantism in nineteenth century America (Casanova 2006b).

The contextualization of the categories, religious and secular, should thus begin with the recognition of the particular Christian historicity of Western European developments, as well as of

[2] See Asad (1993); Kippenberg (2002); Mazusawa (2005); McCutcheon (1982); Smith (1998); de Vries (2008).

[3] For a sharp critique of the thesis of differentiation, see Tilly (1984:43–60).

the multiple and diverse historical patterns of differentiation and fusion of the religious and the secular, and their mutual constitution, within European and Western societies. Such recognition in turn should allow a less Eurocentric comparative analysis of patterns of differentiation and secularization in other civilizations and world religions, and more importantly, the further recognition that with the historical process of globalization initiated by the European colonial expansion, all these processes are dynamically interrelated and mutually constituted. Without questioning the actual historical processes of secular differentiation, such analysis contextualizes, pluralizes and, in a sense, relativizes those processes by framing them as particular Christian-Western historical dynamics, which allows for a discourse of multiple modernities within the West and of course, even more so, for multiple non-Western modernities.

From a comparative global historical perspective, the process of Western secularization appears as a radicalization of the great disembedding of the individual from the sacred cosmos, and from society, that was first initiated by the axial revolutions.[4] In the context of a general theory of religious evolution, one may understand this process as a redrawing of boundaries between sacred/profane, transcendence/immanence, and religious/secular. All too often these dichotomous pairs are viewed as synonymous. But it should be obvious that these classificatory schemes do not fit neatly within one another. The sacred tends to be immanent in pre-axial societies, transcendence is not necessarily religious in some axial civilizations, and obviously some secular reality (the nation, citizenship, the person and individual human rights) can become sacred in the modern secular age.

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

As Charles Taylor has clearly shown, the historical process of modern secularization began as a process of internal secular reform within Latin Christendom, as an attempt to spiritualize the temporal and bring the religious life of perfection out of the monasteries into the *saeculum*, thus literally, as an attempt to make the religious secular (Taylor 2007). The repeated attempts at Christian reform of the *saeculum* began with the papal revolution and continued with the emergence of the spiritual orders of mendicant and preaching friars bent on Christianizing the growing medieval towns and cities, as well as with the emergence of lay Christian communities of brothers and sisters committed to a life of Christian perfection in the *saeculum*, or the world. These medieval movements of Christian reform already established the basic patterns of secularization which were later radicalized first by the Protestant Reformation and then, from the French Revolution on, by all subsequent modern civilizing and reform processes.

The Protestant path, which attained its paradigmatic manifestation in the Anglo-Saxon Calvinist cultural area, particularly in the United States, is characterized by a blurring of the boundaries and by a mutual reciprocal infusion of the religious and the secular, in a sense making the religious secular and the secular religious.[5] The French-Latin-Catholic path, by

[4] The concepts of axiality and axial revolutions go back to Karl Jaspers' theory of the "Axial Age", a crucial period in global human history when simultaneously, between the sixth and fourth centuries BC, a series of great prophets and thinkers (Zoroaster and Isaiah in the Middle East, Socrates and Plato in Greece, Buddha in India, Confucius and Lao Tzu in China) developed parallel conceptions of transcendence, which were to serve as the foundation of long-lasting human civilizations. For recent debates on axiality and modernity for which the work of Shmuel Eisenstadt has served as catalyst, see Ben-Rafael and Sternberg (2005) and Arnason et al. (2004).

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

contrast, took the form of laicization, and is basically marked by a civil-ecclesiastical and laic-clerical antagonistic dynamic. This explains the central role of anticlericalism in the Catholic pattern. Unlike in the Protestant pattern, here the boundaries between the religious and the secular are rigidly maintained, but those boundaries are pushed into the margins, aiming to contain, privatize and marginalize everything religious, while excluding it from any visible presence in the secular public sphere.

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

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

The purpose of this comparison is not to reiterate the well-known fact that American society is more religious and therefore less secular than European societies. While the first may be true, the second proposition does not follow. On the contrary, the United States has always been the paradigmatic form of a modern secular, differentiated society. In any case, it would be ludicrous to argue that the United States is a less functionally differentiated society, and therefore less modern and less secular than France or Sweden. On the contrary, one could argue that there is less functional differentiation of state, economy, science and so on in *étâtiste-laïciste* France than in the United States, but this does not make France either less modern or less secular than the United States.[6]

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

Until very recently, most discussions of secularization had assumed that European religious developments were typically or paradigmatically modern, while the persistence of religion in modern America was attributed to American "exceptionalism". It was assumed that Europe was secular because it was modern. America was the exception that confirmed the European

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

rule, a convenient way of not having to put the European rule into question. Progressive religious decline as a normal process of modern development was taken so much for granted that it was the American deviation from the European norm that required an explanation (José Casanova 2003).

But the fundamental question is whether secularization in the derived sense of the decline of religious beliefs and practices—which takes the paradigmatic European form of "unchurching", that is, of ceasing to belong to Christian churches and to practice "church" religiosity—is likely to take place without having undergone first the historical experience of secularization in the primary structural sense. This means the transformation of the Christian churches from the system of medieval Christendom through Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the territorialization and confessionalization of the absolutist state churches, and the subsequent secularization of the state. It is this sequence of historical developments which itself produces the stadial[7] consciousness of having superseded religion, which is associated with the collective memories of European peoples. But without the phenomenological experience of stadial consciousness associated with the stages of European historical secularization, processes of modernization elsewhere might not have the same secularizing effect as in Europe.

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

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

Moreover, following Peter van der Veer, one could argue that the pattern of Western secularization cannot be fully understood if the crucial significance of the colonial encounter in European developments is ignored (van der Veer 2001). In fact, in the colonial encounter, secular modernity and Western Christian civilization always appear entangled. Any comprehensive narrative of the modern civilizing process must take into account the Western European encounter with other civilizations. The very category of civilization in the singular only emerged out of these intercivilizational encounters (Arnason 2003). Moreover, in the same way as "our" modern secular age is fundamentally and inevitably post-Christian, the emerging multiple modernities in the different post-axial civilizational areas are likely to be post-Hindu, or post-Confucian, or post-Muslim, that is, they are also a modern refashioning and transformation of already existing civilizational patterns and social imaginaries.

Public religions beyond ecclesiastical disestablishment and civil society

My own analysis of the de-privatization of religion tried to contain, at least normatively, public religions within the public sphere of civil society, without allowing them to spill over to political society or the democratic state. This remains my own personal normative and political

[7] Stadial refers to the Enlightenment premise that humanity and human societies undergo progressive stages of development.

preference, but I am not certain that the secular separation of religion from political society or even from the state are universalizable maxims, in the sense that they are either necessary or sufficient conditions for democratic politics. Today I must recognize my own modern Western secular prejudices and the particular hermeneutic Catholic and ecclesiastical perspective on religion which I adopted in my comparative analysis of the relations between church, state, nation and civil society in Western Catholic and Protestant societies. The moment one adopts a global comparative perspective, one must admit that the de-privatization of religion is unlikely to be contained within the public sphere of civil society, within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state, and within the constitutional premises of ecclesiastical disestablishment and juridical separation of church and state. We need to go beyond the secularist discourse of separation and beyond the public sphere of civil society, in order to address the real issues of democratic politics around the world.

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

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

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

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

Alfred Stepan's model of the "twin tolerations" offers, in my view, a fruitful way of looking into the entanglement of religion and politics in democratic systems (Stepan 2001:218–225). Stepan has pointed out how the most important empirical analytical theories of democracy, from Robert Dahl to Juan Linz, do not include secularism or strict separation as one of the institutional requirements for democracy, unlike prominent normative liberal theories such as those of John Rawls or Bruce Ackerman. As an alternative to secularist principles or norms, Stepan has proposed the model of the twin tolerations, which he describes as "the minimal boundaries of freedom of action that must somehow be crafted for political institutions vis-à-vis religious authorities, and for religious individuals and groups vis-à-vis political institutions" (Stepan 2001:217). Religious authorities must tolerate the autonomy of democratically elected governments without claiming constitutionally privileged prerogatives to mandate or veto public policy. Democratic political institutions, in turn, must tolerate the autonomy of religious individuals and groups not only to complete freedom to worship privately, but also to advance publicly their values in civil society and sponsor organizations and movements in political society, as long as they adhere to the rule of law and do not violate democratic rules. Within this framework of mutual autonomy, Stepan concludes, "there can be an extraordinarily broad range of concrete patterns of religion-state relations in political systems that would meet our minimal definition of democracy" (Stepan 2001:217).[8]

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

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

Since, on the other hand, there are many historical examples of European states that were secular and non-democratic, the Soviet-type communist regimes being the most obvious case, one can therefore safely conclude that the strict secular separation of church and state is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for democracy. Between the two extremes of French *laïcité* and Nordic Lutheran establishment, there is a whole range of very diverse patterns of church-state relations, for example, in education, media, health and social services, which constitute very "unsecular" entanglements, such as the consociational formula of pillarization in the Netherlands, or the corporatist official state recognition of the Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany (as well as of the Jewish community in some *Länder*).[9]

---

[8] Naturally, the system of twin tolerations and the framework of mutual autonomy will need to be based on some robust institutional juridification that protects the rights of individuals and groups from tyrannical majorities (religious or secular) from monopolistic ecclesiastical institutions and the state. It needs to be stressed that liberal constitutional principles of juridification of rights, and the separation and autonomy of the judiciary which it entails, are much more necessary for the proper functioning of democracy, for the free exercise of religious and other freedoms, and for the progressive institutionalization of gender equality than secularist norms per se.

[9] John Madeley has developed a tripartite measure of church-state relation, which he calls the TAO of European management and regulation of religion-state relations by the use of Treasure (T: for financial and property connections), Authority (A: for the exercise of states' powers of command) and Organization (O: for the effective intervention of state bodies in the religious sphere). According to his measurement, all European states score positively on at least one of these scales, most states score positively on two of them, and over one-third (16 out of 45 states) score positively on all three (Madeley 2007).

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

As to public religion in political society, one should not lose sight of the fact that, at one time or another, most continental European societies developed confessional religious parties, which played a crucial role in the democratization of those societies. Even those confessional parties which initially emerged as anti-liberal and at least ideologically as anti-democratic parties—as was the case with most Catholic parties in the nineteenth century—ended up playing a very important role in the democratization of their societies. This is the paradox of Christian democracy which has been analyzed by Stathis Kalyvas (1996). Catholic political mobilization emerged almost everywhere as a counterrevolutionary reaction against liberalism and its anti-clerical assault on the Catholic Church. Political, and even social, Catholicism was in many respects fundamentalist, intransigent and theocratic. Focusing on Catholic ideology and doctrine, one was bound to conclude that Catholicism and democracy were indeed antithetical and irreconcilable, as the liberal and Protestant anti-Catholic discourse was never tired of stressing throughout the nineteenth century (Casanova 2005).

Yet, somehow, the dynamics of electoral competition led to the transformation of Catholic parties everywhere. Those parties, in turn, by embracing democratic politics made a fundamental contribution to the consolidation of democracy in their respective countries. With important variations, a similar story repeated itself in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, the countries where Christian democracy became dominant after the Second World War. This story, as Kalyvas points out in his conclusion, is particularly relevant at a time when the alleged incompatibility of Islam and democracy and the supposedly anti-democratic nature of Muslim and other religious parties is so frequently and publicly debated.[10]

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

One can also, of course, defend the need for a secular state on religious grounds, that is, precisely in order to protect free and voluntary religious commitment from state-enforced religious coercion. This was the original rationale of Baptists and other sects in support of "no establishment" and "free exercise" of religion in the United States.[11]

Here I fully agree with Anne Phillips that one should "take the rights of individuals, rather than the rights of religions or religious minorities, as the starting point" and that this "provides the more secure basis for thinking about the relationship between religion, politics and gender equality" (Phillips 2009:47–48).[12] My basic premise is that "free exercise of religion" is the primary fundamental right and a necessary condition for democracy, while "no establishment" is a secondary instrumental condition, necessary only when religious establishments hinder the free exercise of religion. The free exercise of religion is in this respect primarily an individual human right, not a corporate one. Freedom of conscience and freedom to exit any religious community, and thus the right to believe or not to believe and to belong or not to belong, are in my view the basic inalienable foundation of the free exercise of religion, meant to protect the individual equally from state despotism, secular or religious, and from the coercion of

[10] For a more extensive elaboration, see Casanova (2008b).

[11] Today a similar argument for the sake of free individual commitment to Islam and to *shari'a* and against any state coercion in the religious sphere has been convincingly developed by Abdullahi An-Na'im (2008).

[12] Further references to Phillips' paper in this volume are cited with just a page number rather than the full citation.

ecclesiastical institutions and corporate religious communities. Obviously, I should have made this more explicit. But I had assumed that this went without saying, given that this is a position I have maintained in all my writings.

I am surprised, therefore, that Phillips interprets my focus on the free exercise of religion and on the rights of religious minorities in a corporatist direction and that she seems to imply that I defend a "corporatist understanding of religious authority" (p. 47). I always refer to the rights of religious minorities in the context of protecting minorities (religious or secular) from the tyranny of democratic majorities (religious or secular), and not as a corporate right of religious communities vis-á-vis their individual members, vis-á-vis the democratic state, or vis-á-vis the rule of law. I would be very surprised if anybody could uncover any strong communitarian strain in any of my writings. But, like Phillips, I also "have my own reservations about the discourse of rights", over its overtly individualistic, liberal and secularist conception in most Western discourses, and over "the tendency to define as fundamental rights and freedoms what turn out to be more parochial requirements of particular societies and histories" (p. 47).[13] This applies also to common Western secular feminist understandings of gender equality, and individual male and female liberties. We do not disagree on the broad principles, which I am willing to postulate as universal norms, of individual freedom and gender equality. But I have become reflexively self-conscious of my own Western Christian secular prejudices and wary of too facile an application or imposition of parochial historical patterns and institutional arrangements upon non-Western settings.

This is the main rationale for the need to rethink secularization beyond the Christian or post-Christian West, and for the need to revise my theory of public religions, not only beyond the language of ecclesiastical disestablishment or secular separation of church and state, but also beyond civil society. This is also the reason for my adoption of Stepan's framework of the twin tolerations, precisely because it frees our analysis from the parochial understandings of particular Western secular historical developments and is open to a slightly more neutral global comparative historical analysis. I concur with Phillips that one should be careful not to conceive Stepan's framework of the twin tolerations "in quasi-corporatist terms as a relationship between democratic and religious authorities" (p. 57). In this respect I also feel uneasy about a focus on religious authorities. But I understand the choice of this term as an attempt to open the analysis beyond Western-centric conceptions of church or ecclesiastical institutions, not as an opening for corporatist political arrangements. In any case, I doubt that anybody familiar with Stepan's work on comparative democratization in Latin America, Eastern Europe, South and South East Asia, and Africa, would tend to misinterpret his position as a defence of corporatism (Stepan et al. 2007; Linz and Stepan 1996). Phillips argues that the notions of toleration, democracy or the rule of law are too diffuse and that they may not be sufficient to guarantee strong regimes of gender equality (p. 47). This may be true. But I do not see how the no less diffuse notion of a secular state would offer a better guarantee. I would tend to assume that strong regimes of gender equality have a better chance to prosper where one already has a robust culture of toleration, a consolidated democratic regime and institutionalized rule of law.

In any case, it is precisely when one adopts an individual conception of "free exercise of religion" or recognizes that some forms of religious community may have a "quasi-republican" egalitarian structure without a formally institutionalized form of "religious authority," that it becomes obvious that the Euro-centric secularist discourse of separation of church and state or the attempt to establish a wall of separation between "religion" and "politics" is unjustified, unlikely to succeed and probably counterproductive for democracy itself. In such a context, curtailing the "free exercise of religion" per se must lead to curtailing the free exercise of the civil and political rights of religious citizens and will ultimately infringe on the vitality of a democratic civil society. Particular religious discourses or particular religious practices may be objectionable, and susceptible to legal prohibition on democratic or liberal grounds, but not because they are religious per se.

[13] For a concrete analysis of the tensions between individual and group rights in the context of conflicts over religious freedom, freedom of conversion, and freedom to proselytize, see Casanova (2008a).

