Appropriation and Redemption in Contemporary Western Discourses on Islam in Europe

Luca Mavelli

The aim of this paper is to sketch a line of interpretation of certain political-philosophical discourses on 'Islam in Europe' through the interrelated concepts of *appropriation* and *redemption*. Muslim presence in Europe is generally perceived as 'problematic.' A specific vocabulary, including terms like 'liberal dilemma,' 'defense of freedom,' 'Muslim exceptionalism', and 'specification of acceptable boundaries,'[1] characterizes an academic production which has been particularly stimulated by the emergence of 'crises'[2] (the 'Rushdie Affair,' *l'affaire du foulard,* the French ban on headscarves in schools, and the publication of the 'Danish cartoons,' just to mention those that have hit the front pages of newspapers worldwide).[3] Albeit in different ways, this scholarship has

displayed a certain agreement on the existence of a distinctive European tradition of liberal-secular humanism and on the idea that cultural and religious pluralism should be assessed against the necessity of preserving this tradition. The scope of this essay is to articulate a reflection on the assumptions (and ensuing implications) of this interpretive framework and thus contribute to fill a gap in the burgeoning and variegated literature on Islam in Europe.

This literature, in fact, has been mostly concerned with the question of the transformation of Islam within European settings, namely whether, to what extent, and how European Muslims are undergoing—or *should* undergo—a process of individualization, secularization, and dislocation of traditional religious authority. Such a focus has had the effect of leaving the variable 'Europe' in the relation 'Islam in Europe' relatively under-problematized and of framing the issue almost exclusively in terms of Muslim 'integration into consolidated models of European secularity,' as if such models represented an unsurpassed example of pluralism and neutrality.4 The aim of this paper is to shift the attention from Islam to Europe through an exploration of how the vindication of a distinctive European tradition of liberal-secular humanism is wielded to perpetuate dimensions of self-understanding and projection of differences, which nourish and reproduce the idea of a rift between Islam and Europe.

The argument is that this dynamic is postulated upon an ontological essentialism of the kind expounded by Michel Foucault in his famous essay

'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.'5 In this essay, Foucault lays the foundations of his critical distinction between 'genealogy' and 'traditional history' and warns against the attempts of the latter 'to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities.' He maintains that this search 'assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession … [it] is directed to "that which was already there,"' the image of primordial truth fully adequate to its nature and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity.6 In our case the 'immobile forms' are 'the West' and 'Islam,' which, as Armando Salvatore points out, tend to be conceived as two enclosed, self-sustaining, and mutually exclusive *kulturreligionen*.7 These forms are the primary units of a debate strongly characterized by the problem of contending values, the latter being an expression of 'an original identity.' This essentializing ontology, Foucault contends, conceals a need for origins, a quest for reassurance about one's own tradition, and a desire for a coherent and unitary identity. It expresses the necessity of dispelling the threatening idea that what one imagines as a clear and meaningful line of descent may just be the 'unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers.'8 Within this perspective, 'to essentialize' does not simply mean to construct interpretive frames of references that stabilize, congeal, and deform the Other. Indeed, to essentialize becomes a function of the self in which the will to knowledge cannot be separated from the will to master, which in turn is not independent from the will to define

one's own subjectivity. Thus, following Foucault, the essentializing process can be defined as a cognitive mechanism in which the Other is purposefully constructed on the basis of subjective concerns.9

The construction of Islam on the basis of European concerns is only one dimension of a more complex reality which sees sections of Muslims (living in Europe) performing a similar construction of 'Europe' from the perspective of an Islamic ideal-type or, even more interestingly, identifying with the 'essentialized'—and often stigmatizing—image of Western/European origin. However, an inquiry into this interplay of 'imbalanced essentialisms,'10 although crucial for an understanding of the phenomenon of 'Islam in Europe,' cannot be pursued within the narrow 'European' focus of this paper, concerned as it is with exploring how some contemporary Western academic discourses on Islam conceal a specific Western and European will to identity and distinction. In these discourses, it is argued, essentializing assumptions are enacted through the two interrelated discourses of appropriation and redemption.

