

Catholic and Muslim Politics in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

The contemporary global discourse on Islam as a fundamentalist antimodern and undemocratic religion shows striking similarities with the old discourse on Catholicism that predominated in Anglo-Protestant societies, particularly in the United States, from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The essay draws some comparisons between old Catholic and current Muslim politics at three different levels: (1) at the level of the transnational structures of Catholicism and Islam as world religions; (2) at the level of religious political parties and movements in national politics; and (3) at related issues of immigrant incorporation of Catholics in Anglo-Protestant societies in the past and of Muslims in “secular-Christian” Western societies today.¹

The contemporary global discourse on Islam as a fundamentalist antimodern and undemocratic religion shows striking similarities with the old discourse on Catholicism that predominated in Anglo-Protestant societies, particularly in the United States, from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. In this essay, I would like to draw some, admittedly superficial, comparisons between old Catholic and current Muslim politics at three different levels: (1) at the level of the transnational structures of Catholicism and Islam as world religions; (2) at the level of religious political parties and movements in national politics; and (3) at related issues of immigrant incorporation of Catholics in Anglo-Protestant societies in the past and of Muslims in “secular-Christian” Western societies today.

I recognize the superficial character of these comparisons, not only because I cannot claim any expertise on Islam or on Muslim societies, but

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also more importantly because the aim of my essay is not at all to offer a systematic comparative analysis in order to show some essential similarity between the two religions. Rather, my aim is to put into question some of the secularist assumptions dominant in the social sciences, and in political science in particular, when it comes to the analysis of “the Holy but Controversial Affiliation between Religion and Politics.” Even a superficial comparative analysis between the old Catholic and contemporary Muslim politics at all three levels should serve to substantiate three points: (a) that the holy affiliation of religion and politics, as controversial as it may be, has an old history and is likely to persist into the future, thus putting into question the secularist assumption of the privatization of religion in modern societies; (b) that the resistance to the secular differentiation of religion and politics is neither uniquely “Muslim” nor peculiarly characteristic of non-Western religions, thus putting into question spurious contrapositions of the secular West and the religious Rest; and (c) that, given the successful democratization of Catholic politics in the last decades, one can anticipate, indeed one can already observe, parallel processes of democratization of Muslim politics throughout the world, thus putting into question the alleged “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West.

Transnational Structures of Catholicism and Islam as Worldly Religious Regimes

As religious regimes, both Catholicism and Islam preceded and are likely to outlast the modern world system of nation-states.² The very attribute *transnational* only makes sense in relation to the Westfalian system of sovereign nation-states that emerged in early modernity and eventually replaced the system of medieval Christendom. That system had been centered on the conflictive interdependent relation between the Roman papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. Of all the world religions, none had seemed as threatened at its core by the emergence of the modern world system of sovereign territorial states as the Roman Church. The dissolution of Western Christendom undermined the role of the papacy as the spiritual head of a universal Christian monarchy represented by the Holy Roman Empire. The papacy lost control of the emerging national Catholic churches to caesaro-papist Catholic monarchs and it itself became territorialized into the Papal States, reduced to being just another marginal and increasingly irrelevant sovereign territorial state. One by one, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, most of the transnational dimensions of Medieval Catholicism receded or disappeared altogether. It

² The following analysis of Catholicism draws upon José Casanova, “Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a ‘Universal’ Church,” in *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, ed. Susanne Rudolph and James Piscatori (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

is not surprising, therefore, that the Catholic Church remained for centuries adamantly antimodern and developed a negative philosophy of history.

At the Congress of Westphalia (1648), the concerted effort of Catholic and Protestant princes (with the exclusion of Imperial Spain) successfully shut out the papacy from European international and internal national affairs. As long as the sovereign rulers maintained officially their Catholic confession, an impaired papacy absorbed with the internal and external affairs of its own territories acquiesced. The French Revolution shattered the *modus vivendi* of the Ancient Regime and opened the way for the modern conflicts between secular state and Catholic Church. Pius VI's condemnation of the 1790 Civil Constitution of the Clergy, after the majority of the Gallic Church had already expressed its refusal to take the public oath, marks a turning point in the papacy's attempt to reclaim its supremacy over national bishops and clergy. After the Spanish American colonies won their independence, the papacy refused to extend to the new republics the privileges of the old royal patronage, preferring to withdraw diplomatic recognition of the new states and to leave episcopal sees vacant.

Ironically, it was the 1804 Concordat with Napoleon that served as the blueprint for the successive concordats with secular states, which allowed the papacy to regain control of the national hierarchies. In the course of the nineteenth century, however, as conflicts with the liberal state became endemic throughout Europe and Latin America, it became increasingly evident that it was easier to safeguard papal claims in Anglo-Saxon countries that had institutionalized freedom of religion than in Latin Catholic countries, even when Catholicism was officially established as the state religion. Indeed, Anglo-Saxon as well as Protestant countries such as Holland, Germany, or Switzerland, where Catholics constituted large minorities, became strongholds of modern Romanization and of a new liberal form of Catholic ultramontaniam, distinct from the integralist ultramontaniam that was tied to the restoration of European monarchies.

The year 1870 marks the turning point in the modern process of Catholic globalization. At the very moment when the Papal States were incorporated into the new Kingdom of Italy and the papacy was forced to renounce its claims to territorial sovereignty, the First Vatican Council reaffirmed papal supremacy. Through the control of the nomination of bishops, the papacy has gained progressively and for the first time in history control over the national churches. Significantly, non-Catholic liberal states were the first ones to accept the transnational papal claims, while Catholic monarchs tried to preserve the old caesaro-papist claims of state supremacy. Today, the People's Republic of China may be the only state in the world still claiming supremacy over its national Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, Catholic nations under non-Catholic rule, Catholic minorities in Protestant countries, and Catholic immigrant diasporas were the first ones to lend support to the new papal global claims.