This is especially relevant in the case of the politics of gender equality and women's rights. It is neither possible nor advisable to restrict empirically or normatively the religious politics of gender equality to the public sphere of civil society. It is, however, desirable to subject religious discourses legitimating patriarchal customs or discriminatory gender practices to open public debate and to political contestation.[14] But this in itself is a form of de-privatization of religion that thrusts religion into the political arena. What makes blatant gender discrimination and patriarchal practices objectionable is not the fact that they may be grounded in religious discourse, but the fact that they violate basic democratic and legal norms of equality. The democratic solution cannot be to outlaw religious discourse or patriarchal norms but to subject such a discourse to public debate and to subject collective norms to legal-political democratic processes.[15] In any case, given the enormous diversity of political and cultural contexts, one can at best propose some general guiding principles. But their application in any particular context will have to be guided by prudential contextual practical judgment, rather than by universal principles or the rule of general consistency.[16]

2. Gender Equality, Religious Politics and Public Religions

The religious politics of gender has become one of the most important issues facing humanity worldwide and is likely to remain an issue of increasing relevance for the foreseeable future, if one assumes the validity of the following premises:[17]

i. That democratization, in the sense proposed by de Tocqueville, as the categorical principle of equality of ascribed conditions, is a modern, irresistible, universal and providential force or drive; that the principle of gender equality is a rising tide and one of the last manifestations of this modern drive, so that the proposition that all men and women are created equal is becoming a global self-evident truth; that the task of somehow bridging the enormous gap between the norm of gender equality and the appalling reality of unequal worth, unequal status and unequal access to resources and power which women throughout the world suffer is likely to remain one of the most important historical-political challenges for all societies; that while the drive to institutionalize the principle of gender equality may be general, its practices and effects—that is, the particular cultural, sociopolitical and institutional arrangements—are likely to vary significantly across societies, cultures, civilizations and religions (Inglehart and Norris 2002).

ii. That sexuality is one of the most powerful, one could even say sacred or transcendent dimensions of individual and intersubjective human life; that sexual intercourse entails not only a unique source of erotic pleasure, but also a physical act of intimacy between two persons which may serve as the foundation for a lifelong mutual commitment. In addition, it has the potential to create new life and is the foundation for kinship structures and social reproduction; that sexuality is simultaneously the most intimate expression of the embodied self and therefore the most private of affairs, and the primary source of sociobiological reproduction

[14] I am equally surprised that Phillips (p. 42) quotes this sentence to imply that I continue to stress primarily or exclusively "the public sphere of civil society," when in fact the preceding and succeeding sentences make clear the opposite, the fact that if one takes my own thesis of de-privatization of religion seriously, one cannot restrict it to the public sphere of civil society, particularly when it comes to issues of gender equality. Democratic political contestation and mobilization around such issues is inevitable. Of course, there is no guarantee that the outcome will be a liberal one or one favourable to greater gender equality. Open democratic processes can never guarantee outcomes. I also do not have any illusions about civil society being necessarily liberal and egalitarian. But I do not believe that today, in the contemporary global context, one should count on the enlightened despotism of secular states to advance gender equality, although in fact historically some secular non-democratic states, such as Soviet communist states, Kemal Attatürk's Turkey, or Arab nationalist states have served to further gender equality.

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

[16] On this point, I am fully in agreement with Phillips, and I empathize with the inevitable sensation of going around in circles.

[17] The relevant literature is already very vast. See Juschka (2001); Castelli (2001); Ellingson and Christian (2002); Carmody (1979); Sharma and Young (1994); Haddad and Findly (1985).

and therefore a public affair which no society can leave unregulated. In particular the female body, because of its indispensable function in the pregnancy and gestation of new life, is caught in the middle of this tension between the private and the public dimensions of sexuality. The modern sexual revolution, however, entails a dual separation of sexuality and biological reproduction, as well as the emancipation of sexual desire from heterosexual norms. Reflexive birth control through reliable techniques of contraception have freed sexuality from reproduction and made possible the liberation of women from the onerous burden of unwanted reproductive labour. In turn, advances in reproductive technologies and biogenetics could potentially free biological reproduction not only from sexuality but also from all traditional forms of social reproduction through family and kinship. We could be entering, indeed, a "brave new world".

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

If these premises are correct, then it is not surprising that the politics of gender and gender equality are central to politics everywhere, and that religion is thoroughly and intimately implicated in the politics of gender. Indeed, religious politics and the politics of gender appear to be so ubiquitously entangled that it is not surprising that many analysts have been tempted to interpret what they construct as a singular global resurgence of religious fundamentalism in all religious traditions as, primarily, a patriarchal reaction against the common global threat of gender equality, the emancipation of women and feminism (Riesebrodt 1998, 2000). Feminism appears to have replaced communism as "the spectre" haunting all religious traditions. In turn, the discourses of feminism and secularism have become intertwined today in the same way as communism and atheism became intertwined in the nineteenth century. Gender or "the woman question" has become, in this respect, the pre-eminently contested social question, while religion has been thrown, willingly or unwillingly, into the vortex of the global contestation. Traditional religious establishments tend to view feminist agendas and, particularly, the very notion of gender as a contingent, socially constructed and therefore changeable reality, as the greatest threat not only to their religious traditions and their moral authoritative claims, but to the very idea of a sacred or divinely ordained natural order, inscribed either in natural law, *shariʾa*, or some "right way" universally valid for all times. The unholy alliance of patriarchy and altar, which such an attitude fosters, provokes in turn the secularist response of feminists, particularly in the West, who tend to view religious fundamentalism, indeed religion itself, as the main obstacle to the global advance of women's rights and the progressive emancipation of women, and therefore tend to advocate the secularization of state, politics, law and morality. At least in Europe, the need to advance and protect gender equality and women's rights has become today the most common normative justification of secularism.[18]

Secularist discourses on religion will inevitably lead to the essentialist reification of religion, ironically mirroring the essentialist reification of gender one finds in traditionalist and fundamentalist religious discourses. To a certain extent, any general discussion of religion,

[18] This is the ground on which many people defend *laïcité* today, in spite of the fact that historically, French *laïcité* was not very conducive to the advance of the political or legal rights of French women (Scott 2005). Not surprisingly, some of the most important feminist critical reflection has been engaged in disentangling secularism and feminism (Mahmood 2005; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008).

gender and politics will necessarily lead to some essentialist reification of all three. Yet generalization, and therefore some reification, is inevitable in scholarly as much as in moral, practical and political discourse. In the following presentation I will be making general references to religion, though most of my reflections will be contextually derived from my recent engagement with the comparative analysis of Catholicism and Islam as religious regimes and as discursive traditions.

In some of my recent work I have emphasized the similarities between the contemporary global discourse on Islam and an older liberal secular Protestant anti-Catholic discourse that was prevalent in the second half of the nineteenth century, and which tended to depict Catholicism as an essentially fundamentalist, undemocratic and anti-modern religion (Casanova 2001, 2005). The Catholic *aggiornamento* of the 1960s and the crucial role of Catholic groups and movements in the third wave of democratization in the following decades made the old anti-Catholic discourse obsolete. Yet the juxtaposition of the anti-Catholic and anti-Muslim discourses puts into question any depiction of any religion as essentially fundamentalist and unchanging. The obvious implication is that if Catholicism can change, renew and update its tradition in response to modern challenges, then certainly there is no reason to believe that Islam cannot do the same. But more importantly it suggests that viewing contemporary Muslim transformations as forms of Muslim *aggiornamenti*, that is, as plural and often antithetical attempts by Muslim individual and collective actors to fashion their own Muslim versions of modernity, may be analytically and hermeneutically more fruitful than to view such transformations as the civilizational resistance of fundamentalist Islam against an essentialist construction of Western secular modernity.

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

I pose those questions in such a provocative manner precisely in order to warn against any simple and unambiguous answer. Yet such warning by no means belittles the urgent historical need to subject both religious traditions to an internal radical feminist critique, reinterpretation and reappropriation. Strategically, internal critiques aiming to reform certain aspects of tradition would seem to have better chances to succeed than external frontal attacks against any religious tradition. Ideally of course it is the combination and even the pragmatic and political alliance of internal religious and external secular critique that may have the most favourable conditions of success.[19] But under conditions of religious hegemony, such as in Catholic Poland or in Muslim Iran, where external secular critique is hardly viable and can easily be deflected as an "alien" cultural norm, internal religious feminist critique is absolutely essential.

In any case, the long centuries of anti-Catholic polemics and anti-Muslim Orientalist discourses should raise some suspicions about the validity and efficacy of external calls to "crush infamy" or civilizing missionary efforts to liberate people from internalized oppression, self-imposed tutelage or false consciousness. There are many compelling critiques of religious patriarchy from an external secularist or liberal feminist position which reflect the normative consensus reached in most advanced Western democratic societies in the last decades. Those external

[19] On this point I am fully in agreement with Phillips.

critiques are useful and necessary. But in this paper I want to adopt consciously what could be called an internal critique from within the normative claims of religious traditions.[20]

As a fruitful heuristic way of organizing the points of entry for such an internal critique, I am going to follow Birgit Heller's tripartite analytical differentiation between: (i) the issue of "*women's status and roles* in different religious traditions", that is, the kinds of institutionalized gendered religious division of labour within particular religious regimes; (ii) "the subject of *cultural images, ideas, stereotypes and norms* about women" within diverse discursive religious traditions; and (iii) "the question of what *women as religious subjects* do and think", that is, the question of the historical agency of religious women today in the contemporary reproduction and transformation of their religious traditions and in the insertion of religious discourses, resources and practices in the contested politics of gender equality (Heller 2001:357–359, emphasis in original).

The gendered religious division of labour and power relations within religious regimes

Sociologically one can view institutionalized religions as religious regimes with certain analogies to polities, that is, as systems of production and distribution of power, authority and decision making within a community in relation to the sacred, as well as to economic modes of production, that is, as symbolic modes of production, distribution and consumption of the sacred and of religious goods. In both cases the obvious question is the extent to which the system of power relations and the social relations of production are gendered and unequal: whether men and women have unequal differential access to religious power and authority, and to the means of production, distribution and consumption of religious goods (Maduro 1982). The political analogy, at least, is by no means farfetched since the word *ecclesia* in ancient Greek refers to the political assembly of citizens of the polis or city state, while the word *ummah* has analogous connotations of a sociopolitical community.

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

The Catholic church is characterized by a dual system of highly differentiated and canonically regulated religious roles, the sacramental one between ordained priesthood and laity, and that between, on the one hand, the religious orders of monks, friars and nuns who follow the higher evangelical calling, withdraw from the world (*saeculum*), and profess the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and, on the other hand, the secular Christians (including the secular

[20] I am well aware that my attempt at hermeneutic critical dialogue between religious and secular discursive traditions is likely to be rejected by both embattled camps. As it became obvious in some of the acrimonious debates at the international conference, Religion Revisited—Women's Rights and the Political Instrumentalization of Religion, at Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung in Berlin, 5–6 June 2009, secular feminists who have to contend with the oppressive power of religious hegemonic discourse at home will tend to vilify my attempt at dialogue as a naïve, futile and unacceptable compromise with religious patriarchal domination. Religious authorities in turn are prone to view internal feminist religious critiques as ultimately more insidious, corrosive and threatening to their hegemony than external secularist frontal attacks. My basic assumption is that pragmatically, in order to advance the cause of gender equality worldwide in all cultural traditions, one needs both critiques. The more the external secular and the internal religious feminist critiques can work in tandem and in critical dialogue with one another, the better.

clergy) who live in the world. The dynamics of modern Western secularization, both the Protestant one of abolishing the differentiation between religious and secular roles and callings, and the Catholic/laicist one of giving primacy to civil (laic) over ecclesiastical (clerical) ranks, authority and jurisdiction, were reactions against this dual Catholic system of differentiation.

While patriarchal, inasmuch as it has been primarily a male assembly in its public dimensions, the *ummah* within Sunni Islam is more democratically organized, without a priestly/sacerdotal/ clerical class and without the high differentiation of religious virtuosi/literati and ordinary people/laity typical of most high religions. The *ulama*, as the self-organized guardians of tradition and custodians of change, come close to being a clerical class of Muslim literati (Zaman 2002; Zeghal 1996). Only within *Shi'a* Islam, however, have the *ulama* attained in modern times a highly differentiated, at times also hierarchically organized, structure.

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

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

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

The de-privatization of religion, as I have stressed throughout my work, is a two-way street. It implies not only religious actors bringing religious norms into the secular public sphere, but also secular norms inevitably entering and affecting the religious sphere. Only through radical sectarian segregation from society and from the *saeculum* can a religious community avoid secular influence. But such a sectarian strategy of creating isolated religious enclaves cannot be, in the long run, a viable option for public churches, that is, for those religious traditions that have universal, global claims, as is the case of Catholicism and Islam. Under conditions of globalization, even the strategy of state territorialization of religion, people and cultures, which was the model of the Westphalian system of sovereign confessional territorial states, as well as the model of *Dar El Islam* is increasingly becoming a less viable option. Under the emerging system of what I call global denominationalism, no religious tradition, much less those with universal global claims, can be immune from global public opinion (Casanova 2008c:117–119).

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

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

Following Stepan's formula of the twin tolerations, one could argue that in the same way as religious authorities ought to tolerate the autonomy of democratically elected governments "without claiming constitutionally privileged prerogatives to mandate or to veto public policy", democratic states and political institutions ought to tolerate the autonomy of religious groups to organize themselves internally in accordance with their religious traditions, "as long as they do not violate democratic rules and adhere to the rule of law" (Stepan 2001:217). The added proviso curtailing the principle of free exercise of religion would legitimize the right of a democratic state to intervene and outlaw certain religious customs which would appear to be blatant violations of basic human rights, for example, the outlawing of *sati* or the formal abolition of the Hindu caste system by the secular Indian state. Other more blatantly secularist interventions like the Kemalist reforms abolishing the Caliphate and Sufi brotherhoods, or proscribing veiling and other traditional dress codes, or de facto establishing state control of Muslim institutions may have lesser democratic legitimization.

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

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

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

Sociologically, one can predict that it is a matter of time until the Catholic Church embraces the modern value of gender equality more firmly as a sign of the times and revises some of its positions as no longer defensible forms of gender discrimination. The public theological debate over the ordination of women is by no means settled by papal decree (Raab 2000). But even if some theological consensus were to persist on the exclusion of women from the sacerdotal/ sacramental function, there will be theological difficulties in continuing to exclude them from greater administrative power within the church, including the Curia and the College of Cardinals.

Religion and sexism: Androcentric images of women in religious traditions

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

Only through Abelard's method of *Sic et Non*, simultaneously affirming and denying every proposition could one do justice to the contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalences in all religious traditions. The very strong misogynist strand in the Christian tradition is undeniable and has been amply and critically documented by contemporary female and feminist theologians and religious scholars.[21] But no serious scholar could claim that this misogynist

[21] Daly 1985; Ruether 1974; Fiorenza 1993, 1994; Malone 2001, 2002.

strand is derived from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth or deny that in its origins primitive Christianity was countercultural, representing an egalitarian trend against the patriarchal culture of the times (Greeley 2007). One could debate how to allocate fairly the blame for the later reversal to patriarchy, for the intensification of misogyny, or for the novel introduction of misogamy beyond the Jewish tradition, or whether to attribute them to specific currents within Hellenism or Gnosticism, for example, or to particular *Patres*, such as Paul, Tertullian, Agustin and so on. What is undeniable is that for two millennia the images of women and gender within the Catholic tradition have been produced and controlled by males and, what is most significant, mostly by celibate clerics. The persecution of witches in medieval Christianity and in early modernity offers the most damaging evidence of the way in which religious images could be used to sanctify the oppression of women. Only in the last decades have female scholars and religious activists begun to challenge in earnest the established patriarchal images and the male celibate control of those images (Fiorenza 1985; Ranke-Heinemann 1990). In most advanced capitalist Western countries, the development of religious feminism was mostly a response to general secular trends in those societies, to the radical transformation in gender roles, to the advancement of woman's liberation and to the spread of feminist ideas and sensibilities. But in many so-called Third World countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, religious feminism often presents a prophetic challenge vis-à-vis established patriarchal customs and gender roles (Reuther 1999; Oduyoye 1995).

Specifically within the Catholic tradition, the cult of Mary, the Virgin Mother of Jesus, Mother of God, and Mother intercessor of all believers represents most paradigmatically the ambivalence in woman's image, being simultaneously mother and virgin, and thus an unattainable ideal for all her sisters (Warner 1983; Greeley 1977). It is undeniable that the Virgin Mary in her myriad diverse vernacular representations has served as an iconic symbol of perpetual help to the most needy, the most marginal and the most disprivileged, who in all cultures throughout the world happened to be oppressed women at the bottom of all hierarchies of power and privilege. What is debatable is whether such symbolic representation and "*marianismo*" offer the anticipatory critical promise of transcendence and liberation in this world and in the next, or rather the otherworldly ideological compensatory opiate that serves to sanctify the status quo and quietist resignation in this world (Stevens 1973; Navarro 2002).