Appropriation addresses the need for origins and continuity by framing liberal-secularism as a unique Western achievement. This claim is made either by invoking the Christian roots of liberal-secular arrangements, or by referring to Europe's historical and philosophical tradition and the role it has had in the process of emancipation from religious obscurantism. In this latter case, the modernizing character of liberal-secularism suggests the idea of a system that can be disentangled from a specific Christian

trajectory (thus made post-Christian) in order to deliver equality, freedom, and dignity to those who have not been educated in this tradition. This is the discourse of redemption—it encompasses and transcends the discourse of appropriation by vindicating the possibility, if not the necessity, of spreading the liberating and dignifying properties of Western liberal-secularism to Islam.

In the next two sections I will analyze how discourses of appropriation and redemption are deployed by some prominent intellectuals debating Islam in Europe. The inquiry will be mostly devoted to unravelling the assumptions, implications, and limitations of their interpretive frameworks, sparing for the conclusion some proposals for alternative modes of interpretation. The narrow focus of the investigation, based on a discussion of a limited selection of academic-intellectual discourses, warns against generalizations. The relevance of the positions analyzed does not rest on their alleged hegemony at an academic or societal level. In order to make this case, in fact, it would be necessary to analyze how intellectual discourses are appropriated, transformed, reinterpreted, and disseminated at the level of social agency11—a task beyond the scope of this paper.

Rather, drawing on Armando Salvatore, this paper takes academic-intellectual perspectives on Islam in Europe to be relevant in themselves, because they represent a *legitimizing discourse* of those less theoretically refined, 'sub-intellectual' societal discourses and practices which cast

Muslims as the Other of Europe.12 The legitimizing strength of the intellectuals, 'the stratum represented by the legitimate holders of the keys to sound knowledge and politics,'13 rests on their capacity to create a self-sustaining discursive space from which they can disappear by virtue of the intellectual function they perform, i.e, *theoria*—'the contemplation that enable[s] the philosopher to distinguish the eternal truth of the cosmos from the uncertainty and the fluidity of quotidian life.'15 By considering the academic-intellectual as a legitimizing discourse of 'sub-intellectual' societal discourses and practices, this paper ultimately focuses and elaborates on a very specific dimension of the conditions of existence of the discourse on Muslim Otherness—the space of legitimization granted by some academic-intellectual perspectives.

Appropriation

An interesting articulation of the discourse of appropriation is offered by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. According to Taylor, the question of whether Muslims can effectively separate religious belief and political commitments bears directly on the role and form that secularism should take in modern Western societies.16 Secularism, Taylor maintains, has its roots in Christianity, in the theological 'requirement of distance, of non-coincidence between the Church and the world.'17 This principle has been further developed following the wars of religion when the necessity

of overcoming Christian sectarianism became paramount. The original idea of an ethic of peaceful coexistence based on elements common to all Christian doctrines ('common ground strategy') was quickly superseded by that of an 'independent ethic.'18 The latter, which aimed at transcending confessional allegiances altogether, was based on an appeal to human nature and universalizable principles and had its most notable exponent in Grotius. The idea of an independent ethic was not synonymous with atheism. It demanded, however, that principles not be justified in religious terms.19 Such a secular independent ethic has been crucial in favoring the transition from traditional hierarchical societies, based on intermediate structures of mediation, to the direct-access society of modern nation-states, because it has enabled the transfer of loyalties from the intermediate structures of the family, class, or religious confession to the nation-state.20

These achievements notwithstanding, Taylor considers the form of secularism grounded in an independent ethic to be no longer capable of guaranteeing neutrality in Western societies. The polarization of believers and non-believers and, above all, the growing presence of non-Christians, most notably Muslims, have increasingly changed the meaning of the independent ethic, which has become synonymous with atheism. This of course dissatisfies Christian believers, but it is particularly problematic for Muslims, for whom secularism is an alien tradition.21 However, this argument should not automatically suggest the irreconcilability of Islam and secularism. On the contrary, Taylor argues, a modern form of