The loss of the Papal States rather than leading to the further weakening or even extinction of the papacy, as was first feared, has led to the reconstitution of the Vatican as the highly centralized administrative core of a modern transnational religious regime, this time on a truly Catholic, that is, global-ecumenical basis. The Vatican's unchallenged control over the process of nomination of bishops through the papal nuncios has proven to be the single most important factor in papal control of the transnational Catholic Church. The internationalization of the Vatican Curia serves as counterpart to the global Romanization of the local Catholic churches.

In addition, the contemporary process of Catholic globalization finds expression primarily in three new directions: in the ever wider publication of papal encyclicals dealing not only with matters of Catholic faith, morality, and internal church discipline, but also with secular global issues affecting all of humanity; in the increasingly active and vocal role of the papacy in international conflicts and in issues dealing with world peace, world order, and world politics; and in the public visibility of the person of the pope as a symbolic high priest of a new universal civil religion of humanity and as the first citizen of a global civil society.

As a transnational religious regime, Islam never had the highly centralized, hierarchic, and priestly-clerical structure of the Catholic Church. Against the often repeated claim that Islam is "religion and state" and, therefore, knows no clear differentiation of religion and politics, even a superficial acquaintance with the complex history of premodern Muslim societies across three continents and over a millennium makes abundantly clear that the patterns of relations and, indeed, differentiation between religious and political institutions and structures are as diverse as anything one finds in Latin Christendom or, indeed, in any other world religion.³ But as a political system, the Muslim Caliphate, in its successive institutionalizations from the Umayyad Caliphate through the Abbasids, had some structural similarities with medieval Christendom.

However, when the Ottoman Sultans assumed the title of Caliphs in the sixteenth century, in the dynamic context of Mediterranean and Central East European geopolitics and in confrontation with the emerging post-Reformation European system of states, the Caliphate was transformed in a modern absolutist caesaro-papist direction. Although what could be called positivist secular legislation under the Ottomans was named *qānūn* (after ecclesiastical canon law), in fact, canon law in Islam means exactly the opposite of Catholic canon law. The two functions of Sultanate and Caliphate were separately invested in the same Ottoman ruler, but, as positive legislators, the Ottomans functioned

³ M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); S.N. Eisenstadt, M. Hoexter, and N. Levtzion, eds., *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002); and S.A. Arjomand, "Perso-Indian Statecraft, Greek Political Science and the Muslim Idea of Government," *International Sociology* 16, no.3 (2001).

only as Sultans and, as pointed out by Fazlur Rahman, “the *qānūn*-law was a product of the Sultanate, not the Caliphate.”⁴

The European colonial expansion into “the abode of Islam” and the posterior globalization of the European system of nation-states undermined the viability of all premodern forms of Muslim polities. The political world of Islam disintegrated throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like European Christendom before, Islam also became fragmented and territorialized into nation-states.⁵ The dissolution of the Caliphate following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire found little resistance throughout the Muslim world, particularly in predominantly Muslim countries. With the emergence of various forms of secular nationalism after World War II, it seemed as if the nation were becoming also for Muslim peoples the primary imagined community, replacing the old transnational imagined community of the *ummah*. It is increasingly evident, however, that in the last decades, Islam is being reconstituted as a transnational religious regime and as a global imagined community. The proliferation of transnational Muslim networks of all kinds, transnational migration and the emergence of Muslim diasporas throughout the world, the massive global proportions of the pilgrimage to Mecca, the establishment of global Islamic mass media, the expressions of global solidarity with the Palestinian people and other Muslim causes—all can be viewed as manifestations of the contemporary globalization of Islam.⁶

But unlike the modern reconstitution of the papacy as the core of a deterritorialized transnational Catholic religious regime, the dissolution of the Caliphate has created a void and a still unresolved crisis in the political imaginery of Islam as a transnational religious regime. Three alternative models of organization of Islam and of the global *ummah* are competing on the world stage among Muslim actors.

The predominant model and the one more in accordance with the world system of states is that of an international system of Muslim states in geopolitical competition with other state blocs and with Western hegemony. To a certain extent, this has been the aim of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) since its founding in 1972. Virtually all states with majority Muslim populations now belong to the Conference. No other world religion has such an interstate organization. Yet, the OIC has proven an extremely ineffective and noncohesive organization. Even Samuel Huntington, the scholar who has advanced forcefully the vision of “Islam” as a territorial geopolitical unit in

⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 40.

⁵ James P. Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation-States* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁶ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004); Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001).

conflict with “the West,” admits that the “movement from Islamic consciousness to Islamic cohesion involves two paradoxes.”⁷ First, Islam is divided among competing states vying for hegemony and for global leadership of the Muslim ummah. The list of candidates is long: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Turkey, and so on. But, more importantly, the very concept of a transnational global ummah undermines the legitimacy, or at least the absolute sovereignty, of the nation state. Yet, at least geopolitically, the ummah can be unified only through the leadership of a Muslim core state, functioning as a superpower. For Huntington, “the absence of an Islamic core state is a major contributor to the pervasive internal and external conflicts which characterize Islam. Consciousness without cohesion is a source of weakness to Islam and a source of threat to other civilizations.”⁸ One wonders, however, whether this is a paradox intrinsic to Islam or rather a paradox intrinsic to Huntington’s problematic conception of civilizations as territorial geopolitical units akin to superpowers.