Similar heated debates concerning the image of women within Islam and the role of Islam in legitimizing and reproducing patriarchy and gender inequality within Muslim societies have erupted with great force in the last decades. As in the case of Christianity, female scholarship has made the most important critical contributions to those debates.[22] There is less scholarly consensus that the Prophetic Revelation and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet constituted an improvement in the situation of women when compared with the reigning conditions in the immediate pre-Islamic period in the Arabian peninsula, despite the widespread and strongly held conviction among ordinary Muslims, both male and female, that this was the case. It is more widely accepted that Muhammad himself respected and trusted women and tried to provide for equal participation of women in the religious life of the *ummah*. On the other hand, there is evidence of a rapid decline with the institutionalization of the early Muslim community, marked by what Jane Smith has termed a dual process of exclusion and seclusion, that is, the exclusion of women not only from leadership roles but from the communal aspects of religious life, and their seclusion to a place apart from normal social intercourse with men (Smith 1985).

The most heated controversies, however, relate to the central role of women in modern processes of Islamization. Veiling, above all, has become the most salient, contested and controversial emblem of contemporary global Islam. As Nilüfer Göle has pointed out, "no other symbol than the veil reconstructs with such a force the 'otherness' of Islam to the West. Women's bodies and sexuality reappear as a political site of difference and resistance to the homogenizing and egalitarian forces of Western modernity" (Göle 1996:1). One cannot understand the centrality of the issue without taking into account the dynamics of thesis and antithesis, marked by Western orientalism and colonialism, on the one hand, and Muslim response and resistance, on the other.

[22] Ahmed 1992; Stowasser 1994; Wadud 1999; Mernissi 1991; Moghissi 2005.

Certainly, in the West the headscarf has become the symbol of fundamentalist Islam and the clear sign of the oppression of Muslim women. But countering such a simplistic liberal, feminist and secularist reading of the meaning of the Muslim veil, anthropological phenomenological analyses of the practices and discourses of Muslim women both in Muslim societies and in immigrant diasporas have offered more nuanced, ambivalent and contextual interpretations (Mahmood 2005; Mir-Hosseini 1999). One should note that while France outlawed the wearing of headscarves in public schools in 2004 in the name of secularism and gender equality, the government in Turkey did the opposite: it attempted to lift the secularist Kemalist ban on wearing the veil in universities and public schools, allegedly for exactly the same reason—to guarantee equal access and the "right to higher education" to all girls.

Indeed, throughout the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East, the veil has functioned as an emblem of the eruption of women in the public sphere after centuries of seclusion and, as such, as a symbol of their political, economic and cultural emancipation, and above all as expression of female agency and subjectivity. Of course, the latter can only be true where Muslim women have real freedom to wear or not to wear the veil, without having to suffer negative consequences for exercising their individual freedom. Neither secularist proscription of the veil in public places, as is the case in France or in Turkey, nor the Islamist obligatory prescription of the veil in Muslim societies, such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, allow the free exercise of religion as a matter of individual conscience. But it would be misleading to simply frame the politics of the veil anywhere in terms of liberal principles of religious freedom, female autonomy or individual conscience.[23]

Women as religious subjects, historical agents and political actors

From a comparative perspective this may well be the most critical area of research insofar as it examines the historical agency of women in the contemporary reproduction, reinterpretation and transformation of their religious traditions and their role in the contested politics of gender equality. The proliferation of feminist religious discourses within both Catholicism and Islam is undoubtedly the harbinger of radical transformations in both traditions.[24] At the same time, the religious politics of gender are also at the centre of the internal contestations and debates within both traditions.[25] Women reading the sacred texts of their traditions with female eyes and with female sensibilities without the mediation, interpretation and control of male clerical authorities is the first hermeneutic step, simple yet radical, on the road to female religious subjectivity and agency.[26]

About the global expansion of female religious subjectivity and agency in all religious traditions there is little doubt. This is perhaps the most significant and novel element shared by liberation theology and the Base Christian Communities within Catholicism, the explosion of Pentecostal Christianity in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, and the pious mosque movement throughout the Muslim world and in immigrant diasporas. It can certainly be viewed as a sign of religious modernity. Of course, nuns and religious sisters had always traditionally played an active role within Catholicism, running and staffing many of the Church's educational, welfare and health care institutions. But they had been much more subservient to male clerics, even in the definition of proper female religious roles. Noticeable in the last decades, however, and particularly since Vatican II, women religious have assumed a much more leading intellectual, organizational and pastoral role at all levels of Catholic life. Intellectually, they have surpassed the educational credentials and achievements of male priests (Puzon 1996). Organizationally, given the drastic fall in vocations of male priests, they have become ever more indispensable to the management of Catholic institutions at all administrative levels. Pastorally, they serve increasingly as de facto surrogate pastors in many parishes and leaders of many Christian base communities (CEBs). But equally significant is the extent to which ordinary Catholic women of all social strata, who had always constituted a majority of the practicing faithful, have become

[23] Scott 2007; Bowen 2006; Göle 1996; Mahmood 2005.

[24] Henold 2008; Beattie 2006; Schneiders 2004; Aquino 1998; Moghadam 2002; Hassan 2005.

[25] For a good comparative survey in response to the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing that covers a number of Catholic and Muslim countries, see Bayes and Tohidi (2001).

[26] This is the basic hermeneutic principle shared by liberation theology in Latin America and Sisters in Islam in Southeast Asia, for instance (van Doorn-Harder 2006).

increasingly active female religious subjects, actively forming and informing their religious selves and creatively appropriating and reshaping Catholic practices and discursive traditions.[27]

Particularly in the case of Latin American Catholicism, much of this female religious agency and grassroots activism has been in concert with progressive, liberal and secular feminist agendas.[28] But one should not exaggerate the extent to which the Catholic religious revival in Latin America, and even a majority of the CEBs, are linked to a progressive agenda of social and political transformation. Much of this religious revival has as its primary goal religious self-transcendence and the transformation and liberation of the religious self. This is particularly the case in much of the Catholic Charismatic movement (Chestnut 2003a; Cleary 2007).[29] Moreover, on crucial gender issues central to secular liberal and feminist agendas, such as contraception, abortion, homosexuality, divorce and family values, the Catholic hierarchy has maintained a firm conservative traditionalist position not only in the public sphere of civil society but engaging also in terms of active political mobilization, trying to influence directly the legislative-democratic process and state policies. Not surprisingly, liberals and secular as well as Catholic feminists have responded with counter-mobilizations and accusations of religious fundamentalism (Mala Htun 2003, 2009; Correa 1994).

Sociologically, in reaction to the Catholic Church's official defence of a traditionalist position on all kinds of gender issues and a singularly obsessive focus on sexual moral issues, one can observe throughout the Catholic world a dual process of female secularization and erosion of the Church's authority on sexual morality (Loaeza 2009). Women are increasingly leaving the Church, especially in Europe. Indeed, female secularization may be the most significant factor in the drastic secularization of Western European societies since the 1960s and in the radical rupture of European "religion as a chain of memory" (Hervieu-Léger 2000; Brown 2001). But equally important seems to be the drastic secularization of sexual morality. Increasing numbers of practicing Catholics are disobeying the injunctions of the Catholic hierarchy and following their own conscience on most issues related to sexual morality. [30] Moreover, there is increasing evidence that young Catholic adults are explicitly dissociating their sexuality and their religiosity, claiming that religion has absolutely no influence upon their attitudes toward sexuality (Casanova 2009).

It is in this complex relation between gender moralities, religion, feminism and secularization that one can observe very different dynamics throughout the Muslim world. Indeed, as Saba Mahmood has pointed out, "the vexing relationship between feminism and religion is perhaps most manifest in discussions of Islam" (Mahmood 2005:1). On the one hand, nobody can deny that the female veil has become the public face of global Islam. This could not have happened had it not been for the fact that Muslim women have actively entered the public sphere of Muslim societies. But more importantly, it is the first time in history that Muslim women not only have entered the mosque en masse, but are in many cases leaders of the modern mosque movement, thereby challenging the traditional image of the mosque and the *umma* as a public male assembly.[31] But it is precisely this public manifestation of female agency and subjectivity, and the grassroots character of the mass movement that most baffles liberal and secular feminist assumptions as well as the conceptions of a modern civil society. As Mahmood has asked rhetorically: "why would such a large number of women across the Muslim world actively support a movement that seems inimical to their 'own interests and agendas,' especially at a historical moment when these women appear to have more emancipatory possibilities available to them?" (Mahmood 2005:2). The fact that the movement also enjoys support from highly

[27] Weaver 1995; Alvarez 1990; Drogus 1990; Hebblethwaite 1994.

[28] Drogus and Stewart-Gambino 2005; Burdick and Hewitt 2000; Vásquez 1998; Levine 1992.

[29] In this respect the original tendency to contrast the progressive and activist Catholic CEBs with the conservative and quietist Latin American Evangelical and Pentecostal movements has given way to more nuanced ethnographic analyses that emphasize the deep similarities between them (Lehmann 1996; Chestnut 2003b).

[30] D'Antonio et al. 2007; Fulton 2000; Shepard 2000; Rusonello and Stewart Research and Communications 2003.

[31] To understand the magnitude of the change one needs only to consider some numbers of the mosque movement in Egypt, so brilliantly analyzed by Saba Mahmood. The number of mosques in Egypt grew from 28,000 in 1975 to 50,000 in 1985 and to 120,000 in 1995. Of the 50,000 mosques listed in 1985, only 7,000 had been established by the government. It is therefore primarily a grassroots movement of civil society (Mahmood 2005:4).

educated and articulate women from the upper- and middle-income strata of many Muslim societies makes even more problematic the explanations in terms of false consciousness, self-imposed tutelage or the feminist intuition that women (like men) can internalize norms that lead to their own oppression (Stoljar 2000).

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

> like many other post-Enlightenment intellectuals, assume that those who are inspired by religious enthusiasm or fanaticism, or who live under the influence of a religious institution or discipline, have no agency or limited agency, whereas secular society, which locates religious authority and practice outside the sphere of politics or the marketplace, allows for domains of free, autonomous behavior (Mack 2003:153).

The fact that women are highly active in contemporary Islamist movements is undeniable. But as I have stressed frequently, when it comes to Islam, that, is, to a global imagined community of Muslims, the West tends to be obsessed with state Islamism and *khilafist jihādism* as the two contemporary dominant forms of globalized Islam (Roy 2002). But one could argue that the majoritarian currents of transnational Islam today, and the ones likely to have the greatest impact on the future transformation of Islam, are national and transnational *da'wa* movements, that is, pious networks and movements of Muslim renewal, equally disaffected with state Islamism and transnational *jihādism*.[32]

Furthermore, within this piety movement of Muslim renewal there is a minoritarian, but nonetheless in many places significant and even prominent, movement of Muslim feminists, such as Sisters in Islam in Malaysia, who are actively struggling to inform their own Muslim vision of modernity. In Islam, as in every other civilization and religious tradition, the most important culture wars are taking place not as a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West, but in the form of internal struggles to redefine and make the tradition relevant for the modern age. Even if it is true that so-called fundamentalist religious movements in all religious traditions are active and reactive interventions and responses to the radical global transformation of gender relations, the aim of this paper has been to put into question the unreflexive binary categories of Western liberalism, secularism and feminism, which equate secular with liberation and autonomy, and religious with subjection and heteronomy. Such binary categories cannot easily be grafted upon gendered religious politics even in Western contexts. This is even much less the case in non-Western Catholic and Muslim contexts.[33]

Conclusion

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

---

[32] Mahmood (2005:3, footnote 5) uses "the terms 'the *da'wa* movement' and 'the piety movement' interchangeably to refer to this network of socioreligious organizations of which the mosque movement is an important subset".

[33] Badran 2007; Naghibi 2007; Sharma and Young 1999.

In this respect, I fully agree with Phillips that my paper fails to grapple with the religious politics of gender in particular contexts and therefore fails to "engage sufficiently with the severity of the issues" (p. 45). Getting down to real politics in concrete historical settings would have required writing a completely different paper than the one I was commissioned to write. I was asked to revise my analytical framework of public religions in a way that it could address the religious politics of gender worldwide, beyond the West. That is what I have tried to do in this paper. One may disagree with many aspects of the revised framework for analytical or normative reasons, but I do not think it is right to argue that the revised analytical framework itself is not useful or applicable because it does not deal concretely with serious cases of gender discrimination, with the coercion of women within particular religious communities, or with the actual effects of particular forms of politicization of religion on gender equality. The proper question would be whether the framework is amenable to the critical analysis of the religious politics of gender equality in diverse sociohistorical contexts and in diverse religious traditions. My response would be an emphatically affirmative one.

As to the critique that I present an overtly optimistic reading of the consequences of the de-privatization of religion for gender equality to such a point that in my analysis, according to Phillips, "everything that has been identified as cause for concern is turned around into evidence of progress", I agree that my position is a consciously contrarian one (p. 45). But my position is not derived from some philoreligious attitude, but rather from a critical attitude toward the still hegemonic secularist discourse on religion. My aim is not to rehabilitate religion, much less to prove its benign or progressive character, but rather to open up the debate so that we can enter into a more nuanced and complex comparative historical analysis and political evaluation of different forms of de-privatization of religion without subsuming them too quickly into instances of religious fundamentalism or of patriarchal reaction.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Leila. 1992. *Women and Gender in Islam*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

Alvarez, Sonia. 1990. "Women's participation in the 'people's church': A critical appraisal." *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Summer.

An-Na'im, Abdullahi. 2008. *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Aquino, Maria Pilar. 1998. *Teología Feminista Latinoamericana.* Ediciones Abya-Yala, Quito, Ecuador.

Arnason, Johann P. 2003. *Civilizations in Dispute.* Brill, Leiden.

Arnason, Johan P., S.N. Eisenstadt and Björn Wittrock (eds.). 2004. *Axial Civilizations and World History.* Brill, Leiden.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity.* Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, CA.

———. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion.* The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Badran, Margot. 2007. *Feminism Beyond East and West: New Gender Talk and Practice in Global Islam.* New Global Publications, New Delhi.

Bayes, Jane H. and Nayereh Tohidi (eds.). 2001. *Globalization, Gender and Religion: The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts.* Palgrave, New York.

Beattie, Tinna. 2006. *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory.* Routledge, New York.

Ben-Rafael, Eliezer and Yitzhak Sternberg (eds.). 2005. *Comparing Modernities: Essays in Homage to Shmuel N. Eisenstadt.* Brill, Leiden.

Beyer, Peter. 2006. *Religions in Global Society.* Routledge, London.

Bowen, John R. 2006. *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Brown, Callum G. 2001. *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization, 1800–2000.* Routledge, London.

Burdick, John and W.E. Hewitt (eds.). 2000. *The Church at the Grassroots in Latin America: Perspectives on Thirty Years of Activism.* Praeger, Westport, CT.

Carmody, Denise Lardner. 1979. *Women and World Religions.* Abingdon, Nashville, TN.

Casanova, José. 2009. "Spanish religiosity: An interpretative reading of the religion monitor results for Spain." In Berterlsmann Stiftung (ed.), *What the World Believes: Analysis and Commentary of the Religion Monitor 2008.* Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh.

———. 2008a. "Balancing religious freedom and cultural preservation." *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 13–16, Summer.

———. 2008b. "The problem of religion and the anxieties of European secular democracy." In Gabriel Motzkin and Yochi Fischer (eds.), *Religion and Democracy in Contemporary Europe.* Alliance Publishing Trust, London.

———. 2008c. "Public religions revisited." In Hent de Vries (ed.), *Religion: Beyond a Concept.* Fordham University Press, New York.

———. 2007a. "Die religiöse Lage in Europa." In Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt (eds.), *Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen.* Fischer, Frankfurt.

———. 2007b. "Immigration and the new religious pluralism: A European Union/United States comparison." In Thomas Banchoff (ed.), *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism.* Oxford University Press, New York.

———. 2006a. "Religion, European secular identities, and European integration." In Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein (eds.), *Religion in an Expanding Europe.* Cambridge University Press, New York.

———. 2006b. "Secularization revisited: A reply to Talal Asad." In David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (eds.), *Powers of the Secular Modern*: *Talal Asad and his Interlocutors.* Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, CA.

———. 2005. "Catholic and Muslim politics in comparative perspective." *The Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol 1, No. 2, pp. 89–108, December.

———. 2003. "Beyond European and American exceptionalisms: Towards a global perspective." In Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures.* Ashgate, Aldershot.

———. 2001. "Civil society and religion: Retrospective reflections on Catholicism and prospective reflections on Islam." *Social Research*, Vol. 68, No. 4, Winter, pp. 1041–1080.

———. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World.* University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Castelli, Elizabeth A. (ed.). 2001. *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader.* Palgrave, New York.