secularism is required more and more to avoid the marginalization of Muslims in contemporary Western societies. This mode of secularism cannot be based on an independent ethic, nor can it rest on a common ground strategy given the fundamental diversity of the traditions involved (Christianity and Islam). Taylor envisages the solution in a secularism of 'overlapping consensus' in which the possibility of agreement on some political principles does not demand a parallel consensus on the underlying intuitions of values. Even this perspective needs some refinement in the face of today's diversity. In Taylor's interpretation, Rawls maintains that principles can be agreed to without sharing foundations, but also believes that what can be shared is the rationale for these principles—'a doctrine of political constructivism, reasonable mutual expectations, and just terms of cooperation.'22 For Taylor, this is 'asking too much.'23 In today's diverse societies the best we can aim for is agreement on some general principles, not on foundations, and most likely not on common frameworks.

This brief summary of Taylor's perspective on secularism offers an interesting illustration of how the logics of appropriation contribute to shape his views on the Muslim presence in the West. The idea that secularism is a unique Western achievement is expressed in the identification of a single point of origin, Christian theology, and a single line of development, the wars of religion. These elements are sufficient for Taylor to conclude that secularism is alien to Islam and from that to infer the radical diversity of the two traditions which demands an 'overlapping

consensus' where neither foundation nor common frameworks can be shared but only some general political principles.

This argument is constructed upon an objectionable premise, namely the idea that secularism is uniquely Western because the differentiation of religious and secular spheres is an element of Christian theology. However, the fact that the term secularism has its 'original etymological-historical meaning … within medieval Christendom' does not make the underlying process an exclusive feature of Christianity.24 In fact, although the Qur'an refers to some sort of indivisibility of religion and politics in more than forty passages, historical evidence shows that the two realms started to develop distinct spheres of experience not long after the death of the Prophet.25 Ira Lapidus articulates a detailed analysis of how the claim of the rulers of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750) to exercise political control over aspects of religious life was met with protests and triggered the growing awareness that an autonomous sphere for religious activity and organization was required in order to preserve its sacred, transcendent character.26 This awareness can be observed at an institutional level just three centuries after the birth of Islam. As Lapidus explains,

> [F]rom the middle of the tenth century effective control of the Arab-Muslim empire had passed into the hands of generals, administrators, governors, and local provincial lords; the Caliphs had lost all effective political power. Governments in Islamic lands were henceforth secular regimes—Sultanates—in theory authorized by the Caliphs, but actually

legitimized by the need for public order. Henceforth, Muslim states were fully differentiated political bodies without any intrinsic religious character, though they were officially loyal to Islam and committed to its defense.27

Philip Hitti suggests that the defense of Islam by Muslim states was not dissimilar to the defense of the Christian faith by European emperors.28 Yet, Tamara Sonn highlights the difference between medieval Christendom and Islam in the tolerance granted to religious minorities and in the level of support that religious authority lent to authoritarian and oppressive regimes.29 The millet system (self rule for minority groups) of the Ottoman Empire, although considered by some as not living up to modern liberal standards,30 encompassed a dimension of religious tolerance which was unknown to a Europe scourged by the sectarianism of different Christian confessions. This element, together with the fact that, unlike in Christianity, 'religious authorities were not affiliated with coercive power for the most part,' probably made the separation between religion and politics a less important institutional, philosophical, and ethical concern.31

This argument needs to be considered in relation to the specific sense that secularism acquired in Europe during the Enlightenment, namely freedom *from* belief. This meaning is not at all universal, not even in the West, as can be seen in the United States where secularism's primary meaning is freedom *of* belief.32 These significations are related to the different histories of the two continents, with Europe crucially engaged in

emancipating itself from the coercive and oppressive power of the Church. If one accepts Taylor's argument that a secular independent ethic has been crucial for the transition from traditional hierarchical societies to modern nation-states, one cannot help but notice how Western secular nation-states—and not religious Islamic institutions—became the primary source of oppression of Muslim societies through the process of colonization; how, in other words, if secularism represented for Europe the shifting of violence from religious wars into national and colonial wars,33 it represented for Muslims a symbol of oppression due to its identification with Western nation-states.