The second model is one of diverse nonstate transnational Muslim groups, the *kilafist*, striving to reconstitute the Caliphate, or a global Muslim polity, incorporating all the historical territories of “*Dar el Islam*,” of which the radical *jihadis* willing to use spectacular terror across state borders are the most prominent, or at least they have attained the greatest global prominence. In terms of numbers, those may be relatively small and rather isolated and loosely organized cells, but through their willingness to openly challenge the hegemony of the Western powers, particularly that of the United States, and through the skillful use of Muslim rhetoric and symbols, they have captured the imagination and the sympathy of many disaffected Muslims throughout the world, particularly in the diasporas of radical Islam.⁹ Although a highly destructive force able to disrupt the international order, such terrorist groups present no real threat to Western hegemony or to the established Muslim states, no more so than did their modern global precursors, the anarchist terrorist groups of the end of the nineteenth century or the left communist factions of the 1960s. On the contrary, by provoking the military response of the only global superpower, they have contributed to the strengthening of global U.S. hegemony. International multilateral intelligence and policing would probably prove more effective against such transnational terror groups than a “global war on terror” that is unable to discriminate against various forms of radical Islam. But the disproportionate military response serves better the imperial goals of

⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 176.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁹ Peter Mandaville, “Sufis and Salafis: The Political Discourse of Transnational Islam,” in *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), and Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 232-325.

the United States as the unchallenged global superpower, while simultaneously feeding constantly the ranks of the global jihādis.

There are some similarities between transnational *jihādism* today and Catholic ultramontanist in the nineteenth century. Both were parallel responses of transnational religious groups to the threats of the modern system of nation-states and the political opportunities of globalization. But Catholic ultramontanist only turned politically violent in conjunction with integralist tendencies aiming to restore Catholic authoritarian monarchism against the liberal state, particularly against republicanism, as in the case of the Carlist wars in Spain or counterrevolutionary Catholic monarchism in France.¹⁰ The Cristero Rebellion in laic post-revolutionary Mexico had a similar character.¹¹ In Spain, those Catholic political movements also assumed explicitly the identity of Christian crusades and in its final stage, in the global political context of the underground radical movements of the 1960s, they even assumed the name of “Guerrilleros de Cristo Rey.” In the 1930s, however, the surviving currents of Catholic antiliberal and antimodernist integralism fed the various movements of Catholic Fascism and authoritarian corporatism throughout Latin Europe and Latin America, searching for a Catholic “Third Way” between bourgeois liberal democracy and godless Bolshevik communism.

Ultimately, however, the liberal currents of Catholic ultramontanist that prospered in Protestant countries and in secular liberal states protecting the religious, civil, and political rights of Catholic groups proved more viable geopolitically and, along with Christian Democracy, prepared the ground for the democratization of Catholic politics after World War II and for the proliferation of transnational Catholic movements of all kinds, which constitute today the interlinking and competing networks of a Catholic pluralist global civil society.¹²

Finally, there is a third model. Although usually overlooked by scholars, journalists, and political observers, the majoritarian currents of transnational Islam today, and the ones likely to have the greatest impact on the future transformation of Islam, are transnational networks and movements of Muslim renewal, equally disaffected from state Islamism and transnational jihādism. They constitute the networks of a loosely organized and pluralistic transnational

¹⁰ Martin Blinkhorn, *Carlism and Crisis in Spain, 1931-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

¹¹ David C. Bailey, *Viva Cristo Rey: The Cristero Rebellion and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1974).

¹² Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Thomas Kselman and Joseph A. Buttigieg, eds., *European Christian Democracy: Historical Legacies and Comparative Perspectives* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003); Scott Mainwaring and Timothy P. Scully, eds., *Christian Democracy in Latin America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Eric O. Hanson, *The Catholic Church in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

ummah, or global Muslim civil society: from the “evangelical” Tablighi Jama’at, a faith movement highly active throughout the Muslim world and in Muslim diasporas, whose annual conferences in India represent the second largest world gathering of Muslims after the *hajj*, and other transnational *dawa* networks, to the neo-Sufist Fethullah Gulen’s educational network, active throughout Turkey, Turkish diasporas and the Turkic republics of Central Asia, and other Sufi brotherhoods such as the Mourids of West Africa who have also expanded their transnational networks into the Muslim diasporas of Europe and North America; from Muslim feminist networks of Sisters in Islam and Women Living Under Muslim Law to the diasporic networks of cosmopolitan Muslim scholars.¹³

Yet, despite the multifaceted varieties of the public forms of modern Islam, the contemporary global discourse on Islam, at least in the West, tends to depict Islam uniformly as an essentially fundamentalist, antimodern, and antidemocratic religion. Secularist assumptions of a homogeneous cosmopolitan secular modernity, which are still dominant throughout Europe and within the social sciences and which tend to characterize every form of public religion resisting privatization and secular differentiation as “fundamentalist,” have been joined with Huntington’s highly influential thesis of “the clash of civilizations” to form a distorted view of global Islam. Not surprisingly, many have viewed the Muslim terrorist attacks since September 11 and the Western military responses as a dramatic confirmation of the civilizational clash between Islam and the West. Such an interpretation of the conflict appears to have found considerable resonance throughout the West as well as throughout the Muslim world.