Chestnut, Andrew R. 2003a. "A preferential option for the spirit: The Catholic charismatic renewal in Latin America's new religious economy." *Latin American Politics and Society,* Vol. 45, No. 1, pp. 55–85.

———. 2003b. *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy.* Oxford University Press, New York.

Cleary, Edward L. 2007. "The Catholic charismatic renewal: Revitalization movements and conversion." In Timoty J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary (eds.), *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America.* Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ.

Correa, Sonia. 1994. *Population and Reproductive Rights: Feminist Perspectives from the South.* Zed Books, London.

D'Antonio, William V., James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge and Mary L. Gautier. 2007. *American Catholics Today: New Realities of their Faith and their Church.* Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham.

Daly, Mary. 1985. *The Church and the Second Sex.* Beacon Press, Boston.

de Vries, Hent (ed.). 2008. *Religion: Beyond a Concept.* Fordham University Press, New York.

Drogus, Carol. 1990. "Reconstructing the feminine: Women in São Paulo's CEBs." *Archives de sciences sociales des religions,* Vol. 71, pp. 63–74, July-September.

Drogus, Carol Ann and Hannah Stewart-Gambino. 2005. *Activist Faith: Grassroots Women in Democratic Brazil and Chile.* Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park.

Ellingson, Stephen and M. Christian (eds.). 2002. *Religion and Sexuality in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Routledge, New York.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. 1994. *Searching the Scriptures: Volume II: A Feminist Commentary.* Crossroad, New York.

———. 1993. *Searching the Scriptures; Volume 1: A Feminist Introduction.* Crossroad, New York.

———. 1985. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins.* Crossroad, New York.

Fulton, John (ed.). 2000. *Young Catholics and the New Millennium: The Religion and Morality of Young Adults in Western Countries.* University College Dublin Press, Dublin.

Göle, Nilüfer. 1996. *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling.* The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

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

———. 1977. *The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God*. Seabury Press, New York.

Habermas, Jürgen. 2008. "Notes on a post-secular society." www.signandsight.com, accessed on 18 June.

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck and Ellison Banks Findly (eds.). 1985. *Women, Religion and Social Change.* SUNY Press, Albany, NY.

Hassan, Riffat. 2005. "Feminist theology: the challenges for Muslim women." In Haideh Moghissi (ed.), *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology: Volume I: Images and Realities.* Routledge, New York.

Hebblethwaite, Margaret. 1994. *Base Communities: An Introduction.* Paulist, Mahwah, NJ.

Heller, Birgit. 2001. "Gender and religion." In Kari Elisabeth Børresen, Sara Cabibbo and Edith Specht (eds.), *Gender and Religion: European Studies.* Carocci editore, Rome.

Henold, Mary J. 2008. *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement.* University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle. 2000. *Religion as a Chain of Memory.* Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ.

Htun, Mala. 2009. "Life, liberty, and family values: Church and state in the struggle over Latin America's social agenda." In Frances Hagopian (ed.), *Religious Pluralism, Democracy and the Catholic Church in Latin America.* Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame, IN.

———. 2003. *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies.* Cambridge University Press, New York.

Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris. 2002. *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Jakobsen, Janet and Ann Pellegrini (eds.). 2008. *Secularisms.* Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Juschka, Darlene M. (ed.). 2001. *Feminism and the Study of Religion: A Reader.* Continuum, New York.

Kalyvas, Stathis N. 1996. *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe.* Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

Kippenberg, Hans. 2002. *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Lehmann, David. 1996. *Struggle for the Spirit: Religious Transformation and Popular Culture in Brazil and Latin America.* Blackwell, Cambridge, MA.

Levine, Daniel H. 1992. *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Linz, Juan and Alfred Stepan. 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe.* Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, MD.

Loaeza, Soledad. 2009. "Cultural change in Mexico at the turn of the century: The secularization of women's identity and the erosion of the authority of the Catholic church." In Frances Hagopian (ed.), *Religious Pluralism, Democracy and the Catholic Church in Latin America.* Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame, IN.

Mack, Phyllis. 2003. "Religion, feminism, and the problem of agency: Reflections on eighteenth-century Quakerism." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 149–177.

Madeley, John T.S. 2007. *Unequally Yoked: The Antinomies of Church-State Separation in Europe and the USA.* Paper presented at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 30 August-2 September.

Maduro, Otto. 1982. *Religion and Social Conflicts.* Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Malone, Mary. 2002. *Women and Christianity: Volume II: From 1000 to the Reformation.* Novalis, Ottawa.

———. 2001. *Women and Christianity: Volume I: The First Thousand Years.* Novalis, Ottawa.

Mazusawa, Tomoko. 2005. *The Invention of World Religions.* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

McCutcheon, Russel. 1982. *Manufacturing Religion.* Oxford University Press, New York.

Mernissi, Fatima. 1991. *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry.* Basil Blackwell, New York.

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. 1999. *Islam and Gender. The Religious Debate in Contemporary Islam.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Moghadam, Valentine M. 2002. "Islamic feminism and its discontents: Toward a resolution of the debate." *Signs,* Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 1135–1171.

Moghissi, Haideh (ed.). 2005. *Women and Islam: Volume I: Images and Realities.* Routledge, New York.

Naghibi, Nima. 2007. *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran.* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Navarro, Marysa. 2002. "Against Marianismo." In Rosario Montoya, Lessie Jo Frazier and Janise Hurtig (eds.), *Gender's Place: Feminist Anthropologies of Latin America.* Palgrave, New York.

Oduyoye, Mercy Ambo. 1995. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy.* Orbis Books, New York.

Phillips, Ann. 2009. "Religion: Ally, threat, or just religion?" In José Casanova and Anne Phillips, *A Debate on the Public Role of Religion and its Social and Gender Implications*. Programme on Gender and Development, Paper No. 5. UNRISD, Geneva.

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

Raab, Kelly A. 2000. *When Women Become Priests: The Catholic Women's Ordination Debate.* Columbia University Press, New York.

Ranke-Heinemann, Uta. 1990. *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church.* Doubleday, New York.

Riesebrodt, Martin. 2000. *Die Rückkehr der Religionen: Fundamentalismus und der Kampf der Kulturen.* Beck, Munich.

———. 1998. *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran.* University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Roy, Olivier. 2002. *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah.* Hurst and Company, London.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1999. "Feminism in world Christianity." In Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (eds.), *Feminism and World Religions.* SUNY Press, Albany.

——— (ed.). 1974. *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions.* Simon and Schuster, New York.

Rusonello, Belden and Stewart Research and Communications. 2003. *Attitudes of Catholics on Reproductive Rights, Church-State, and Related Issues: Three National Surveys in Bolivia, Colombia and Mexico.* Conducted for Catholics for a Free Choice and Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir en Bolivia, Colombia y Mexico. www.catholicsforchoice.oeg/topics/international/documents/2004latinamericanpoll.pdf, accessed on 16 February 2009.

Schneiders, Sandra Marie. 2004. *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church.* Paulist Press, New York.

Scott, Joan W. 2007. *The Politics of the Veil.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

———. 2005. *Parité: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism.* University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Sharma, Arvind and Katherine K. Young (eds.). 1999. *Feminism and World Religions*. SUNY Press, Albany, NY.

———. 1994. *Religion and Women.* SUNY Press, Albany, NY.

Shepard, Bonnie. 2000. "The 'double discourse' on sexual and reproductive rights in Latin America: The chasm between public policy and private actions." *Health and Human Rights,* Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 110–143.

Smith, Jane I. 1985. "Women, religion and social change in early Islam." In Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (eds.), *Women, Religion, and Social Change.* SUNY Press, Albany, NY.

Smith, Jonathan Z. 1998. "Religion, religions, religious." In Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Stepan, Alfred. 2001. *Arguing Comparative Politics.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Stepan, Alfred, Juan Linz and Yogendra Yadav. 2007. *Democracies in Multinational Societies: India and other Polities.* Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Stevens, Evelyn P. 1973. "Marianismo: The other side of Machismo in Latin America." In Ann Pescatello (ed.), *Female and Male in Latin America.* University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh.

Stoljar, Natalie. 2000. "Autonomy and the feminist intuition." In Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (eds.), *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self.* Oxford University Press, New York.

Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. 1994. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation.* Oxford University Press, New York.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Tilly, Charles. 1984. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons.* Russell Sage, New York.

Van der Veer, Peter. 2001. *Imperial Encounters.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Van Doorn-Harder, Pieternella. 2006. *Women Shaping Islam: Indonesian Women Reading the Qur'an.* University of Illinois Press, Urbana.

Vásquez, Manuel. 1998. *The Brazilian Popular Church and the Crisis of Modernity.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Wadud, Amina. 1999. *Qur'an and Woman: Re-Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective.* Oxford University Press, New York.

Warner, Marina. 1983. *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and The Cult of the Virgin Mary.* Vintage, New York.

Weaver, Mary Jo. 1995. *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority.* Indiana University Press, Bloomingdale.

Zaman, Muhammmad Qasim. 2002. *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Zeghal, Malika. 1996. *Gardiens de l'Islam: Les oulémas d'Al Azhar dans l'Egypte contemporaine.* Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris.

Part II

Religion: Ally, Threat or Just Religion?

Anne Phillips

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

In feminist, as in mainstream, thinking, there has been a reassessment of the relationship between religion and politics. For much of the twentieth century, it was assumed that religion was at odds with gender equality, and campaigners for women's rights looked to the spread of secular principles and attitudes as an important engine of change. But the notion that secularism, understood as the complete separation of politics from religion, is the precondition for progressive politics has been challenged by critics of the secularization thesis, including José Casanova. Specifically within feminism, it has been challenged by the importance attached to women's agency, and the need to respect the choices of religious as well as non-religious women.

Yet religions can and do threaten gender equality, and particularly so when their authority over their members is enhanced by a formal or informal role in the political system. The essay argues that Casanova does not engage sufficiently with the severity of this issue, and that his resolution is too complacent both in its celebration of the democratic engagements of civil society, and its reliance on movements for internal reform. Civil society is not a neutral zone, and the associations that constitute civil society can reproduce social hierarchies and exclusions as often as they contest them. Internal reform, moreover, will be hardest to mobilize precisely where it is most needed.

This paper addresses the relationship between religion, politics and gender equality through four aspects: (i) what authority, if any, states can cede to religious communities or groups without beginning to threaten gender equality; (ii) the informal impact of religions on attitudes and lives, beyond any institutionalized power; (iii) the possibilities and limits of internal reform; and (iv) the possibilities and difficulties of alliances between religious and secular groups. The central theme running through the essay is that religions most threaten gender equality when they are conceived of—and conceive themselves as—corporate bodies, capable of speaking with a unified voice. The key protection for women is a strong politics of individual rights. In arguing this, however, this paper stresses the difficulties surrounding the politics of rights. It is crucial both to recognize the centrality of individual rights *and* acknowledge the problems in their interpretation and implementation. This is not something that can be resolved at a purely theoretical level. It alerts us, rather, to the political issues.

Anne Phillips is Professor of Political and Gender Theory at the London School of Economics, United Kingdom.

Résumé

La pensée féministe, comme la pensée classique, a procédé à une réévaluation des rapports entre religion et politique. Pendant une grande partie du vingtième siècle, on a considéré que la religion était hostile à l'égalité entre hommes et femmes et les militants des droits de la femme voyaient dans la diffusion des principes de laïcité et des attitudes laïques un important moteur de changement. Pourtant, l'idée que la laïcité, comprise comme séparation totale entre politique et religion, est la condition d'une politique progressiste a été contestée par des critiques de la thèse de la laïcisation, notamment par José Casanova. Dans le féminisme en particulier, elle a été remise en question par l'importance attachée aux femmes comme agents, et la nécessité de respecter leurs choix, qu'elles soient religieuses ou non.

Cependant, les religions peuvent menacer et menacent effectivement l'égalité entre hommes et femmes. Elles le font en particulier lorsque la place officielle ou officieuse qu'elles tiennent dans le système politique vient renforcer l'autorité qu'elles exercent sur leurs fidèles. Dans cet essai, Anne Phillips fait valoir que José Casanova ne tient pas suffisamment compte de la gravité de cette question et que la façon dont il la règle est trop complaisante à la fois dans sa célébration des engagements démocratiques de la société civile et dans sa confiance dans les mouvements œuvrant de l'intérieur pour le changement. La société civile n'est pas une zone neutre, et les associations qui la constituent peuvent autant reproduire que contester les hiérarchies et exclusions sociales. De plus, c'est là où elle est le plus nécessaire que la réforme de l'intérieur a le plus de mal à s'imposer.

Anne Phillips traite des rapports entre religion, politique et égalité entre hommes et femmes sous quatre aspects: (i) les Etats peuvent-ils céder aux communautés ou aux groupes religieux une quelconque autorité sans que l'égalité des genres soit menacée? (ii) l'influence officieuse que les religions, au-delà de tout pouvoir institutionnalisé, exercent sur les attitudes et les existences; (iii) les possibilités et limites de réformes venant de l'intérieur et (iv) les possibilités et difficultés d'alliances entre groupes religieux et laïcs. Un thème central parcourt cet essai: c'est lorsqu'elles sont conçues et se conçoivent comme corps constitués, capables de parler d'une seule voix que les religions menacent le plus l'égalité entre hommes et femmes. La meilleure protection des femmes est une forte défense politique des droits individuels. Cependant, en avançant cette thèse, Anne Phillips souligne les difficultés de cette entreprise. Il est crucial de reconnaître à la fois le caractère central des droits individuels *et* les obstacles liés à leur interprétation et à leur réalisation. Ce n'est pas un problème qu'il est possible de résoudre à un niveau purement théorique. Il nous alerte plutôt aux enjeux politiques.

Anne Phillips est professeure de théorie politique et de théorie du genre à la London School of Economics, Londres, Royaume-Uni.

Resumen

En la corriente de pensamiento feminista, al igual que en las corrientes más universales de pensamiento, se ha dado una reevaluación de la relación entre la religión y la política. Durante buena parte del siglo XX se pensó que la religión se movía a contrapelo de la igualdad de género, por lo que los defensores de los derechos de la mujer buscaban difundir principios y actitudes laicas como propulsores importantes del cambio. Pero la noción de que el laicismo—entendido este como la total separación entre la política y la religión—es la precondición de la política progresista es ahora objeto de cuestionamiento por parte de los críticos de la tesis de la secularización, entre ellos José Casanova. En el caso específico del feminismo, ese cuestionamiento se basa en la importancia adscrita al agenciamiento de la mujer y a la necesidad de respetar las decisiones de las mujeres tanto religiosas como no religiosas.

No obstante, las religiones pueden amenazar, y amenazan, la igualdad de género, y lo hacen sobre todo cuando la autoridad que ejercen sobre sus seguidores se ve ampliada con el desempeño de una función formal o informal en el sistema político. Anne Phillips argumenta en su ensayo que Casanova no trata suficientemente la gravedad de este problema, y que su resolución es demasiado complaciente tanto en su celebración de las participaciones democráticas de la sociedad civil como en su confianza en los movimientos de reforma interna. La sociedad civil no es una zona neutral, y las asociaciones que la conforman pueden reproducir jerarquías y exclusiones sociales con la misma frecuencia con que las combaten. Más aun, la reforma interna será la más difícil de movilizar precisamente porque es donde más se necesita.

Phillips aborda cuatro aspectos de la relación entre religión, política e igualdad de género: (i) qué autoridad pueden ceder los estados (si han de ceder alguna autoridad) a las comunidades y grupos religiosos sin llegar a poner en riesgo la igualdad de género; (ii) cuáles son las repercusiones informales de las religiones sobre las actitudes y la vida, más allá de cualquier poder institucionalizado; (iii) cuáles son las posibilidades y los límites de la reforma interna; y (iv) cuáles son las posibilidades y dificultades de las alianzas entre los grupos religiosos y laicos. El hilo conductor de todo este ensayo es que las religiones amenazan a la igualdad de género sobre todo cuando se les conciben—y se conciben a sí mismas—como entes corporativos facultados para hablar con una sola voz. Brindar protección clave a la mujer es una práctica política sólida de los derechos individuales. Sin embargo, al tiempo que enarbola este argumento, Phillips recalca las dificultades que rodean la política de los derechos. Es fundamental reconocer tanto la importancia central de los derechos individuales como los problemas que se presentan a la hora de interpretarlos y aplicarlos. Esto no es algo que pueda resolverse a nivel puramente teórico, por lo que la autora nos advierte más bien de los aspectos políticos del problema.

Anne Phillips es Profesora de Teoría Política y de Género en la Escuela de Economía de Londres, Reino Unido.