Yet, to infer from this a general Muslim antipathy toward secularism—for instance, toward a secular independent ethic, as Taylor asserts34—would be unwarranted. Several studies on Muslim communities in Europe converge around the idea that Muslims are displaying a tendency toward the individualization or privatization of religious belief,35 one of the three dimensions of secularization according to the framework of José Casanova (the other two being the decline of religious beliefs and practices, and the differentiation of the religious and secular spheres).36 Interestingly, Taylor defines secularism only according to the latter dimension, which seems to lead to dynamics of individualization/privatization, hence the secular independent ethic of modern nation-states built on Christian roots. Following Taylor's logic one may then expect a tendency to 'secularize' among Muslims living in Europe, and this is indeed a key feature that seems to emerge from the literature on Western European Islam. But

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Taylor does not seem to take into account this possibility. For him, Muslims belong to a different religious tradition which not only prevents them from undertaking processes of individualization, but also constructs them almost exclusively as religious subjects.

These brief socio-historical snapshots have no aim other than showing how the meaning, evolution, and reception of secularism are dependent on a variety of historical, social, and political circumstances which cannot be reduced to theological arguments. Hence, in a Foucauldian fashion, one might say that there is no historical necessity in Christian theology that has caused the regime of knowledge known as 'secularism' to gain widespread acceptance in Europe,37 but only a succession of historical contingencies that need to be analyzed, dissected, and carefully reconstructed if one wants to understand the implications of this regime for Muslims.38

Following the theoretical framework sketched in the introduction it can be suggested that Taylor's reliance on the classic Orientalist assumption which frames Islam as a cluster of absences39—thus making secularism an exclusive Western appropriation—should not be misread as an interpretive fallacy but as a will to identity and distinction. This will encompasses Taylor's desire to preserve a Christian tradition in a liberal-secular environment and is moderated by his renowned sensibility for the recognition of cultural diversity.40 Accordingly, Taylor's reliance on an understanding of religion as an analytically identifiable category,

characterized by an autonomous essence, is not fortuitous.41 It allows him to satisfy 'the liberal demand in our time that [religion] be kept quite separate from politics, law, and science—spaces in which varieties of power and reason articulate our distinctively modern life,' and at the same time, to claim an unchanged vitality and importance for Christianity (and Islam).42 Yet, his concern for recognition of different cultures leads him to endorse a lighter version of Rawls' paradigm as a way to overcome differences. The final effect is controversial as the very sources of (alleged) contention—Christianity and Islam—are removed from the debate in the public sphere. This is certainly coherent with Taylor's understanding of these two traditions as transhistorical entities, but pays almost no attention to how European countries have achieved agreements on the role of religion in political life (with still harsh confrontations, and thus in a constant dynamic of renegotiation of the respective spheres of influence).43 These agreements, Alfred Stepan remarks, were the result of

> long public arguments and negotiations in which religion was the dominant item on the political agenda. Thus [for instance] in the Netherlands [at the beginning of the 20th century] … religious conflicts [among Catholics, Calvinists, and liberal-secularists] were eventually taken off the political agenda of majority decision-making by a democratic—but not liberal or secular—consociational agreement that allocated funds, spaces, and mutual vetoes to religious communities with competing comprehensive doctrines. Achieving such an agreement normally requires debate within the major religious communities. And proponents of the democratic bargain are often able to win over their fellow believers only by employing

arguments that are not conceptually free-standing but deeply embedded in their own religious community's comprehensive doctrine.44

Taylor's endorsement of Rawls is thus controversial in that it denies Muslims living in the West the possibility to engage in that process of democratic confrontation and conflictual negotiations that has allowed Europe in its very recent past (and not just in the times of the wars of religion) to overcome the conflicts arising between Christian confessions and Christian and secular components. This position may be consistent with Taylor's view, which deems secularism to be an exclusively Western feature, thus making the process of a democratic confrontation impossible if 'Islamic' arguments are to be brought into it. The problem with this perspective is that it suggests a fictionalized and depoliticized image of how different Christian confessions would have overcome their disagreements in more recent times—that is, by virtue of the adoption of an independent ethic, favored by a transfer of loyalties toward the nation-state. This account glosses over the fragmentation which has characterized the Christian world. For instance, as Casanova points out, discourses on Catholicism, which characterized Anglo-Protestant societies in the United States from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, bear a certain resemblance to contemporary discourses on Islam as an illiberal and antimodern religion.45 Similarly, one might argue that some strands of the discourse which juxtapose Europe's unitary Christian character against Islam are relatively recent and crucially linked to the project of European integration and the attempt to promote a specific