The similarities between today’s discourse on Islam as a fundamentalist antimodern religion incompatible with democracy and yesterday’s discourse on Catholicism are indeed striking. From the 1830s to the 1960s, anti-Catholic Protestant nativism in America was based on the alleged incompatibility between “Republicanism” and “Romanism.”¹⁴ In his portrayal of Catholics in America, Tocqueville had already tried to refute this thesis, as well as the widely held perception on both sides of the French republican-laicist and monarchist-Catholic divide that Catholicism was incompatible with modern democracy and with individual freedoms. As in the case of Catholicism before, the internal and external debates over the compatibility between Islam and

¹³ Muhammad Khalid Masud, ed., *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama’at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), and M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, eds., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gulen Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ José Casanova, “Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A EU/US Comparison,” in *The New Religious Pluralism and Democracy*, ed. Thomas Banchoff (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006).

democracy and modern individual freedoms is taking place at three separate yet interrelated levels: (a) in debates over the proper articulation of a Muslim ummah in diasporic contexts outside of Dar el Islam; (b) in debates over the democratic legitimacy of Muslim political parties in Turkey and elsewhere, which like their at first equally suspect Catholic counterparts may establish new forms of Muslim Democracy, akin to Christian Democracy; and (c) in debates over the alleged clash of civilizations between Islam and the West at the geopolitical level, with clear parallels with earlier debates on the clash between “Republicanism” and “Romanism.” Under conditions of globalization, all three issues have become ever more entangled, feeding upon the resonance of Huntington’s thesis.

Clash of Civilizations or Parallel *Aggiornamentos*?

Against cosmopolitan, universal theories of a global modernity, Huntington has raised provocatively the argument that democracy and the cultural norms and values upon which it is based, such as liberty, equality, and human rights, may be a particular civilizational achievement of the Christian West and, therefore, not easily transferable to other civilizations or world religions, other than through Western hegemonic imposition or through outright conversion to Western norms and culture. But Huntington’s controversial vision of the impending clash between the Christian democratic West and other civilizations, particularly “Islamic-Confucian states,” has three fundamental flaws:

- (1) Huntington offers an essentialist and a-historical view of civilizations that assumes that the world religions upon which they are based have some unchangeable core essence;
- (2) Huntington conceives of civilizations as territorially bounded geopolitical units, akin to superpowers and nation-states, and
- (3) From a policy perspective, the combination of normative particularism and the presumption of the inevitability of hegemonic power conflicts in the international arena leads him to an unabashed assertion of Western global hegemony that can easily turn the prognosis of the clash of civilizations into a dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy.

Huntington’s own analysis of “the third wave” of democratization can be used to question his essentialist assumptions.¹⁵ Roughly two-thirds of the thirty some countries that have undergone successful transitions to democracy since the mid-1970s have been Catholic. Moreover, Catholic groups played

¹⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1991).

a prominent role in democratic transitions, even in countries where they constituted small minorities, such as South Korea or South Africa. In this respect, it was a Catholic wave not just because the countries where it occurred happened to be Catholic, but because the transformation of Catholicism associated with the *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council was itself an important independent factor in producing the wave.

Had Huntington developed his argument only a few decades earlier, before the Catholic *aggiornamento*, the formulation could possibly have taken the form of the clash of the Protestant secular West against “the Rest,” and Catholic culture could have been easily construed as essentially inimical to democracy. Irrespective of how one judges the old anti-Catholic prejudices, the swift and radical transformation of the political culture of Catholic countries as the result of the official reformulation of the religious teachings of the Catholic Church puts into question the notion of the unchanging core essence of a world religion as dogmatically structured as Catholicism. The premise of an unchanging core essence should even be less valid for other world religions with a less dogmatically structured doctrinal core or with a more pluralistic and contested system of authoritative interpretation of the religious tradition.

The successful democratic transitions in South Korea and Taiwan, in addition to the persistence of democracy in Japan, puts into question the validity of Huntington’s thesis for the Confucian-Buddhist culture area, despite the attempts of political leaders in Singapore to defend a supposedly Asian authoritarian culture against Western cultural imperialism. The same could be said about the persistence of a much-tested democracy in India, despite the hegemonic project of a resurgent Hindu nationalism that challenges the institutions of a secular Indian state which are meant to protect religious pluralism. But it is in relation to Islam that Huntington’s thesis has found the greatest resonance and has provoked the most heated debates.

It is an undeniable fact that the majority of Muslim countries today have authoritarian political regimes and repressive states. Many of those regimes rely on the military and financial support of the United States and other Western powers. Many of them also claim to be “Muslim” states or seek the religious mantle of Islam as a source of political legitimation for the most diverse institutions and political practices. In fact, practically every political movement or project, in power or in opposition, throughout the Muslim world claims to be “Islamic” if not “Islamist.” It is this very fact of the apparently inevitable fusion of religion and politics in Muslim countries, which has led so many external observers and “experts” to attribute a “fundamentalist” essence to Islam that allegedly makes it incompatible with the differentiated structures of modernity and with the privatization of religion supposedly required by liberal democracy.¹⁶

More than the ongoing intellectual debates among Orientalists and “experts” concerning the nature of Islam, it is the very open and contentious contemporary debates among Muslims concerning their own tradition that

raises the question as to what constitutes if not the essential core of Islam as a civilization, certainly its authoritative interpretation and its authentic representation today. But essentialist interpretations of Islam tend to preclude the possibility that contemporary Muslims may find their own models of Muslim agglomerations (they are likely to be plural), which like the Catholic one would offer viable responses attuned both to their religious tradition and to modern requirements.¹⁷

The comparison with Catholicism may be instructive because, like Islam today, it was viewed for a long time as the paradigmatic antimodern fundamentalist religion. Catholicism served as the central focus of the Enlightenment critique of religion. It offered for centuries the most spirited, principled, and seemingly futile resistance to modern processes of secularization and modernization. Even after its official accommodation with secular modernity and after relinquishing its identity as a monopolistic state church, the Catholic Church refuses to become just a private religion, just an individual private belief. It wants to be both modern and public. Indeed, since Vatican II, it has kept a highly public profile throughout the world.