Introduction[34]

That religions can threaten gender equality is hardly controversial. Religious leaders through the centuries have preached that it is women's primary duty to obey. They have represented women's sexuality as a dangerously disruptive force, sometimes countenancing the punishment of transgressions by death. On a milder though still troubling note, they have taught men to regard themselves as having custodial responsibility for women, along with other "lesser creatures" like children. Religions have no monopoly on such representations, and the same things have been repeated endlessly by the non-religious. But pronouncements made in the name of religion carry an additional force that makes their consequences for gender equality especially burdensome. Religiously inspired principles regarding the sanctity of marriage and the sanctity of life have weighed heavily on women, because it is women who are most likely to be trapped in violent or abusive marriages, and women whose bodies bear the consequences of multiple pregnancies. Religious practices regarding marriage, adultery and divorce are often explicitly discriminatory, as when men are permitted multiple marriage partners, but not so women, or when divorce is permitted to the man, but to the woman only with her husband's consent. Some major religions have segregated the sexes for the purposes of prayer. With few exceptions, religions have signalled their lack of confidence in women's virtues or capacities by excluding them from participation in the clerical class.

It is not surprising, then, that campaigners for gender equality have found themselves at odds with religious authorities, or that feminists have looked to the spread of secular principles and attitudes as a welcome engine of change. The fact that many early feminists drew their inspiration from religion is not, of itself, a contradiction, for neither atheism nor agnosticism was a respectable alternative in the beginnings of organized feminism (in Europe and North America, this dated from the mid-nineteenth century). A striking proportion of those nineteenth century feminists belonged, moreover, to religions that positioned themselves outside the mainstream—Quakers or Unitarians, for example—and were known for their more radical views regarding the position of women. In the course of the twentieth century, even that association between feminism and religion largely dropped away. While individual women continued to locate their commitment to gender equality in their religious faith and beliefs, the public discourse regarding the rights of women and equality of the sexes became almost entirely secular, and was more often linked to socialist or communist ideals. It was no longer considered necessary to seek normative justifications for gender equality from within religious doctrines. It was, moreover, widely assumed that the declining public authority of religions, measured in their reduced role in circles of government and reduced authority over their (also reducing) flock, would produce a more welcoming environment for feminist ideas.

It is clear by now that this narrative of declining faith, diminished public role for religion and enhanced prospects for gender equality had only a partial and localized significance; and that neither socialist ideas about the dissipation of religion, nor liberal dreams of a wall of separation between religion and politics are to be realized in the foreseeable future. José Casanova's useful differentiation (1994) between secularization as religious decline, secularization as institutional differentiation and secularization as the privatization of religion is part of what has enabled a more rigorous analysis. Contemporary societies do indeed, he argues, exhibit greater institutional differentiation between the spheres of state, market and science, and religious institutions and norms. But institutional differentiation is not intrinsically linked either to the decline of religious faith and practice, or the withdrawal of religious discourse and practice to a private sphere. Outside Western Europe (plausibly represented by Casanova as exception rather than norm), possibly also China, (this depends on one's understanding of Confucianism), religious ways of being and thinking continue to exert considerable influence over people's lives. Figures from the World Christian Database indicate that religious attachment has increased, not fallen, over the last century, with the proportion of the world's population attached to one of the four major religions—Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism—rising from 67 per cent in 1900 to 73 per cent in 2005.[35] It is evident, moreover, that religions are

---

[34] Anne Phillips is grateful to Moira Dustin, Shahra Razavi, Linda Woodhead, colleagues from LSE Gender Institute, and an anonymous reader for their comments on an earlier draft.

[35] Reported in an article by John Lloyd, *Financial Times Weekend*, 25–26 October 2008, p. 34.

not being confined to a private zone of individual conscience and practice, but are being actively invoked in political life. Religious beliefs furnish the substance for many political interventions, as when they are mobilized in debates about homosexuality or abortion or to justify constraints on women's freedom of movement. In a number of countries, religion provides the basis for state law.

The movement, if any, has been in the opposite direction: not the steady retreat of a diminished religion to a private zone, but a global trend toward the "de-privatization" of religion and its increasing salience on the political stage. Does this matter? Casanova argues that de-privatization is both empirically irrefutable *and* normatively defensible. In 1994, he presented the process almost as proto-feminist: "the de-privatization of religion…simultaneously introduces publicity, that is, intersubjective norms into the private sphere (analogous to the feminist dictum 'the personal is political') and morality into the public sphere of state and economy (the principle of the 'common good' as a normative criterion)" (Casanova 1994:217). "Public" norms of transparency or gender equality thereby spilt over into the religious zone—meaning, among other things, that churches came under pressure to accept women as spiritual leaders—while "religious" norms helped tame the starker brutalities and inequities of the market. In the current essay (Casanova 2009), he is more circumspect, acknowledging that both Catholicism and Islam have tended to support versions of "patriarchal fundamentalism" or "fundamentalist patriarchy", and that, as "high religions", they have institutionalized an unequal division of gendered roles. He nonetheless insists that both Christianity and Islam offer equal access to salvation to both women and men, and that their core ethical norms can be seen as anticipating modern understandings of gender equality.

In representing religion as a possible force for progressive democratic change, Casanova has looked particularly to its role in what he terms "the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society" (Casanova 2009:8).[36] Here, in open debates about the direction of public policy, religious arguments can engage with what is necessary for the common—rather than particular—good, thereby "enlivening of democratic politics" (p. 8) and challenging the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes. In the earlier version of his argument, he claimed that only this aspect of de-privatization was ultimately compatible with modern universalistic principles, contrasting it with the more dubious engagement of religion in "political society" (as when political parties or social movements are based directly on religions), or the official recognition of religion in state institutions (as with an established state church, or when religious leaders are accorded a specific constitutional role). He now describes this preference as reflecting his "modern Western secular prejudices" (p. 13). The better approach, he argues, draws on Alfred Stepan's notion of twin tolerations, which requires religious authorities to "tolerate" the autonomous decisions of democratically elected governments; and democratic institutions to "tolerate" the autonomy of religious individuals and groups, and takes this last to include both freedoms of worship and the right to advance religious values in civil and political society, constrained only by the requirements of civil law.

So far as gender equality is concerned, Casanova continues to stress the public sphere of civil society. This focus is already over-optimistic, for civil society is not a neutral zone, and the movements or associations that constitute civil society can reproduce social hierarchies and exclusions as often as they contest them. We certainly cannot assume that the kinds of religious contestation we might find in civil society will favour gender equality rather than obstructing it. Casanova now wants us to consider even more extensive engagements of religion in politics as potentially compatible with gender equality. He rejects the conventionally secular thesis about gender equality depending on the separation of religion from politics, offering instead the mutual responsibilities and self-imposed limitations of religious authorities and democratic institutions, combined with reform movements inside each religion, and a principle of minority rights.

The question is whether such mechanisms adequately address what Casanova himself acknowledges to be blatant discrimination against women in the organization of churches, a "very strong misogynist strand in the Christian tradition" (p. 23), and difficult and heated

[36] Further references to Casanova's paper in this volume are cited with just a page number rather than the full citation.

debates about such matters as abortion, polygamy and systems of personal religious law. If we are to abandon the idea of a strict separation of religion from politics—as unlikely to happen and anyway not normatively required—what other kind of protections need to be in place to secure the best conditions for gender equality? Are Casanova's twin tolerations, combined with the vitality of internal reform movements, enough?

Secularism, Agency and Respect

Though my answer, in the end, is negative, I want to start with one important area of agreement. Like Casanova, I do not think we can usefully represent religion as the nemesis of gender equality or secularism, understood as the complete separation of politics from religion, as the precondition for feminist politics. We need a more nuanced, less oppositional, understanding of religion and secularism. This, indeed, is increasingly the consensus within both mainstream and feminist literature. There remain powerful voices stressing the dangers of religious "fundamentalism" and extolling the virtues of secular reason; and in some quarters, what Saba Mahmood (2008:448) describes as a "shrill polemic" continues to characterize discussion. Elsewhere, however, there has been a sea change in political and social thinking, with growing concern about "the strains of dogmatism in secularism" (Connolly 1999:4); a renewal of interest in the way religious belief has inspired participation in movements for gender, racial and economic equality; and a greater willingness to conceptualize religion as an ally of progress. A number of theorists have queried the binary rhetoric influential through much of the twentieth century, where it became commonplace to presume a choice between a religious Right and a secular Left.[37] Though religious leaders *have* often deployed their authority to resist movements for social change or promote passivity in the face of violence, religiously grounded claims about the fundamental equality of all human beings have also provided important inspiration in challenges to slavery, movements for women's emancipation, civil rights activism, and mobilizations of the poor and landless. As the narrative of secular modernity came to be associated with globalization or the arrogance of the West, religion additionally became one of the vehicles for challenging the global distribution of power.

At a philosophical level, secularism has been accused of a false neutrality that employs a language of impartiality to impose inappropriate restrictions on public life. It has been a common theme in discussions of Islam, for example, that the secular separation of religion from state derives from a Judeo-Christian tradition, disadvantaging those whose religion does not operate in such terms. More generally, it has been argued that restricting religious practices and pronouncements to a private sphere makes life easier for non-believers but harder for believers, thereby introducing an inequity of treatment. In their reflections on this, many political theorists have come to reject what was previously understood as the Rawlsian prohibition on arguments that appeal to religious authority ("arguments not open to argument") in debates about public policy (for example, Spinner Halev 2000).

We can certainly see why people might want to exclude arguments that threaten to go nowhere: to tell people they must come up with a more compelling line of argument for a particular policy than "this is what my religion says". There is also legitimate anxiety about a growing recourse to religious language in the public sphere (notable in the United States, for example, over the last 20 years[38]) that has many politicians adopting a "prophetic" posture, implying they have privileged access to God's wishes or intentions. But a prohibition on religiously derived arguments wrongly implies that religious people are immune to argument. As Lucas Swaine (2003, 2006) stresses, even the most theocratic devotee has an interest in distinguishing between right or wrong interpretations of her religion, and has to engage in argument and judgment in order to achieve this. The notion that "secular" arguments are based on evidence and sustained by logic is far too complimentary to the complex ways in which most people develop their political and moral views. The contrasting image of "religious" arguments as

[37] Asad 2003; Scott and Hirschkind 2006; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008.

[38] According to an analysis by Coe and Dourke, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush adopted the prophetic posture in an unprecedented 47 per cent of inaugural and state of the union addresses. This compared with 0 per cent for pre-Reagan Democrats, and only 5 per cent for pre-Reagan Republicans. Cited in Smith (2008).

based on authority or faith is equally overstated. If we are concerned about dogmatism, we should perhaps be most worried about a pre-emptive exclusion of religion from politics, which "in effect establish(es) secularism as the theory of government" (Nussbaum 2008:265).

This re-evaluation has been paralleled in the feminist literature by greater attention to women's engagement with religion, and an emphasis on empowerment, resistance and reform from within (Moghadam 2002). These developments are often informed by a post-colonial critique of the modern/traditional dualism that had come to permeate feminist as well as other thinking, generating an image of the "Third World" woman—overexploited and mostly powerless—and implicitly contrasting her with the secular, liberated proto-feminist from the West (Mohanty et al. 1991). In the literature on multiculturalism, writers have queried exaggerated discourses of cultural difference that represent women from minority or non-Western cultural groups as uniquely in need of protection from their oppressive cultures;[39] or opportunistically deploy principles of gender equality to justify a retreat from multiculturalism. The logic of these arguments is widely applied to religion as well. A previously dominant opposition between religion and equality, with religion cast as a major source of gender oppression, has given way to a focus on the empowerment of women, and consideration of the scope for resistance and reform within the various religions.

Questions of agency have been central here: the need to respect the choices women make, not dismiss those of religious women as evidence of victim status or illustrating their false consciousness; but also the recognition that resistance takes many and subtle forms, and that what looks to an outsider like submission can sometimes be better understood as empowerment or subversion. Put generally, both points are compelling, though in their detailed interpretation, they have provoked extensive debate. For some writers, "extravagant affirmations" of empowerment and agency (Moghissi 1999) blind analysts to the often violent force of politicized religion, particularly in Islamic regimes in North Africa and the Middle East, and misrepresent as choice what is self-evidently coercion. For others, the co-option of women's agency in neoliberal discourses of development focuses attention on the individual rather than the collective, on strategies for survival rather than transformation, and encourages states to withdraw from social provision (Wilson 2007). For others again, the search for agency looks uncomfortably like another cultural imposition: "we have to ask what Western liberal values we may be unreflectively validating in proving that 'Eastern' women have agency, too" (Abu-Lughod 2001:105).

In their respective writings on Quaker women in eighteenth century England and women in the mosque movement in late twentieth century Egypt, Phyllis Mack and Saba Mahmood alert us to a tendency—even within the most sympathetic readings—to reframe religious experience in a more comfortably secular register: to translate terms like sacrifice, redemption, ecstasy or repentance into the categories of modern social science (Mack 2003:153); or "explain the motivations of veiled women in terms of the standard models of sociological causality (such as social protest, economic necessity, anomie or utilitarian strategy) while terms like morality, divinity, and virtue are accorded the status of the phantom imaginings of the hegemonized" (Mahmood 2005:16). When this happens, women's religious participation is treated primarily in terms of the avenues it opens up for action, the main focus being on the subversion of traditional interpretations of religious doctrine or the challenges women offer to patriarchal norms. Yet for the women themselves, religion may be primarily about virtue and piety, involving submission or "the desire to be controlled by an authority external to oneself" (Mack 2003:174). If we are to think seriously about agency, in ways that respect the meanings people themselves give to their practices and beliefs, we may have to "detach the notion of agency from the goals of progressive politics" (Mahmood 2005:14), and query that presumed opposition between submission and agency.[40]

[39] Narayan 1998; Volpp 2000; Phillips 2007.

[40] In her discussion of this, Mahmood (2005:29) gives the (secular) example of the virtuoso pianist who submits herself to a rigorous programme of practice, and a hierarchy of power that makes her the apprentice and her teacher the authority, in order to acquire the ability to play: "her agency is predicated on her ability to be taught, a condition classically referred to as 'docility'". Arguably, this does what she warns us against, in that it re-describes submission as empowerment.

These arguments resonate widely in contemporary feminism, partly because they echo an anti-elitism that insists on the integrity of all participants, and distrusts claims to superior understanding when these are employed to differentiate the unenlightened from those in the know. As a corrective to accounts that either represent religion as inherently at odds with agency, or offer to resolve the seeming tension by identifying moments of resistance and subversion, they are, I think, broadly correct. It should go without saying that religious women must be accorded the same respect as those who are non-religious. It should also go without saying that one element in that respect is taking seriously their own self-descriptions, and the meaning they themselves attach to their practices and beliefs. I see this, however, as an ethical rather than political stance. The key point, as I take it, is that we should allow religion to be "just" religion, not endlessly translate its practices into the more comfortable register of empowerment or resistance or subversion, and not require of it that it promotes democracy or egalitarian social movements. Well, certainly, if the question is framed as whether "we" "require" or "allow". But if the implication is also that we import inappropriate questions when we ask whether women's religious engagement better empowers them to resist oppressive social norms, or imposes those norms more rigidly, then this is a more troubling restriction.

Acknowledging that believers may seek self-transcendence is an important challenge to arguments that misrepresent religious commitment or refuse to engage with it seriously. But when a desire for self-transcendence puts religious injunction beyond the realm of negotiation—as it sometimes does—it threatens the scope for gender equality. And when the entanglement of religion with politics authorizes the most conservative interpretations of a religion—as appears often to be the case—it can seriously affect women's opportunities and position. So while we should not *assume* that gender equality is at odds with religion, the political questions remain. Has the explosion of politicized religion made it harder for women to pursue equality with men? What are the possibilities and limits of working through faith-based movements in promoting greater gender equality? What kind of separation of religion from politics is most conducive to gender equality?

Casanova's answers to these questions do not convince me, mainly because he does not engage sufficiently with the severity of the issues. While he recognizes the problem of gender discrimination within religious regimes, he considers this primarily in terms of differential access to religious power and authority: the refusal, for example, of the Catholic Church to permit the ordination of women priests. He has little to say about more pressing areas of gender discrimination, like the toleration of polygamy in Islam and breakaway Mormon sects, or the greater ease of access to divorce for men than for women in Islam and Orthodox Judaism. He also has little to say about coercion, whether the official coercion practiced in countries that incorporate discriminatory religious principles into law; the unofficial violence against women sometimes countenanced and encouraged by local religious leaders; or the insidious forms of coercion practiced in families and civil society that require women to conform to what are said to be religious principles and norms.