European identity.46

Taylor's desire to preserve an original identity for Christianity, and thus for Islam, together with an aspiration for a political system which may accommodate different traditions, leads him to endorse what we may label a 'multiculturalism of necessity.' In this account, culture is the inescapable context of subjectivity but also of government. As culture cannot be transcended, Taylor suggests, liberal-secularism, being an offspring of Western Christianity, must undergo a profound and necessary transformation if it is to make room for Muslims. What happens, though, if we assume that the cultural context may be transcended?

Redemption

Redemption occurs when liberal-secular arrangements, understood as an organic outgrowth of Western Christianity, are deemed to have acquired primacy over the cultural-religious dimension that generated them. This perspective subscribes to a polarized transition from a pre-modern to a modern status whereby the *subject* of a cultural-religious system (for this very reason subject to the practices that govern her life) becomes a liberated agent capable of assessing, questioning, and eventually opposing such a system of rules. In the discourse of redemption, the individual is thus redeemed from her state of submission to the inherited, hence not

consciously embraced, cobweb of cultural-religious prescriptions. Redemption, however, does not rest on a complete rejection of tradition. The primacy of liberal-secular norms over the Christian cultural-religious system from which they originated means that the former has domesticated and privatized the latter (it has become post-Christian), thus making it compatible with the dictates of reason and modern rationality. The unique feature of the discourse of redemption is that it makes possible the preservation of an organic link with tradition and at the same time allows its transcendence. The discourse of redemption subsumes the particularistic discourse of appropriation as it satisfies the Foucauldian need for origins and continuity, but also contains a universal discourse of liberation from the obscurantist aspects of tradition.

In the discourse of redemption, the strength of liberal-secularism does not simply rest on its bearing a universal validity by virtue of being 'the sole political doctrine that can harbor culture and religion without being conquered by them.'47 The strength of liberal-secularism as part of a universal discourse of redemption relies on the alleged fairness of its demands—it does not ask for a rejection of tradition, but only that it be contained within the discipline of liberal-secular norms—and on the moral authority of its proponent, the post-Christian West. The latter, in fact, does not couch its appeal in abstract universal principles, but refers to its concrete experience in the lengthy process of emancipation from the grip of cultural-religious oppression. By overlooking the possibility that this experience of religious oppression might not have been shared (not, at

least, in the same way) by other traditions such as Islam, the discourse of redemption asserts the moral authority of the post-Christian Western redeemer as universal. The post-Christian West has redeemed itself by gaining ascendancy over its *kulturreligion* through the adoption of liberal-secular norms and, as such, it can now redeem Muslims who are still subjected to it.

This perspective requires the construction of the subject of redemption as lacking agency as someone 'whom culture has' as opposed to a self-image of mastery and control of one's own tradition.48 What type of social imaginary does this perspective enact? A vivid representation is offered by Mahmood Mamdani, for whom the rhetoric of the 'war on terror,' with its claims for the need to distinguish 'good Muslims' from 'bad Muslims,' rests on an implicit understanding of Muslims as unable to make culture, hence only capable of conforming to it. Muslim culture, Mamdani observes,

> seems to have no history, no politics and no debates. It seems to have petrified in a lifeless custom. Even more, [Muslims] seem incapable of transforming their culture, the way they seem incapable of growing their own food. *The implication is that their salvation lies, as always, in philanthropy, in being saved from the outside.*49

In order to bring salvation, the post-Christian West endows itself with the possibility of inflicting suffering by inscribing it in a discourse of redemption enacted in the name of a doctrine, liberal-secularism, which

as the ultimate redemptive truth, promises deliverance from oppression.50 Although evidence of this argument is usually provided in relation to the 'war on terror,' strains of redemptive discourse in which suffering is alluded to and endowed with redemptive properties can be found in several arguments on Muslims in the West. Thus Brian Barry, in discussing the 'Rushdie Affair,' states that