The relevant question, of course, is whether one should attribute the widespread impulse found in the contemporary politics of Muslim countries to establish “Islamic” states to some Islamic essence which Muslims cannot relinquish without also abandoning their religious tradition and their identity; or, alternatively, whether it is the product of modern politics and the modernizing state. I am not in a position to evaluate the competing claims concerning the history of Islam, but since one finds similar “fundamentalist” impulses to symbiotic fusions of religions and politics throughout the history of nation-state formation in the Christian West and today one finds similar “fundamentalist” impulses within Judaism in Israel, within Hinduism in India, and within Buddhism in Sri Lanka, I would be inclined to attribute the common “fundamentalist” impulse to the common context of nation-state formation, rather than to some common symbiotic fusion of religion and politics at the genesis of all these religions which has left an indelible mark in their make-up.¹⁸

I believe that a look at the ongoing contemporary reformulations of the Islamic tradition from the comparative perspective of the Catholic

¹⁶ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Bassam Tibi, *Islam Between Culture and Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 1991); and *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁷ José Casanova, “Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam,” *Social Research* 68, no.4 (Winter 2001).

¹⁸ Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, eds., *Nation and Religion. Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

aggiornamento may be instructive. At the very least, it should serve to “relativize” constructions of a clash between “Islam” and “the West.” The problem, so often reiterated by the critics, is not just that Huntington’s analysis rests on an essentialist conception of Islam, but also that the construction of “the West” on which it is based is no less essentialist. The juxtaposition of Catholicism and Islam shows that the problem lies not only in simplistic depictions of a uniform “fundamentalist” Islam that fail to acknowledge the extraordinary diversity one finds among Muslim societies in the past and in the present. Equally problematic and misleading is the essentialist construction of a modern secular West that fails to recognize Catholic Christianity as an integral part of the past and present of Western modernity. Every incrimination of Islam as a fundamentalist, antimodern, and anti-Western religion could have been directed justifiably against Catholicism not long ago. Moreover, most features of contemporary political Islam that Western observers find rightly so reprehensible, including the terrorist methods and the justification of revolutionary violence as an appropriate instrument in the pursuit of political power, can be found in the not-too-distant past of many Western countries and of many modern, secular movements. Thus, before attributing these reprehensible phenomena all too hastily to Islamic civilization, one should perhaps consider the possibility that global modernity itself somehow generates such practices.

Moreover, in comparison with the clerical, hierarchic, and hierocratic centralized administrative structure of the Catholic Church, the Muslim ummah, at least within the Sunni tradition, has a more consultative, egalitarian, laic, and decentralized structure. The pluralistic and decentralized character of religious authority, which had always been distinctive of traditional Islam, has become even more pronounced in the modern age. Actually, if there is anything on which most observers and analysts of contemporary Islam agree, it is on the fact that the Islamic tradition in the very recent past has undergone an unprecedented process of pluralization and fragmentation of religious authority, comparable to that initiated by the Protestant Reformation. Few would deny that this pluralization and fragmentation of religious authority amounts to a participatory revolution and to a democratization of the religious sphere. But can this often-chaotic ferment be transformed into a force conducive to the democratization of political structures and to the institutionalization of an open and pluralistic civil society made up of “publics” and “associations” based on protected individual freedoms? One should not expect, of course, an unambiguous and uniform answer to this question. Scholarly “experts” and professional “observers” of Islam are engaged in a contentious debate on this issue.¹⁹ For some, as chaotic as it may be, the fragmentation of authority is preparing the ground for democratic pluralism. For others, it just amounts to a violent and destructive “rebellion of the masses.” Ultimately, time will tell. But since many “scholarly” interventions in public affairs actually have practical repercussions and may even have the character of self-fulfilling prophecies, I would rather contribute to wishful thinking in viewing the contemporary

revival as a form of Islamic aggiornamento.

However, there is a crucial difference between the two aggiornamenti. The Catholic transformation had the character of an official, relatively uniform, and swift reform from above that found little contestation from below and could easily be enforced across the Catholic world, generating as a result a remarkable global homogenization of Catholic culture at least among the elites. Islam, by contrast, lacks centralized institutions and administrative structures to define and enforce official doctrines and, therefore, the ongoing Muslim aggiornamenti to modern global realities and predicaments are likely to be plural, with multiple, diverse, and often contradictory outcomes. One should be open to the possibility that the Islamic tradition, its distinctive public discourse, and Muslim practices will inform and shape the type of civil society and the democratic institutions that may emerge in Muslim countries. There are multiple Western modernities, and there will likely be multiple Muslim modernities.²⁰

There is no guarantee, indeed it is unlikely, that movements of Islamic revival or renewal will be uniformly conducive to democratization. What is more certain is that democracy is unlikely to grow and thrive in Muslim countries until political actors who are striving for it are also able to “frame” their discourse in a publicly recognizable Islamic idiom. Calls for the privatization of Islam as a condition for modern democracy in Muslim countries will only produce antidemocratic Islamist responses. By contrast, the public, reflexive elaboration of Islam’s normative traditions in response to modern challenges, political learning experiences, and global discourses has a chance to generate various forms of public civil Islam that may be conducive to democratization. The problem is not that an essentially fundamentalist religious tradition

¹⁹ The literature is vast. As an illustrative sample of relevant texts, cf. Saïd A. Arjomand, “Civil Society and the Rule of Law in the Constitutional Politics of Iran Under Khatami,” *Social Research* 67, no. 2 (Summer 2000); Dale F. Eickelman, “Islam and the Languages of Modernity,” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (Winter 2000); Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, eds., *New Media and the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999); John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996); Robert W. Heffner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1997); Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman, eds., *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); Jenny B. White, *Islamist Modernization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2002); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

²⁰ Nilüfer Göle, “Snapshots of Islamic Modernities,” in *Multiple Modernities*, ed. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002).

prohibits such reflexive elaboration, but rather that modern authoritarian states in Muslim countries, many of which have relied until very recently at least on the military and financial support of the United States and other Western powers, do not allow the open public spaces where such reflection can take place.