Casanova recognizes that reactive movements in all religious traditions are mobilizing to contest what they see as threatening transformations in gender norms and gender relations; but he is, in my view, too easily reassured by his reading of these as themselves a measure of how far the transformations have gone. In his analysis, everything that has been identified as cause for concern is turned around into evidence of progress. The greater visibility of veiled women in Muslim societies is a sign of increasing gender equality (because the women are attending mosques and making themselves more visible in the public sphere). The greater political visibility of Islam is evidence of energetic internal debates that are fashioning Muslim versions of modernity. The obsessive focus on gender relations in fundamentalist religious movements is evidence that relations between women and men have already undergone enormous change. For secularists threatened by the de-privatization for religion, this offers a reassuringly optimistic vision. I do not think it adequately addresses the problems of religious politics and gender equality.

In what follows, I address (i) issues of demarcation; (ii) the informal impact of religion on attitudes and lives; (iii) the politics of internal reform; and (iv) questions of alliance. The first set of issues is the most state-centric: what should be regarded as a private matter of conscience,

what is an appropriate matter for state policy, and what is best left to religious bodies to decide for themselves? What authority, if any, should states cede to religious communities and groups? What exemptions, if any, are legitimate from legislation that bans discrimination on the grounds of gender? In essence, who or what has the right to decide? In considering these questions, I stress the importance of disaggregating religions and religious communities. Even as shorthand—and even in the context of internal movements for reform—these terms are too slippery. When assessing what degrees of autonomy or authority are compatible with gender equality, we have to be especially careful about what is meant by "the religion" or "religious community".

When considering quasi-constitutional matters of demarcation, it is largely a matter of working out appropriate normative principles that might legitimately regulate a division of authority and rights, and then hoping that state policy will be implemented in line with these. (Policy is not made like this, but we can always hope.) However, political endorsements of religious authority have wider effects than are indicated in official policy or law. Even when policy is carefully balanced, or a legal regime appropriately restrained, a general endorsement of religion or greater dominance of religious discourse in public debate can still work its way through people's attitudes and opinions to constrain women's lives. This is the focus of the second section.

In the third and fourth sections, I turn to a range of issues relating to engagement in political or civil society. We are religious feminists, for example, confronted with a choice between working among our fellow believers for internal reform of discriminatory practices, or joining forces with secular feminists and working on a different terrain. We are secular feminists, deciding whether to join forces with a religious organization committed to many of the same principles of gender equality but entirely opposed to abortion. We are critics of the war in Iraq, deciding whether to ally with a religious organization whose members regard homosexuality as an abomination against nature. In these kinds of choices, it is not a matter of demarcation—what is to be a private matter of individual choice, what is to be left to the discretion of religious authorities, what is to be determined by a (hopefully) democratically elected government—but a more general question of the relationship between religious and political belief, religious and political action. In the third section, I address this as the politics of internal reform; in the fourth, as the politics of alliance.

Demarcation

I shall simply assert, without much argument, that a fusion of state and religion is not favourable to gender equality. Religions are not democracies, and a preemptive requirement that the laws of a country must follow religious prescriptions closes down the space for living as well as the space for debate. There have been vigorous reform movements even in the more theocratic states—the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 1990s is a good example—and movements for gender equality will work around and within whatever the political history of their country has delivered to them. But it is hard to imagine any movement for gender equality that actively chooses theocracy as the best political system. As Lisa Hajjar (2004:27) notes, when religious law becomes the law of the state, "defense of religion can be conflated with defense of the state, and critiques or challenges can be regarded and treated as heresy or apostasy". This is not a good situation for those seeking to extend women's rights.

The kind of legal pluralism that devolves to religious communities the authority to determine matters of personal and family law is also, in my view, unfavourable to gender equality, and I discuss some of the issues associated with this below. But there are lesser entanglements of state with religion that do not seem to carry such significance for women: does it particularly matter *to women*, for example, as opposed to republicans or atheists or those of another religion, that the British monarch is head of the Anglican Church? There are, on the other side, forms of secularism that seem to accommodate a heavy religious influence on decisions regarding homosexuality or abortion: the United States is the obvious example here. And there are forms of secularism that seem to discriminate, *as secularism*, against women, like the Turkish ban on attending university wearing a headscarf, which reduced women's educational opportunities while leaving untouched the men in Islamic attire. So I agree with Casanova that gender

equality does not depend on a strict separation of religion from politics—this is clearly not a sufficient condition, and may not be necessary either—and I agree with him that there may be a range of possible combinations, along an axis from greater to lesser religious engagement in politics, compatible with strong regimes of gender equality. I am not convinced, however, that we can identify the limits of that compatibility through diffuse notions of toleration, democracy or the rule of law. This is an arena where the rights of the individual move to centre stage.

Rights figure for Casanova primarily as the right to religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities: "[t]he protection of the rights of any minority, religious or secular, and equal universal access should be central normative principles of any liberal democratic system" (p. 13). This focuses attention on a relationship between democratic political institutions on the one side and religious minorities/religious authorities on the other, a relationship, that is, between two corporate entities, with too little attention to the ways in which each of these may misrepresent or coerce its members. When the issue is gender equality, that corporatist understanding of religious authority is precisely what is at stake. Much of the coercion associated with religion arises when spiritual leaders insist on followers of their religion abiding by principles that discriminate against women. The rights of the individual include the rights of individual women voluntarily to embrace principles or practices that discriminate against them: respect for agency requires that. But uncritical reference to religious authorities or religious communities does not sufficiently protect individuals from the claims that are made in their name.

I have my own reservations about the discourse of rights: the way it directs attention toward individual autonomy and away from collective forms of engagement; the way it constitutes others as threats to our privacy or freedom, and seems to build walls against them; the tendency to define as fundamental rights and freedoms what turn out to be more parochial requirements of particular societies and histories; and so on.[41] But suspect as it may be in other contexts, the very individualism of rights becomes its strength when what is at issue is precisely the relationship between individuals and their religion or culture. I do not, moreover, consider a discourse of rights as inherently secular, or think it necessarily weights discussion of the relationship between religion and politics in ways that favour a classically secular resolution. A growing literature suggests, to the contrary, that rights can be formulated and argued in religious as well as in non-religious language (Sunder 2003; Madhok forthcoming), and that secularism has no monopoly on the notion of women's rights. Rights matter: particularly when considering claims by religious communities for autonomy over "their" internal affairs; and situations where a religion has assumed such social or political dominance that there is no longer a convincing possibility of determining whether its precepts are being voluntarily embraced.

To say this is not to present the individual as the unit of analysis. Apart from anything else, individual rights are defended and secured mostly through collective action. But it is important not to drift into thinking of the relationship between religion and gender equality as a relationship between two corporate entities—religions and the state—with the state then standing in for principles of gender equality. That corporatism is suspect on both sides. It is suspect so far as religions are concerned because we cannot assume that religious establishments speak for all those who count themselves as members of that religion. It is also suspect so far as states are concerned, because even the most democratic of states cannot claim to represent all its citizens, and even the most secular of states cannot be said to embody ideals of gender equality. Governments and religions often coexist in symbiotic relationship, with governments readily divesting themselves of responsibilities they had only half-heartedly assumed—the burden of promoting gender equality often being one of these—and delegating these responsibilities to religious or other groups.

When we take the rights of individuals, rather than the rights of religions or religious minorities, as the starting point, this delivers two broad principles. Individuals should not be forced by secular rules to abandon key aspects of their religious practices or beliefs; individuals should not be forced by religious authorities to accept discriminatory practices. This inserts a

[41] For some of the feminist literature on this, see Kiss (1997) and Gould (2004).

useful wedge between individuals and either secular or religious authorities. We know that the mechanisms of majority rule do not guarantee protection for those in a religious minority, even in the best run of democracies. We know that the hierarchical institutionalization of many religions can immunize spiritual leaders, leaving them to become thoroughly detached from the conditions in which their followers live their lives. Taking the beliefs and choices of *individuals* as the starting point provides the more secure basis for thinking about the relationship between religion, politics and gender equality.

This is the important starting point that protects us from dogmatic secularism on the one side or incipient corporatism on the other. But things are never that simple, and broad principles will not settle the matter. There are always difficulties, for example, in defining what is a "key" aspect of a religious practice or belief (who determines this?), what counts as a discriminatory practice (again, who determines this?), and running through both of these, what counts as individual choice or belief. There are also questions about indirect harm. Where the choices I make directly harm you, there are clearly grounds for government intervention, preventing me from doing what I have chosen to do. But what if what I choose has *indirect* effects on you, because it sustains or reinforces values that put pressure on you to behave in particular ways? What if my choice to wear hijab reinforces the social pressures on you to do the same, and so contributes to your harassment? (This was the argument French progressives used to justify their support for legislation banning Muslim girls from wearing headscarves to school.) Can we continue to say that we support the rights of religious women *and* the rights of non-religious women, or do we have to make a more definite decision between these two?

I do not promise to resolve these issues, for my guiding principle, if any, is that there *is* no simple principle, and that judgments must be made in a contextual way.[42] But I hope to clarify this through two illustrations. Consider two questions: to what extent should states recognize the authority of personal religious law? To what extent should legislation against sex discrimination be applied to the internal affairs of religions? We can—and should—formulate answers to these questions that derive their legitimacy from the notion of equal individual rights; but the answer in each case will be complicated by problems about what counts as choice and what as coercion.

Personal religious law

Religions commonly regulate sexuality, marriage, and the relationship between parents and children. Very often, regulation according to religious principles (or what are said by those in authority to be the religious principles) delivers a less favourable outcome for some than regulation according to state law. The law of the country may permit divorce, while the religion forbids it. The law may allow divorce on identical grounds to women and men, while the religion requires the consent of the husband before a marriage is dissolved. The law may establish an equal division of family property on divorce, while the religion permits a distribution more favourable to the men. The devout Catholic is then as free as any non-Catholic to get a divorce and remarry according to the laws of the land, but will only feel able to remarry if the first marriage has been annulled by the church. The devout Muslim or Orthodox Jew is able to divorce under both state and religious law, but if the husband refuses to cooperate, will find it much harder to get a religiously sanctioned divorce.

In societies that practice strong versions of religious pluralism, there may not even be recourse to a single state law. In Israel, for example, matters regarding marriage and divorce are determined according to the religious affiliations of the parties involved. While a significant minority of Israelis have civil rather than religious marriages, these are only recognized when they were conducted abroad (Halperin-Kaddari and Yadgar 2009), and still have to be dissolved under religious law. In India, there *is* provision for civil marriage, but only where people have explicitly opted for a secular code. Social pressure means that few make this choice; for the vast majority of Indians, questions of family law are settled within the personal law systems associated with the different religious communities. One compelling question for Indian feminists has therefore been whether to work for a uniform civil code that provides women

[42] See Carens (2000) for a discussion of contextualism.

with equal rights regardless of their religious affiliations, or for reform of the personal law systems, either through internal mobilization or external, state-imposed, regulation.

Before the much discussed Shah Bano ruling (1985), when a divorced Muslim women brought a case for maintenance under the universally applicable Criminal Procedure Code, and a Supreme Court Justice used the occasion to criticize Muslim family law, Indian feminists tended to favour replacing the systems of religious family law by a uniform civil code. In the aftermath of Shah Bano, that strategy became almost impossibly tainted by the political battles between Hindu majority and Muslim minority. Muslim outrage at the judge's criticism of family law led the Congress Party to pass the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights On Divorce) Act (1986), reinforcing rather than reducing the requirement for Muslim women to work within personal religious law. Meanwhile, the Bhartiya Janata Party opportunistically advocated a uniform civil code as part of its general anti-Muslim politics. The rights of the individual and principles of gender equality do, in my view, point in the direction of a uniform civil code. But with that strategy hijacked by Hindu nationalism, most feminists turned to notions of internal reform (Sunder Rajan 2003; Hasan 2009).

At a practical level, there has been significant improvement since these events. The Muslim Women's Act had deprived Muslim women of their right to claim maintenance under the Criminal Procedure Code, establishing that they were entitled according to principles of Islamic law only to the dowry they brought with them to the marriage and "reasonable and fair provision" during the *iddat* period, the three months or so before a divorced woman is able to remarry. This effectively reduced their rights. Attempts to have this declared unconstitutional have not so far succeeded, but the Supreme Court ruling in Danial Latifi and Anr v. Union of India (2001) interpreted the law as meaning advance provision for future needs, not just during the *iddat*, and this substantially increased the requirements regarding maintenance. That judgment therefore helps address some of the most pressing practical concerns. But it still means Muslim women are uniquely denied access to the maintenance provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code, and have fewer legal rights than other women in India. And despite the optimism suggested by Casanova over working for reform from within, it has been extremely hard for Muslim women to mobilize for internal reform.

Outside contexts of strong religious pluralism, there is rarely any issue about whether members of a religious minority should have the same access as anyone else to a more favourable state law. Religious leaders in contemporary Europe sometimes lobby for a system of legal pluralism that would make religious family law the default system for their members, but any proposal that reduces women's legal rights discriminates against them, and is at odds with a wide range of both national and international law. The more serious issue has been what recognition, if any, to give to unofficial arbitration bodies that come into existence to settle matters of dispute according to religious precepts: the Sharia Councils, for example, established in Britain under the auspices of local mosques, and now heavily involved with matters of marriage and divorce (Shah-Kazemi 2001; Bano 2007). One could plausibly describe these bodies as exerting pressure on women to give up the stronger rights they have been accorded by state law, and accept the less favourable terms offered by the council's interpretation of their religion. There is certainly evidence from Britain that women have been pressured to agree less favourable divisions of family property, or more generous access for ex-husbands to the children, than they might have achieved in civil divorce proceedings; or, indeed, pressured to remain within abusive marriages (Bano 2007). But one could also plausibly describe these councils as providing women with a religiously sanctioned way out of unhappy and abusive marriages. Again, evidence from Britain indicates that it is the women rather than the men who take the initiative in approaching Sharia Councils, largely because their husbands have refused to grant them a divorce; and that the outcome is very often in their favour, with the religious scholars issuing a certificate of divorce (Shah-Kazemi 2001).

It is, in my view, inappropriate either to ban such arbitration councils or give them formal authority: neither approach adequately recognizes the rights of the individuals concerned. Banning private religious councils would, in effect, mean women having to choose between their religion, as they currently interpret it, and their rights. They would have access, as before, to the civil courts, and many of their fellow believers have of course felt perfectly satisfied with

that. But their dilemma arose precisely because their own religious beliefs—their own interpretation of their religion—meant this was not really an option for them. Banning religious arbitration is, in effect, saying these women need to rid themselves of their overly rigid or overly orthodox views, and learn to live by a strictly civil code. This is the kind of coercive secularism that both Casanova and I would want to avoid. It attaches too little weight to the beliefs and choices of the women themselves.

The alternative strategy of making religious councils the primary courts for religious believers would be even worse, for this would deprive those belonging to the religion of the more favourable guarantees in state law. It would no longer be available to individual believers to find their own balance between religious and civil requirements. Everyone would be either in the religion or out; and if in, no longer able to avail themselves of the civil code.

This, however, is where the difficulties come into sharper focus, for the deeply felt choices of some women can contribute to a climate of opinion in which other women feel obliged to follow the same rules. Meeting the needs of those who cannot conceive of themselves as genuinely divorced unless this is confirmed by their religious authorities may then put indirect pressure on those who might otherwise have felt perfectly satisfied with a civil divorce. It is not only explicit state regulation—as in India or Israel—that legitimates a particular system of personal law. Shariah councils are also legitimated by the very fact that people apply to them. Even if entirely voluntary, the decision of some women to apply to religious arbitration bodies is likely to enhance the authority of such councils within the community. This may exert pressure on those who had not previously regarded them as so important. The indirect effect on one person's choices may then be to constrain the choices of another.

In the context of religious belief, moreover, there is an element of truth to the notion that individuals should not expect to pick and choose between religious and civil law. People who identify themselves as believers do not normally feel they can select which aspects of their religion to embrace. Or rather, they *may* pick and choose, but the closer the entanglement of religion with politics, the more pressure they will encounter not to act in this way. The principles I have offered as my way of resolving points of tension then start to appear somewhat disingenuous. So individuals should not be forced by secular rules to abandon key aspects of their religious practices or beliefs. So individuals should not be forced by religious authorities to accept discriminatory practices. They should not be forced by secular rules to consider themselves divorced when their religious beliefs tell them they are not; nor forced by secular rules to follow dress codes (like a ban on headscarves) at odds with their own understanding of their religion. They should not be forced by religious rules to give up their legal rights to a fair division of family property on divorce; or required by religious rules to dress in ways they do not regard as a necessary component of their religion. Each of these should, in other words, be a matter for uncoerced individuals to decide.