> few people have ever been converted to or from a religion by a process of "examining beliefs critically." Religious fanaticism is whipped up by non-rational means, and the only way in which it is ever likely to be counteracted is by making people ashamed of it. If Christianity has in the past fifty years finally become compatible with civility (at least in most of Western Europe), that is the long-term consequence of an assault on its pretensions that got under way seriously in the eighteenth century. Gibbon employed the stiletto, while Voltaire resorted to the rapier. But in both cases the core of their deflationary strategy was mocking, ridiculing, and lampooning. Voltaire, however, lived openly at Ferney and died in old age of natural causes, even though religious zealots would have had no difficulty in assassinating him. The fate of Rushdie, forced to live in hiding with a price on his head, unfortunately suggests that the Islamic equivalent of Voltaire may still be some time off.51

Barry vindicates the duty of liberal-secularism to redeem Islam by taking as a model the higher moral ground of Western Europe, which has domesticated Christianity, making it 'compatible with civility.' Muslim redemption, however, cannot be achieved by reasoned discussion, as the

irrationality of the pre-moderns makes any attempt at argumentation worthless. Hence the 'mocking, ridiculing, and lampooning' of Islam by Rushdie should be welcomed for its redemptive properties (and therefore should also be employed against Muslims who protested the publication of the *Satanic Verses*). In this framework, the question as to whether the *Satanic Verses* may have been offensive for Muslims to the point of causing suffering becomes irrelevant because Muslims have already been framed as moved by passionate, pre-modern, non-rational feelings. In such a scenario, suffering loses its original violence because it is self-inflicted. If Muslims had a rational, privatized, and liberal-secular relationship with their religion, they would not be suffering.

The discourse of redemption converts suffering into non-rational emotionality by virtue of its depoliticizing strength. As Wendy Brown points out, depoliticizing 'involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its historical emergence and from the recognition of the powers that produce and contour it,' with the effect that 'an ontological naturalness or essentialism almost inevitably takes up in our understanding or explanations.'52 The crucial implication of this essentialism/depoliticization is that 'the field of political battle and political transformation is replaced with an agenda of behavioral, attitudinal and emotional practices.'53 Hence, the protests of Muslims are not instances of an effective anguish. They are the convulsions, the spasms of pre-modern manipulation or false consciousness from which the discourse of redemption promises to deliver them. Thus Brendan

O'Leary, in a recent debate on the Danish Cartoons published in *International Migration*,54 states that he feels sorry for the ordinary Muslims who were manipulated by the Danish Islamists, but the very fact that that they were manipulated leads him to question whether people were truly offended.55

For O'Leary, 'one should be vigorous in protecting liberalism and secularism in their established heartland,' hence 'no liberal principle should be sold now that might be regretted later.'56 This line of thought is shared by another participant in the debate, Randall Hansen, who, echoing Barry, vindicates the right to mock and ridicule religion, arguing that Muslims 'have to decide whether they wish to live in a liberal democratic society,'57 and concludes that, in the face of increasing immigration, liberal-secularism, a 'unique product of the West,' should be strengthened rather than questioned.58 In Hansen's view, the ultimate redemptive truth of Western liberal-secularism can dispense its liberating properties as long as it remains untouched, which means not only that Muslims do not have the chance to negotiate the terms of their integration,59 but more importantly that they have no contribution to offer to Europe's democratic development.