Muslim Democracy in Turkey

The contemporary transformation of Muslim politics in Turkey offers perhaps the best illustration of Muslim democratization and the most compelling refutation of Huntington's thesis.²¹ In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington depicts Turkey as the classic and paradigmatic case of a "torn country," that is, a country with a single predominant Muslim culture whose leaders want to shift it to the West.²² Given his essentialist conception of civilization, Huntington considers such a task nearly impossible. Indeed, he argues that Turkey, "having experienced the bad and the good of the West in secularism and democracy," is perhaps the best qualified candidate to become the core state of global Islam.²³ Huntington would apparently welcome such a transformation of Turkey from a secular to a Muslim state, if only to fulfill his own prophecy of the inevitable clash of civilizations. "At some point, Turkey could be ready to give up its frustrating and humiliating role as a beggar pleading for membership in the West and to resume its much more impressive and elevated historical role as the principal Islamic interlocutor and antagonist of the West."²⁴

According to Huntington, at least three requirements must be met for a torn country to redefine successfully its civilizational identity: "First, the political and economic elite of the country has to be generally supportive of and enthusiastic about this move. Second, the public has to be at least willing to acquiesce in the redefinition of identity. Third, the dominant elements in the host civilization, in most cases the West, have to be willing to embrace the convert."²⁵

In the case of Turkey, the first requirement has been given since the 1920s. Building upon the legacy of the Young Turks (1908-1918), Mustafa Kemal, "Father of the Turks," was bent upon begetting a modern Western secular republican Turkish nation-state, based on the principles of positivist secularism that was modeled after French republican laicite, Jacobin statism,

²¹ The following section draws upon the more extensive elaboration in José Casanova, "The Long, Difficult and Tortuous Journey of Turkey into Europe and the Dilemmas of European Civilization," in *Constellations* (forthcoming).

²² Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 138-139, 144-149.

²³ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

and vanguard elitism. But the “six arrows” of Kemalism (republicanism, nationalism, secularism, statism, populism, and reformism), codified in the Fourth Congress of the People’s Republican Party in 1935, at the height of competing authoritarian state ideologies in Europe, could not succeed in producing a Turkish secular homogeneous nation from above. What it did produce was a ruling administrative military-civilian bureaucratic elite with a distinct identity as “*laik* Turks,” separate from ordinary backward Muslim subjects, and the ideology of a national security state with an exclusionary code of violence.²⁶

Ultimately, the project of constructing such a nation-state from above was bound to fail because it was too secular for the Islamists, too Sunni for the Alevi, and too Turkish for the Kurds. A Turkish state in which the collective identities and interests of those groups that constitute the overwhelming majority of the population cannot find public representation cannot possibly be a truly representative democracy, even if it is founded on modern secular republican principles.²⁷ But Muslim Democracy is as possible and viable today in Turkey as Christian Democracy was half a century ago in Western Europe. Secular Europeans, apprehensive of Muslim political parties, or of any other religious political party for that matter, seem to have forgotten that the initial project of a European Union was basically a Christian-Democratic one, sanctioned by the Vatican, at a time of a general religious revival in post-World War II Europe, in the geopolitical context of the Cold War when “the free world” and “Christian civilization” had become synonymous. But this is a forgotten history that secular Europeans, proud of having outgrown a religious past from which they feel liberated, would prefer not to remember. Moreover, practically every continental European country has had religious parties at one time or another. Many of them, particularly the Catholic ones, had dubious democratic credentials until the negative learning experience of Fascism turned them into Christian Democratic parties.

Turkey has been patiently knocking on the door of the European club since 1959, only to be told politely to keep waiting, while watching latecomer after latecomer being invited first in successive waves of accession. Formally, it applied for membership in 1987. But until very recently, there was no chance that Turkey could or actually seemed eager to meet the EU’s stringent economic and political conditions for membership. Only after the landslide victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) in November 2002, have the structural conditions been created to introduce the kind of

²⁶ Karal Envar Ziya, “The Principles of Kemalism,” in *Ataturk, Founder of a Modern State*, ed. Ali Kazancigil and Ergun Özbudun (London: Hurst, 1981).