But this is too simple, for religions *are* institutions, and typically involve the recognition of external authority. Whether hierarchically organized or not, religions always involve prescriptions about what is acceptable behaviour, and it is hardly coherent to be religious yet feel entitled to select which practices to follow or which beliefs to embrace according to what suits one's convenience. And when—as in both the Indian and the British case—the religion in question is being scrutinized and criticized within the wider society for its alleged discrimination against women, its followers may become reluctant to give weight to these criticisms by questioning their religious authorities. In such contexts, it becomes difficult to determine what is active support and what resigned acceptance. Fantasies of the entirely uncoerced individual do not fit.

Sex discrimination laws

The second illustration comes from the other direction: not so much the ways in which religion has been said to threaten gender equality, but ways in which gender equality is said inappropriately to threaten religion. Consider the widespread suspension of anti-discrimination legislation as applied to the internal affairs of religious organizations and groups. The United Kingdom's Sex Discrimination Act (1975) permits "an organized religion" to limit employment to one sex "so as to comply with the doctrines of the religion or avoid offending the religious

susceptibilities of a significant number of its followers". Its more recent Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003) allows organized religions to discriminate against gay and lesbian people in aspects of employment "if necessary to comply with the doctrines of the religion" or "to avoid conflicting with the strongly held religious convictions of a significant number of the religion's followers". (Note the interesting shift from susceptibilities to convictions.) Norway's Gender Equality Act (1976) exempts the internal affairs of communities of faith from its provisions. Later legislation exempts communities of faith from workplace bans on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and from prohibitions on ethnic and religiously based discrimination. The First Amendment to the US Constitution, guaranteeing the free exercise of religion, has been interpreted in subsequent court judgments as exempting organized religions from aspects of anti-discrimination legislation. This has been applied not only to the appointment of ministers, where courts are understandably reluctant to interfere, but also to the appointment of lay persons where the primary duties involve significant spiritual or pastoral work.[43] As Hege Skjeie (2007:473) puts it, it seems that "religious communities may discriminate as long as such discrimination is rooted in religious belief."

Is any of this justified? Cass Sunstein (1999) notes that it is rarely considered problematic to apply ordinary civil and criminal law to religious institutions. Religious bodies are expected to abide by laws against animal sacrifice. Deeply felt religious belief is not thought to exempt people from laws against libel or deception. Why then the asymmetry when it comes to laws prohibiting sex discrimination? The most plausible explanation is that it is not for governments to dictate on matters involving religious doctrine, and that while it may be entirely appropriate for governments to insist that even private clubs must stop selecting people on the grounds of sex, race or sexuality, it is not appropriate for governments to tell the Catholic Church it must ordain women priests. I have some sympathy with this, but who then determines what counts as doctrine? Presumably, it must be the religious authorities themselves, but what if what they regard as core doctrine or key defining practice is no more than the sedimentation of previous prejudice? What if what is described as religious doctrine is no more than "religious susceptibilities" (to quote the United Kingdom's Sex Discrimination Act)? Is this enough to justify a suspension of anti-discrimination law?

When the Indian Constitution was drawn up in 1949, it provided for the right of religious denominations to manage their own affairs in matters of religion, thus exempting them in the now standard way from the full scope of sex discrimination law. But it explicitly retained for the state the right to require Hindu religious institutions to make themselves open to Hindus of all classes and castes. However well established as a practice, the exclusion of lower caste Hindus from the temples was not viewed as an internal matter for the religion to decide for itself, but as a sufficiently compelling problem of discrimination to require state regulation. We might say, of course, that caste practices are a matter of culture, while the acceptability of women in clerical positions is a matter of religious doctrine. But given the embeddedness of all religions within historically shifting cultures, and the demonstrated capacity of many religions in recent decades to change their position as regards the appointment of women to the clergy, this culture/religion distinction becomes harder to sustain. Saying—as I did earlier—that individuals should not be forced by secular rules to abandon key aspects of their religious practices or beliefs suggests that working out what is a "key" aspect is a relatively transparent affair. In truth, it will be hotly contested, and claims about what is key and what is peripheral will often be employed precisely to discourage reforms regarding gender equality. As Narayan (1998) argues, claims about what are core defining values in any particular religion or culture are routinely deployed to immunize those practices that are most to the disadvantage of women.

I do not, as it happens, think laws against sex discrimination should be invoked to force the Catholic Church to ordain women priests, or synagogues and mosques to desegregate their places of prayer; though my reasons are not so much that governments should not interfere in doctrinal matters (this presumes we know what is a doctrinal matter), but that external

[43] For example, in EEOC v. Catholic University of America, 83 F.3d 455 (DC circ 1994), where a Catholic nun who had been employed in the Department of Canon Law for a number of years was denied appointment to a tenured position. Though she had previously been appointed associate professor, the promotion to a tenured position was said to bring the nature of the work under the "ministerial exception".

regulation, rushing ahead of a current consensus, can be counter-productive. In general, however, I see the greater willingness to suspend sex discrimination legislation in its application to religions as reflecting a wider lack of consensus about sex discrimination being wrong. Outside explicitly feminist circles, many people continue to think men and women very different in their talents and capacities. Even when they consider it wrong for employers to select workers on the basis of their sex (many think even that an inappropriate restriction), they still think it strange not to make a difference between women and men in allocating responsibilities in the household. At some level, that is, large numbers of people around the world—including in countries that have regarded themselves as committed to gender equality—continue to think discrimination on the grounds of sex entirely appropriate. When we add to this what is probably also a widely held view about religions having a legitimate interest in the respective roles of women and men or the nature of the relationship between them, we can see how fragile is the hold of laws and conventions against sex discrimination when it comes to religious institutions. Simply reducing things to a matter of individual choices and rights may then provide insufficient protection for gender equality.

I am conscious that my discussion has worked its way round in circles, from an affirmation of individual rights to a complication of that notion that threatens to make it disappear. This may appear contradictory, but I see it as crucial simultaneously to recognize the centrality of rights and acknowledge the problems in their interpretation and implementation. When I affirm equal individual rights, I am stressing the equality of rights for both believers and non-believers, and rejecting as particularly problematic for gender equality corporatist rights attached to religions. But that distinction is less clear-cut in practice, for individuals sometimes employ their rights to affirm the power and authority of corporate bodies (like religions), and the corporate bodies often exert pressure on individuals to make their choices in a particular way. This is not something that can be resolved at a purely theoretical level. It alerts us, rather, to the political issues.

Religion's informal power

This brings me to religion's informal power. When considering the entanglement of religion with politics, official principles of demarcation only take us so far, for the more telling impact of religion will often lie in its everyday effects on people's attitudes and lives. The power of religion may make itself most felt, not through a formal recognition of personal religious law or explicit incorporation of religious principles into state legislation, but through informal sanctions legitimized by a religion or the way it reshapes public opinion. The official settlement between religion and women's rights might then be reasonably favourable to gender equality, but the unofficial impact of religion is still far-reaching.

I suggested above that people who identify themselves as believers do not normally feel they can pick and choose which aspects of their religion to embrace. In fact, there is plenty of evidence that people *do* pick and choose, especially as regards sexual morality, but the capacity to do so will be affected by the extent to which a religion or religious community is being endorsed, courted or invoked by leading political figures in the country. Survey evidence from the United States suggests that as many as 97 per cent of US Catholic women have used contraception, and that 58 per cent do not see themselves as under an obligation to follow the teachings of their bishop on abortion (Jakobsen and Bernstein 2009). Evidence from Poland, where over 90 per cent still describe themselves as Catholics and believers, suggests that nearly two-thirds of the population nonetheless think modern contraception should be available, with 80 per cent of young people thinking the priests should not dictate sexual behaviour (Heinen and Portet 2009). People do feel authorized by their own interpretation of key doctrines or texts to reject some standard requirements. They may become convinced that these are cultural, not religious, and feel emboldened by this to challenge the authority figures of their religion; or they may belong to a religion where no such authority figures exist. The closer the entanglement, however, of religion with politics, and the more public the discourses of religion, the harder it will be to sustain this. The problem lies less with the religion per se, for individuals have demonstrated considerable capacity for making their own accommodations, and more with its political presence.

In a review of the power of the Orthodox Church in contemporary Serbia, Rada Drezgic (2009) notes that the Church was not enormously successful in persuading political parties to restrict the availability of abortion. A new law passed in 1995 did introduce significant restrictions, but still left abortion available on request up until the tenth week of pregnancy. Since 98 per cent of abortions in Serbia are carried out within this period, the legislation then remains among the most liberal in Europe. The more lasting impact of the religious/nationalist discourses mobilized in the public debates about abortion and related issues may lie in the marked retraditionalization of gender roles within Serbian households in the course of the 1990s, and the very striking movement away from principles of equal participation to a division of labour in which most household chores are done by women. Though this retraditionalization can be partly explained by labour market factors, Drezgic argues that the intersection of nationalist ideology with religion was a particularly important element in promoting social and political conservatism. Judging the impact of the Church by legislation passed or policies adopted does not sufficiently capture the impact on gender attitudes and roles.

One could add here evidence from countries where religious principles regarding sexual morality or the respective roles of women and men *have* been more directly incorporated into the legal and political framework: Pakistan, for example, after the Islamicization presided over by General Zia in the 1980s, or post-revolutionary Iran. The impact of direct incorporation often goes further even than the official legislation, for it makes it more likely that people will take the law into their own hands, will harass women in the streets, for example, for failing to conform to new dress codes, or, in extreme cases, organize public stoning for alleged sexual offences.[44] Commenting on the situation in Pakistan, Farida Shaheed (2009:21) suggests that "in retrospect, the most damaging legacy of Zia period may not be the laws, but the reshaping of the social fabric that reconfigured people's psyche and everyday norms, such as the premise that all citizens were not equal".

Evidence from the World Values Survey shows a strong correlation between degrees of religiosity and what would be deemed conservative attitudes to gender equality (Seguino and Lovinsky 2009). Those who participate regularly in religious activities and describe religion as important in their life are more likely to think women need children in order to live a fulfilled life, more likely to think men should be favoured over women when there is a scarcity of jobs, less likely to regard homosexuality, divorce or abortion as justifiable and so on. These are general findings, obscuring important differences both within and between religions, but the overall results are still salutary. The effect of religiosity in encouraging gender inequitable beliefs is stronger even than the effect of being male. One can see, at this point, where some simpler secular arguments derive their appeal. Recognizing the rights of religious believers alongside the rights of those who are not believers can appear disingenuous, for this no longer looks such a neat egalitarian balance if public recognition of the importance of religion makes the equality rights of women as a whole less secure.

Again, I do not take this as justifying a dogmatic secularism or pre-emptive embargo on the public role of religion—and anyway, think such an embargo virtually impossible to police. My point is just that while we should take the principle of equal individual rights as the crucial starting point in addressing tension between religion and gender equality, we should not expect to derive transparent solutions.

Internal reform movements

The impact of religions on gender equality depends, of course, not just on the extent to which religions are successfully able to shape public opinion and policy, but how amenable they are to internal debate and change. The position of women within various religions has changed markedly over the past decades, with an increasing number permitting women to act as spiritual leaders. The position on gender roles and relations is also changing, as evidenced in the emergence of "Islamic feminism" (Moghadam 2002; Razavi 2006), or the reassessments of Catholic religious imagery referred to by Casanova. The ordination of women remains a highly contested issue, but many Protestant churches now recognize women as ministers, with a few

[44] For some evidence of this, see Shaheed (2009) on Pakistan; and Hoofar and Sadr (2009) on Iran.

even allowing them to become bishops. Women have served as rabbis in Reform Judaism since the 1970s, though this is still regarded as unacceptable within the Orthodox tradition. Women are permitted to lead women-only congregations in prayer in a number of the schools of Islam. The Catholic Church continues to hold the line against the ordination of women, but women are now permitted to assume what would have been an unthinkable role in the mass, including reading the lessons and giving the communion wafers. None of this happened by chance—women had to press for these reforms, often against substantial opposition—but the last 40 years, in particular, has witnessed what could be described as a sea change in many religions.

In assessing points of tension between religion and gender equality, many stress the vitality of internal reform movements as the best way forward for change. A strident secularism that treats all religions as beyond repair is unlikely to endear itself to believers, while denunciations of particular religions as discriminatory, patriarchal and backward is more likely to provoke conservative counter-movements than encourage reflection on the position of women. "Strategically, internal critiques aiming to reform certain aspects of tradition would seem to have better chances to succeed than external frontal attacks against any religious tradition" (p. 19). This seems right. Casanova does not, however, just endorse internal reform movements as a promising avenue for egalitarian change. He additionally suggests that they provide a *more* promising avenue than a state-centred insistence on women's equality and rights. This is more contestable. While there are undoubtedly contexts in which state intervention in pursuit of gender equality can become counter-productive—insisting on the ordination of women priests might be one of these—that should not lead us to exaggerate what can be achieved by internal reform alone. The difficulty, surely, is that internal reform is hardest to mobilize precisely where there is most need for it. The religions whose practices are currently most problematic for gender equality will be the very ones that block women or homosexuals from organizing for internal change.

The vitality of internal reform may, moreover, depend on what is happening externally, or at the level of the state. As Shahra Razavi (2006) shows, the often radical endorsement of human rights, democracy and gender equality by religious intellectuals in Iran in the 1990s was enabled by the weakening power of conservatives in parliament and the more liberal presidencies of Muhammed Khatami. This period also saw the publication of women's papers and magazines that drew relatively freely on material from both secular and religious feminists, and made links with global feminism. The subsequent political reversals did not mean that all strands of internal reform immediately dried up—but certainly meant a much less conducive context. Where the rights of women are accorded more weight in a country's politics and legislation, the prospects for internal religious reform are much enhanced.

It is also worth stressing that if reform movements become *entirely* internal, they may be forced onto an epistemologically suspect distinction between religion and culture. One common strategy in movements for internal reform—sometimes highly effective—is to separate what are accepted as genuine religious requirements from the merely cultural accretions. If it can be demonstrated, for example, that a prohibition on abortion is *not* required by Catholicism, or that legal procedures treating the testimony of a man as equal to that of four women are *not* required by Islam, this opens up space for a woman-friendly, yet still religious, politics. That demonstration may involve careful textual exegesis, but the argument is frequently reinforced by considering the historical context out of which certain (supposedly religious) precepts developed, or comparing the different interpretations of religious requirements current in different parts of the world. The variety across time and region suggests that many things designated as essential components of the religion may be historical, contextual and cultural.

Religious women across the world have pursued this strategy of differentiation, often embracing what they see as the requirements of their religion, while repudiating the cultural accretions that have grown up around these. Younger women have been able to employ the culture/religion distinction to particularly good effect, using it to overcome parental resistance to their continuation into higher education or parental pressure to accept an unwanted marriage. A British study indicates that young women may employ their (often superior) textual understanding of Islam to challenge what they regard as the cultural restrictions placed on them by their parents, to the point where one reported that "the more Islamic I become the

less likely it is that I will be pushed into an unwanted marriage" (Afshar et al. 2006:278). Another study indicates young British Muslims as more insistent than their parents on separating religious from cultural or ethnic considerations when it comes to the choice of marriage partner, and critical of their parents for continuing to muddle the three (Samad and Eade 2002).

The religion/culture separation can be highly effective, but is not something that can be claimed as intrinsically empowering for women. Returning religion to its purer forms has been a theme in reform movements through the history of religions, and that history warns against any automatic assumption about the process promoting greater gender equality. Later modifications sometimes reflect successful modernizing movements that opened a religion up to greater participation by women or eased severe restrictions on daily life. Purging the religion of these is likely to curtail rather than promote women's freedom. Much of what is currently described as fundamentalist religion (and not normally seen as favourable to gender equality) is engaged precisely in the process of rescuing a religion from its later, more degenerate, forms: throwing off the distortions and compromises associated with corrupt regimes in the Middle East; or challenging the liberal tolerance of "evil" in the United States. The separation of "real" religion from its cultural accretions is a political, therefore always contestable, act. Epistemologically, it is perhaps as impossible to achieve as the separation of the real self from its social context and influences. There is no self existing prior to and independently of that context and those influences—and if there were, why should we consider it more authentic or real? By the same token, religious beliefs and injunctions can only be articulated in the historically specific discourses of their day, which means they are permeated through and through by "culture". If this is the case, no amount of stripping away the cultural accretions will deliver the essential truth.