This line of argument, which casts Muslims as the ultimate Other of European liberal-secular modernity, rests on a liberal-secular reductionism which, by equating 'freedom to rights, and ... equality to equal standing before the law, ... eliminates from view many sources of subordination,

marginalization, and inequality that organize liberal democratic societies and fashion their subjects.'60 This reductionism can assume a legalistic form. Thus, for instance, O'Leary states that 'to publish mockery of Muhammad in an outlet not noted for its Muslim consumers was well within the newspaper's rights (and indeed public manners) both under Danish law and under the European Convention. Liberal rights also permit public relations stunts.'61 Yet liberal reductionism can also emerge as a comparative argument. A well-known case is that of British historian David Irving who, in the days of the row over the Danish cartoons, was on trial (and later sentenced to a jail term) in Austria on charges of Holocaust denial. This event has led some commentators to raise the question of whether Europe was using double standards by forbidding the freedom of expression of those who deny the Holocaust and allowing the free speech of those who offend and ridicule the Prophet. A very telling reply to this argument has come from French philosopher André Glucksmann who, in an article entitled 'Separating Truth and Belief,' has recalled how 'the distinction between fact and belief is at the heart of Western thought.'62 This distinction, he claims, should not be questioned, because it is through the very recognition of the cruelty of the past, specifically the 'Nazi abominations,' that Europe has been capable of progress toward democracy. Mixing facts and interpretation (religious beliefs), hence putting on the same level those who deny the Holocaust and those who poke fun at Islam, risks heralding us into either fanaticism or nihilism.63

The thread that links these arguments, from Barry to Glucksmann, is only

formally Islam in the European setting. Even a cursory look shows how the discussion revolves around the self-understanding of Europe, in a will to identity and distinction. Liberal-secular Europe becomes the redeemer; it has suffered under the sway of religion but has ultimately succeeded in democratizing Christianity, making of it a source of moral value. It has overcome the horrors of the Second World War by keeping alive its memory with a system of knowledge which distinguishes between facts and beliefs. It has developed a system of legal protection beyond that of individual states. As a counterpoint, Muslims are those to be redeemed. They fall victim to their uncontrolled passions; they are subject to manipulation, unable to distinguish between facts and beliefs.

The discourse of redemption makes liberal-secular Europe an inescapable yardstick for every analysis of Islam in Europe. The effect is that Islam becomes a projection of Europe, incapable of an autonomous life, unable to express an original identity and impossible to evaluate without reference to the European standard. This dynamic can be observed also in 'sympathetic' analysis of a more socio-anthropological character. In the previous section, I mentioned that several scholars consider the 'individualization of religious beliefs as the major development in Europe's Muslim communities.'64 A strong proponent of this argument is Jocelyne Cesari who contends that the arrival of Muslims in the pluralistic context of Europe is leading to the emergence of the 'Muslim individual,' thus engendering a transformation which has not yet reached Muslim countries.65 Hence, she suggests, the 'social adaptation process of Muslim

minority groups has placed Islam within the three interrelated paradigms of secularization, individualization, and privatization, which have until recently been distinctive characteristics of Western societies.'66 The sociological analysis may be well-grounded, but one cannot help but notice how, even in this case, Muslims are being redeemed by embracing features which are deemed exclusively Western, most notably the process of subjectivity formation which, in a classic Orientalist formulation, is deemed an exclusive prerogative of Western Christianity.67 As in the previous examples, Europe is once again taken as the normative yardstick, the measure of every civilizing process.68 From this perspective, the divide between Europe and Islam is transformed into a divide between 'Muslim beliefs and practices in Europe and those in the migrants' countries of origin.'69 The discourse of redemption redraws the circle of otherness and reiterates the distinction between 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims,' leaving a glimpse of hope for those who, having ventured to Europe, will not resist its civilizing strength, allowing the individual to emerge and soar over the suffocating 'bad Islam.'

Conclusion

This paper has examined the discourses of appropriation and redemption as categories that may account for some contemporary Western/European attitudes toward Islam in Europe. What has emerged from this brief analysis is how certain intellectual-academic inquiries into Islam in the West/Europe may conceal a Western/European will to identity and distinction. In a Foucauldian reading this tendency would express a demand for ontological reassurance about one's own being, tradition, and identity, hence the will to stabilize, by means of appropriation and redemption, the purity, originality, and continuity of liberal-secular forms as generated by a Christian, now post-Christian, Europe. As we have observed, both appropriation and redemption rest on an essentializing ontology—the former grounded in a notion of communal differences, the latter based on the depoliticization of differences. Despite this similarity and despite the fact that the discourse of redemption tends to subsume that of appropriation, the two discourses have very different implications for the way they conceptualize Islam and the relationship between non-Muslims and Muslims.