²⁷ Nilüfer Göle, “Authoritarian Secularism and Islamist Politics: The Case of Turkey,” in *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vol. 2, ed. Augustus Richard Norton (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1996).

constitutional, legal, and democratic reforms that makes EU membership possible. The paradox, therefore, is that only the rise of Muslim Democracy in Turkey has created the conditions for real democratization and authentic Europeanization.²⁸ About Turkey's eagerness to join the EU and willingness to meet the conditions, there can be no doubt now that the AKP government has not only reiterated unambiguously the position of all the previous Turkish "secularist" administrations, but also has proven with deeds its readiness to introduce the required reforms. Turkey's "publics," secularist and Muslim alike, have spoken in unison. The present government is certainly the most representative democratic government of all of Turkey's modern history. A wide consensus has seemingly been reached among the Turkish population, showing that Turkey on the issue of joining Europe and thus "the West" is no longer a "torn country." According to a national survey in February 2005, over 70 percent of respondents said they would vote yes if a referendum were held on Turkey's membership in the European Union, while only 16.2 percent said they would vote no.²⁹

Huntington's second requirement, therefore, has also been met. What is less clear is whether the third requirement will follow, namely whether the Europeans, the political elites as well as ordinary citizens, are willing if not to embrace at least to admit a modern Muslim democratic Turkey into the EU. The first open, if not yet formal, discussions of Turkey's candidacy during the 2002 Copenhagen summit touched a raw nerve among all kinds of European "publics." The widespread debate revealed how much "Islam," with all its distorted representations as "the other" of Western civilization, was the real issue rather than the extent to which Turkey was ready to meet the same stringent economic and political conditions as all other new members. Critics within and outside Turkey still accuse the AKP of Muslim fundamentalism and of undermining Kemalist secularism by bringing their religion into the public sphere, despite their explicit rejection of "Middle Eastern political Islamism." One wonders, who are the real "fundamentalists" here: "Muslims" who want to gain public recognition of their identity and demand the right to mobilize in order to advance their ideal and material interests, while respecting the democratic rules of the game, or "secularists" who view the Muslim veil worn by a duly elected parliamentary representative as a threat to Turkish democracy and as a blasphemous affront against the sacred secularist principles of the Kemalist state.

²⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz, "Islam and Europeanization in Turkish-Muslim Socio-Political Movements," in *Religion in an Expanded Europe*, ed. Peter Katzenstein and Timothy Byrnes (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁹ "Turkish Public Overwhelmingly Backs EU Entry," <http://www.abig.org.tr/en/> (accessed February 11, 2005).

There are those like Bassam Tibi, an influential Syrian-German scholar of Islam and modernity, who argue that the AKP is not to be trusted and that its strategy of democratization and Europeanization is only a subterfuge.³⁰ But the argument is only plausible if one assumes that the AKP's project of joining the European Union, its new discourse of human rights, democracy, civil society, and rule of law, and all the democratic reforms they have introduced are only diversionary tactical moves by "pseudo-democrat" Islamists to reach their real strategic goal of imposing an Islamist *sharia* state. Legal Europeanization, that is, the adaptation of Turkey's constitutional and legal system to European standards, would serve the instrumental purpose of dismantling the secularist Security Council, still controlled by the military as guardians of the Kemalist order, which is the only thing that stands in the way of their conquest of absolute state power. I find such an argument totally implausible. Even if one were to concede that such was the hidden agenda which the Islamists adopted after the experience of the 1997 military coup, it should be evident that such a tactic of legal Europeanization could never lead to the strategic goal of establishing an Islamist state. Parallels with the Fascist democratic road to power in the 1930s, the communist strategies of the 1940s, or the Algerian FIS in the 1990s are simply misplaced. The AKP is using its electoral victory to advance legal and cultural Europeanization in order to meet the conditions to join the European Union. The notion that once they are in the EU they will reveal their true intentions and impose an authoritarian Islamic state, seems to me preposterous.³¹

Officially, Europe's refusal to accept Turkey so far is mainly based on Turkey's deficient human rights record. But there are not too subtle indications that an outwardly secular Europe is still too Christian when it comes to the possibility of imagining a Muslim country as part of the European community. One wonders whether Turkey represents a threat to Western civilization or rather an unwelcome reminder of the barely submerged yet inexpressible and anxiety-ridden "white" European Christian identity. The public debates in Europe over Turkey's admission have shown that Europe is actually the torn country, deeply divided over its cultural identity, unable to answer the question whether European identity, and, therefore, its external and internal boundaries, should be defined by the common heritage of Christianity and Western civilization or by its modern secular values of liberalism, universal

³⁰ Bassam Tibi, "Europeanizing Islam or the Islamization of Europe: Political Democracy vs. Cultural Difference," in Katzenstein and Byrnes, *Religion in an Expanded Europe*.

³¹ In the same volume, Yavuz offers a much more plausible argument, buttressed by convincing sociological empirical evidence of the transformation of the AKP from an Islamist to a Muslim Democratic party, that is akin to earlier transformations of the dubiously democratic Catholic parties of the 1930s into the Christian Democratic parties of the late 1940s and 1950s, the very ones which sponsored the project of the ECC. Hakan Yavuz, "Islam and Europeanization."

human rights, political democracy, and tolerant and inclusive multiculturalism. Publicly, of course, European liberal secular elites cannot share the Pope's definition of European civilization as essentially Christian.³² But they also cannot verbalize the unspoken "cultural" requirements that make the integration of Turkey into Europe such a difficult issue.

The paradox and the quandary for modern secular Europeans, who have shed their traditional historical Christian identities in a rapid and drastic process of secularization that has coincided with the very success of the process of European integration and who, therefore, identify European modernity with secularization, is that they observe with some apprehension the reverse process in Turkey.³³ The more "modern," or at least democratic, Turkish politics become, the more publicly Muslim and less secularist they also tend to become. In its determination to join the EU, Turkey is adamantly staking its claim to be, or its right to become, a fully European country economically and politically, while simultaneously fashioning its own model of Muslim cultural modernity. It is this very claim to be simultaneously a modern European and a culturally Muslim country that baffles European civilizational identities, secular and Christian alike. It contradicts both the definition of a Christian Europe and the definition of a secular Europe. Turkey's claim to European membership becomes an irritant precisely because it forces Europeans to reflexively and openly confront the crisis in their own civilizational identity, at a moment when the EU is already reeling from a series of compounded economic, geopolitical, administrative, fiscal, and legitimation crises.