I have my doubts, therefore, about the epistemological validity of the religion/culture distinction. I also see it as playing an ambivalent political role. The religion/culture distinction suggests that if something is indeed identified as a foundational part of the religion, then no further questions arise. Religions often derive their authority from a book or a foundational spiritual leader. In focusing attention on culturally inspired *mis*interpretations, or the way a subsequent institutionalization as "high religion" diverted it from its core egalitarian beliefs, a reform movement may implicitly commit itself to the view that those foundations do indeed set the terms. Valentine Moghadam notes in her discussion of Islamic feminism, that "while some reformers argue for period-based interpretations of the Qur'an, most seek to highlight the egalitarian tendencies within it as a way to frame contemporary legislation." Significantly, as she continues, "none so far has suggested the fallibility of the Qur'an" (Moghadam 2002:1160).

My point here is not to diminish the importance of internal reform movements, or the role they can play in promoting ideas of gender equality. But when we consider the social authority of many religions, and the power they can wield against dissident voices, it is too optimistic to rely simply on reform from within. It is also unhelpful to set up an opposition between internally and externally generated change, or represent one avenue as superior to the other. In a parallel set of debates about state feminism, the inherently compromised engagement of feminists with state bureaucracies used to be contrasted, unfavourably, with the energetic radicalism of women's self-organization in civil society—until more careful analysis revealed that ideas and individuals moved continuously between these supposedly separate spheres, and that it was the combination, rather than one or the other, that most consistently favoured progress.

Alliances

For many, the linking of religion, politics and gender equality primarily evokes dilemmas of political action, including dilemmas about what kind of organizational work to prioritize and with whom. Thus, feminist campaigners against pornography find themselves in alliance with those they regard as the religious Right, sharing a platform with people who consider abortion child murder, and endorse a strict division of labour and responsibilities between women and men. Religious campaigners against headscarf bans find themselves in alliance with libertarians who may despise religion but share the critique of state-imposed restrictions. Feminists in countries where religion frames public political discourse find themselves torn between what

they suspect is an impotent secular feminism that cannot capture sufficient public support, and an Islamic or Evangelical feminism that is, by implication, committed to the view that gender equality is legitimate only to the extent that it is endorsed by religion. What kinds of compromise are possible in such contexts? What are the risks of alliance?

All political alliance involves compromise. Alliance means a willingness to work with others whose objectives are not identical to one's own, but who nonetheless share important areas of concern. Alliance often means modifying one's own sense of priorities to establish common ground with others, and avoiding areas of radical disagreement. What difference, if any, does religion introduce into this? Two plausible points of difference are that a religiously derived politics will consider political questions primarily from an ethical point of view, and that the scope for compromise may be determined in advance by the pronouncements of spiritual leaders. Considering things from an ethical point of view is no bad thing; and, anyway, there are many non-religious participants who consider things primarily in this light. But when moral slides over into moralistic—commonly understood as rigid, judgmental and narrow—it can erect impenetrable barriers against compromise. The second point returns us to the question of the extra authority religions carry and the additional constraints this can impose on negotiation and change. For the non-religious, one of the worries about alliance with a religiously based movement is often the anticipated lack of symmetry when it comes to agreeing a compromise. It is thought that it will always be the non-religious who have to cede ground in disputes about policy or strategy, for they are the ones who will be perceived as having the most room for manoeuvre.

As so often in oppositions between religious and secular, this tension is overstated. Some secular activists are very much closed to counter-argument, while in religions with vigorous reform movements, there will, by definition, be a range of interpretations, and no single authoritative reading of religious principle or law. The notion that religiously based movements are inherently less open to negotiation, modification or compromise is mistaken—and yet there is still some cause for concern. Religious conviction *is* likely to involve a particularly strong commitment to a pre-defined cluster of ethical principles, and in so far as it derives authority from the interpretations of spiritual leaders, may be less open to a deliberative outcome than might be the case with very strongly held non-religious beliefs. Where a religious authority is additionally endorsed by a political authority, this effect will be even stronger.

The other problem that arises in political action is the entirely unintended "alliance" that threatens when arguments for gender equality become ammunition in attacks on cultural or religious groups. This was a central issue in the Shah Bano case, where it became impossible to settle strategy on the basis of what best promotes gender equality, and important also to consider the way ideas of gender equality were being employed to promote hatred between different communities. Similar issues have arisen in Europe, where much-needed interventions against forced marriage and "honour" killing have served to hasten the retreat from multiculturalism (Phillips and Saharso 2008). The women at risk come from a variety of ethnocultural groups and a variety of religions, but their families are mostly of non-European origin. It has proved difficult, in this context, to mobilize effectively against forced marriage or honour killings without inadvertently mobilizing anti-immigrant, often anti-Muslim, sentiment. This is not an alliance of anyone's choosing, but the claims people make and the discourses they employ have their own trajectory, and can be mobilized by others to very different ends. In the ensuing complexities, people sometimes feel compelled to choose between *either* defending the rights of women *or* defending the religious group. This is not a helpful binary.

This issue, however, is not one that arises only in relation to religion. On the whole, I would say that the worries that emerge in relation to alliances with religiously based organizations or movements are pretty much the same as those that arise in relation to *any* alliance that involves people or organizations with which one does not entirely agree. It may be, for example, that working with male religious leaders to discourage practices harmful to women gives legitimacy to an authority structure premised on gender inequality. True, but since authority structures in the vast majority of organizations are premised on gender inequality, this would cancel out a very wide range of potential alliances. Unless one regards religion as intrinsically hostile to gender equality—and I have argued against this view—questions about the limits of possible

alliance with religious groups will mostly parallel questions that arise regarding alliances with non-religious groups. A useful guiding principle in both contexts is whether the alliance can be seen as transformative. Does it work not only for the immediate objective (to reduce this or that harm, achieve this or that change in government policy), but also have probable longer term effects (empowering more women, or encouraging more critical reflection on gender roles)? More negatively, is it likely that the immediate benefits of the alliance will be outweighed by the way it legitimizes either structures or principles inimical to gender equality? These are questions we will ask regarding any alliance. It is not clear that they are specific to religion.

Conclusion

Though I have offered some broad principles in this essay, I have also stressed the limits of principles, and do not then wish to conclude with detailed prescriptions about what should be done. History matters, context matters, and what is an obstacle to gender equality in one situation may be an enabling mechanism in another. But four points have, I hope, become clear. The first is that gender equality means equality between women as well as between women and men, and this means according the same level of respect to religious and non-religious women. Those women who are not religious should not assume false consciousness or attribute victim status to those who choose to live their lives by religious precepts. Those women who are religious should not assume that the others lack ethical conviction or are slaves to a material culture. Unless the choices each of us makes actively harms the others, we should recognize and respect each other's agency and freedom of conscience. *Indirect harm*, as when what I choose to do has the effect of reinforcing values that put pressure on you to conform, is also a compelling problem, and it makes some of my emphasis on recognizing people's own choices look less convincing. But invoking indirect harm as a reason to interfere with individual freedoms and rights gives too much latitude for state interference. It is too vague a category to be employed in this way.

The second point is that the relationship between religion, politics and gender equality should not be conceived in quasi-corporatist terms as a relationship between democratic and religious authorities, but always viewed through the lens of individual rights and needs. As Martha Nussbaum (1999:102) puts it, the protection of basic human rights has to be given "a very strong degree of priority", where necessary at the expense of "traditional religious discourse and practice". There is a danger that this imports too much of the baggage of Western secular liberalism, but that danger is, in my view, overstated. The discourse of rights is not restricted to Western liberalism, any more than the practice of individual agency. When gender equality is at issue, moreover, a quasi-corporatist understanding of religions is particularly problematic. The authority of religions is widely employed to dictate to women what they can wear, what they can study, where they can work, and how they should relate to their parents, husbands and children. The language of religion is sometimes invoked to justify violence against women. Despite all the qualifications and complications I have outlined in this essay, a strong discourse of individual rights provides the necessary tool in addressing these problems.

The third point is that religion *is* different, differing from culture on the one side, and non-religious beliefs on the other. These differences are often overstated. Attempts to disentangle a pure religion from a time- and place-specific culture are epistemologically implausible. Strongly held non-religious belief can be just as resistant to evidence or counter-argument as strongly held religious views. The problems that face us in deciding on appropriate alliances will be much the same whether we are considering alliances with religious or non-religious groups. That said, it is in the nature of religious belief that injunctions come, in some sense, from outside, and it is hardly coherent to live one's life according to religious precepts but treat these precepts as ones that can be modified at will. This is the grain of truth that feeds misconceptions of religious people as either subservient to their religious authorities (the victimized women) or incapable of compromise (the dogmatic men). These *are* misconceptions: a cursory glance at some of that 73 per cent of the world's population that adheres, in however varied a manner, to the four major religions should be enough to dispel that prejudice. But to the extent that religion involves recognizing the importance and value of something existing outside oneself, it makes it especially apparent the intimate ways in which choice can be bound up with coercion. The

externality simultaneously provides the language for those exacting compliance and the motivation for those accepting the rules. Where religions are being courted or endorsed by political agencies, this becomes even more the case.

The effect is to complicate the initial simplicity of points about agency and rights. Political judgment would be considerably easier if we could employ a detector mechanism to identify coercion, if we could just ask people, "is this *your* choice or not?", and decide which practices to support, encourage, regulate or tolerate according to the answer. Often enough, however, the same thing will be simultaneously choice *and* a bowing to authority. It is not that there is a mindset peculiar to religious believers that makes them more likely than others to accept what they are told to do. To the contrary, I would say that simultaneously choosing *and* accepting characterizes much of what everyone does in life. But the language and experience of religions—and particularly, the institutions of "high religion"—bring this more to the fore.

My final point is that gender equality is considerably more precarious in its hold on public discourse and government policy than is commonly assumed. Gender equality is often the first thing to be sacrificed or compromised, because at some deep level, it is not really felt to matter. This fragility is partially masked by the militant face of gender equality, the way the rights of women are invoked in civilizing missions, or ideals of gender equality co-opted as the measure of modernity and scourge of barbarian nations. But this co-option to promote other purposes should not blind us to the underlying fragility. Despite the many conventions of rights and legal commitments, gender equality remains a precarious ideal, easily dislodged by notions of essential sexual difference or the natural harmony of the sexes. In assessing the problems that various forms of religious politics can pose for gender equality, we should not exaggerate the solidity of the egalitarian commitment among the non-religious. This warns against a demonization of religions as inherently at odds with gender equality. It also warns against a complacency that too readily accepts compromise on matters of equality between women and men.

Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2001. "Orientalism and middle east feminist studies." *Feminist Studies,* Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 101–113.

Afshar, Haleh, Rob Aitken and Myfanwy Franks. 2006. "Feminisms, Islamophobia, and identities." *Political Studies,* Vol. 53, pp. 262–283.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Bano, Samia. 2007. "Islamic family arbitration, justice and human rights in Britain." *Law, Social Justice, and Global Development*, Issue 1.

Carens, Joseph. 2000. *Culture, Citizenship, and Community: A Contextual Exploration of Justice as Evenhandedness*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Casanova, José. 2009. "Religion, politics and gender equality: Public religions revisited." In José Casanova and Anne Phillips, *A Debate on the Public Role of Religion and its Social and Gender Implications*. Programme on Gender and Development, Paper No. 5. UNRISD, Geneva.

———. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World.* University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Connolly, William. 1999. *Why I am Not a Secularist.* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.

Drezgić, Rada. 2009. *Religion, Politics and Gender Equality: Country Report, Serbia*. UNRISD, Geneva. Mimeo.

Gould, Carol. 2004. *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights.* Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Hajjar, Lisa. 2004. "Religion, state power, and domestic violence in Muslim societies: A framework for comparative analysis." *Law and Social Inquiry,* Vol. 29, pp. 1–38.

Halperin-Kaddari, Ruth and Yaacov Yadgar. 2009. *Religion, Politics and Gender Equality among Jews in Israel*. UNRISD, Geneva. Mimeo.

Hasan, Zoya. 2009. *Gender, Religion and Democratic Politics in India*. UNRISD, Geneva. Mimeo.

Heinen, Jacqueline and Stephanie Portet. 2009. *Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Poland*. UNRISD, Geneva. Mimeo.

Hoodfar, Homa and Shadi Sadr. 2009. *Religious Idioms and Rights-Based Demands: Can Women Act as Agents of a Democratization of Theocracy in Iran?* UNRISD, Geneva. Mimeo.

Jakobsen, Janet and Elizabeth Bernstein. 2009. *Religion, Politics and Gender Equality: Country Report USA*. UNRISD, Geneva. Mimeo.

Jakobsen, Janet and Ann Pellegrini (eds.). 2008. *Secularisms*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Kiss, Elisabeth. 1997. "Alchemy or fool's gold? Assessing feminist doubts over rights." In M.L. Shanley and U. Narayan (eds.), *Reconstructing Political Theory: Feminist Perspectives*. Penn State, University Park, PA and Polity Press, Cambridge.

Mack, Phyllis. 2003. "Religion, feminism and the problem of agency." *Signs*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 149-177.

Madhok, Sumi. Forthcoming. *Five Notions of Haq: Exploring Vernacular Rights Cultures in Southern Asia*. New Working Paper Series. Gender Institute, London School of Economics, London.

Mahmood, Saba. 2008. "Is critique secular? A symposium at UC Berkeley." *Public Culture,* Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 447–452.

———. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Moghissi, Haideh. 1999. *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*. Zed Books, London.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (eds.). 1991. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Moghadam, Valentine. 2002. "Islamic feminism and its discontents." *Signs*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 1135-1171.

Narayan, Uma. 1998. "Essence of culture and a sense of history: A feminist critique of cultural essentialism." *Hypatia*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 86–106.

Nussbaum, Martha. 2008. *Liberty of Conscience*. Basic Books, New York.

———. 1999. "Religion and women's human rights." In Martha Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Phillips, Anne. 2007. *Multiculturalism without Culture*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Phillips, Anne and Sawitri Saharso (eds.). 2008. *The Rights of Women and the Crisis of Multiculturalism. Ethnicities*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Special issue.

Razavi, Shahra. 2006. "Islamic politics, human rights and women's claims for equality in Iran." *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 7, pp. 1223–1237.

Samad, Yunas and John Eade. 2002. *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage*. Community Liaison Unit, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London.

Scott, David and Charles Hirschkind (eds.). 2006. *Powers of the Secular Modern*. Stanford University Press. Palo Alto, CA.

Seguino, Stephanie and James Lovinsky. 2009. *The Impact of Religiosity on Gender Attitudes and Outcomes*. UNRISD, Geneva. Mimeo.

Shah-Kazemi and Nurin Sonia. 2001. *Untying the Knot: Muslim Women, Divorce and the Shariah*. Nuffield Foundation, London.

Shaheed, Farida. 2009. *Gender, Religion and the Quest for Justice in Pakistan: Religion, Politics and Gender Equality*. UNRISD, Geneva. Mimeo.

Skjeie, Hege. 2007. "Religious exemptions to equality." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 471–490.

Smith, Roger M. 2008. "Religious rhetoric and the ethics of public discourse: The case of George W. Bush." *Political Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 272–300.

Spinner-Halev, Jeff. 2000. *Surviving Diversity: Religion and Democratic Citizenship*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Sunder, Madhavi. 2003. "Piercing the veil." *Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 112, pp. 495–567.

Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari. 2003. *The Scandal of the State: Women, Law and Citizenship in Postcolonial India.* Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Sunstein, Cass. 1999. "Should sex equality law apply to religious institutions?" In Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C Nussbaum (eds.), *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? Susan Moller Okin with Respondents*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Swaine, Lucas. 2006. *The Liberal Conscience: Politics and Principle in a World of Religious Pluralism*. Columbia University Press, New York.

———. 2003. "Institutions of conscience: Politics and principles in a world of religious pluralism." *Ethical Theory and Practice*, Vol. 6, pp. 93–113.

Volpp, Leti. 2000. "Blaming culture for bad behavior." *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*, Vol. 12, pp. 89–116.

Wilson, Kalpana. 2007. "Agency." In Georgina Blakeley and Valerie Bryson (eds.), *The Impact of Feminism on Political Concepts and Debates*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

UNRISD Programme Papers on **Gender and Development**

PP GD 5	**A Debate on the Public Role of Religion and its Social and Gender Implications** José Casanova and Anne Phillips, September 2009
PP GD 4	**The Statistical Evidence on Care and Non-Care Work across Six Countries** Debbie Budlender, December 2008
PP GD 3	**The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context: Conceptual Issues, Research Questions and Policy Options** Shahra Razavi, June 2007
PP GD 2	**A Critical Review of Selected Time Use Surveys** Debbie Budlender, June 2007
PP GD 1	**Change and Continuity in Social Protection in Latin America: Mothers at the Service of the State?** Maxine Molyneux, May 2007

Printed at the United Nations, Geneva
GE.09-xxxxxx-September 2009-1,500

UNRISD/PPGD5/09/1