Muslim Immigrant Diasporas in the West

The specter of millions of Turkish citizens already in Europe but not of Europe, many of them second generation immigrants, caught between an old country they have left behind and their European host societies unable or unwilling to fully assimilate them, only makes the problem the more visible. "Gastarbeiter" can be successfully incorporated economically. They may even gain voting rights, at least on the local level, and prove to be model or at least ordinary citizens. But can they pass the unwritten rules of cultural European membership or are they to remain "strangers," ultimately "Fremdarbeiters"?³⁴ Can the European Union open new conditions for the kind of multiculturalism

³² In his first book published as Pope Benedict XVI, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella crisi delle culture* (Siena: Cantagalli, 2005), but written still as Cardinal Ratzinger, in a brief passage he questions Turkey's EU membership, given its Muslim culture and its lack of "Christian roots." The book is dedicated to a critical reflection on the Enlightenment, secularism, and contemporary European culture.

³³ José Casanova, "Religion, European Secular Identities and European Integration," in *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, ed. Katzenstein and Byrnes.

that its constituent national societies find so difficult to accept? The question of the integration of Turkey into the EU is inevitably intertwined, implicitly if not explicitly, with the question of the failed integration of Muslim immigrants and, in turn, the way in which Europe resolves both questions will determine not only Europe's civilizational identity but also the role of Europe in the emerging global order.

When confronting immigrants in their midst, Europeans rarely reflect upon the fact that, throughout the modern era, European societies have been the primary immigrant-sending region in the world. In the last decades, however, the migration flows have reversed and many Western European societies have become, instead, centers of global immigration. But European societies still have difficulty viewing themselves as permanent immigrant societies or viewing the native second generation as nationals, irrespective of their legal status. They prefer to maintain the illusion that immigration is a temporary phenomenon, that those are "guest workers" who can be sent home or refused entry whenever it is convenient. But unless it is willing to turn itself into "fortress Europe," with heavily policed external borders, and thus belie the self image of cosmopolitan modernity it would like to have, the EU is unlikely to be able to stop completely the constant global flow of refugees and of legal and illegal immigration. Under contemporary conditions of globalization, "fortress Europe" would be economically, geopolitically, and culturally self-defeating. It would turn Europe into a parochial, ethnocentric, and peripheral peninsula of Asia, the position it had before the rise of European hegemony in early modernity.³⁵

But what makes "the immigrant question" particularly thorny in Europe, and inextricably entwined with "the Turkish question," is the fact that, in Europe, immigration and Islam are almost synonymous. The overwhelming majority of immigrants in most European countries, the UK being the main exception, are Muslims and the overwhelming majority of Western European Muslims are immigrants. This entails a superimposition of different dimensions of "otherness" that exacerbates issues of boundaries, accommodation, and incorporation. The immigrant, the religious, the racial, and the socio-economic underprivileged "other" all tend to coincide. Moreover, all those dimensions of "otherness" now become superimposed upon Islam, so that Islam becomes the utterly "other."

³⁴ A controversy has erupted in Germany because Oscar Lafontaine, the left Socialist leader, dislikes the euphemism "Gastarbeiter" (guest worker) and prefers to call immigrant labor "Fremdarbeiter (foreign worker), the term used during the Nazi period.

³⁵ Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Conclusion

After September 11, the global war on terror, and the ever more visible proliferation of global Muslim discourses and networks, as well as of global discourses on Islam, on veiling, and on Islamic fundamentalism, in Europe all those developments have conflated into a panic that can only be characterized as “Islamophobia.” Anti-immigrant xenophobic nativism, the conservative defense of Christian culture and civilization, secularist antireligious prejudices, liberal-feminist critiques of Muslim patriarchal fundamentalism, and the fear of Islamist terrorist networks are being fused indiscriminately throughout Europe into a uniform anti-Muslim discourse which practically precludes the kind of mutual accommodation between immigrant groups and host societies that is necessary for successful immigrant incorporation. The parallels with Protestant-republican anti-Catholic nativism in mid-nineteenth century America are indeed striking. Today’s totalizing discourse on Islam as an essentially antimodern, fundamentalist, illiberal, and undemocratic religion and culture echoes the nineteenth century discourse on Catholicism. What is new and different, however, is the strength of European secular identities.

Interesting sociologically is not so much the fact of progressive and drastic religious decline among the European population since the 1960s, but the fact that this decline is accompanied by a “secularist” self-understanding that interprets the decline as “normal” and “progressive,” and, therefore, as a quasinormative consequence of being a “modern” and “enlightened” European. It is this “secular” identity shared by European elites and ordinary people alike that paradoxically turns “religion” and the barely suppressed Christian European identity into a thorny and perplexing issue when it comes to delimiting the external geographic boundaries and to defining the internal cultural identity of a European Union in the process of being constituted.

Moreover, the European conception of a single universal secular modernity has serious repercussions for conceptions of the emerging global order, for contested definitions of the West and its multiple modernities, and for the failure to recognize the plurality of modern interrelated civilizational dynamics. It is not accidental that the discourse of global secular cosmopolitanism is a paradigmatically European discourse, while the discourses which emerge from America are either evangelical imperial callings to eradicate evil and make the world safe for democracy or realist warnings of a global civilizational clash between the West and the Rest. Neither of the two discourses, however, is conducive to the kind of civilizational dialogues which are required in order to perceive the various Muslim aggiornamentos and to engage creatively the emerging Muslim modernities.