In the discourse of appropriation, the Muslim subject is simply unknown. The only information available is that s/he is non-secular and non-Christian, but these features, which mark the identity of the Western subject, are not a reason, at least not in Taylor's approach, to claim that Muslims should adjust to non-Muslims without reciprocity.70 Taylor looks for mediation, for a mutually respectful accommodation which may do justice to the differences at stake. The result is a painful 'multiculturalism

of necessity,' which raises doubts as to how it could ever work. Why should an overlapping consensus be sought if the differences are as radical as Taylor claims? On what grounds could one justify a form of civic coexistence between perspectives that can never meet? Why should we live together? The problem with Taylor's account is that it establishes radical diversities as ontological units of analysis and then tries to mediate between them. As the brief analysis developed in this article exposes, the employment of a universal understanding of secularism as an exclusive feature of Christian Europe overlooks how similar practices may have been experienced in the 'Muslim world'—a world whose history, philosophy, and social processes have not developed in uncontaminated isolation from those of 'the West' (and vice-versa).

This argument does not simply suggest the presence of similarities and mutual influences between the two worlds but points to the existence and consolidation of what Salvatore identifies as a specific space of transnational communication between 'the West' and 'Islam.'71 This space has been mostly filled with Orientalist assumptions which, at least from Max Weber onwards, have been endowed with a social-scientific status.72 When proponents of a discourse of redemption reduce events like the 'Rushdie affair' or the 'Danish cartoons' to a question of freedom of expression versus the legal protection of a minority (and maybe conclude with the call for a Muslim Enlightenment), they are not simply essentializing Muslims in a typical Orientalist fashion or restating their will to identity and distinction as Westerners and Europeans. What they are

doing is dehistoricizing and depoliticizing the event under scrutiny by not considering at all the possibility that their judgment and their perspectives on such controversies, rather than being the pure outcome of liberated rational minds, may reflect a deeply rooted tradition of Orientalism, which continues to survive unabated in the historical and political space of transnational communication between 'the West' and 'Islam.'

One does not have to share the Foucauldian assumption of pervasiveness of discourse to entertain this argument. As aptly argued by Norbert Elias, the Cartesian presumption of a knowledge contained by a totally independent individual, a knowledge that is reinvented from scratch with every newborn, is part of the myth of emancipation of modernity.73 Our knowledge is already part of a stream of knowledge which provides epistemological frameworks. This does not mean that we lack the capacity to challenge deep-seated assumptions. However, what is required for this enterprise is 'detachment.'74 Contrary to what conventional wisdom may suggest, the traditional problem of social science—the fact that the agent of investigation is also the object of investigation—has not improved with time. On the contrary, while human beings have acquired increasing control over natural events and are thus able to experience greater detachment in the exploration of natural phenomena, the very same empowerment of human beings has lead to greater uncertainty in the social world and in the capacity to understand and control human-made tragedies such as wars, violence, ethnic cleansing, and terrorism.75 According to Elias, the level of involvement in social science has increased,

and increasing involvement has led to a shortening of the time perspective. A concern for the present makes us unable to discern that what we experience today is the result of long-term processes, and the need for reassurance about our identity makes us unable to break with conventional chains of interpretation. The discourse of redemption can thus be considered an illustration of this Eliasian intuition. In a self-deceptive reversal and communal projection, Muslims become the 'involved,' those who succumb to uncontrolled passions, whereas the Western liberal-secular observer is the 'detached,' intent on skimming the good from the bad in the interest of a more civilized society.

Elias's argument confronts us with the possibility that challenging the discourses of appropriation and redemption may demand detachment. This means considering the possibility that assumptions of moral superiority may be linked to higher power ratios,76 that there may be no self-contained and self-sufficient line of historical development, that the discourse of uncontaminated origins may just be a myth, and that the rules which a system has produced may be best understood as a common heritage and as such, they can be seized, replaced, and exposed in their conflictual meaning by those considered to be Other.77 Challenging the discourses of appropriation and redemption may indeed require a considerable effort as it demands coming to terms with the very emotionality, or the 'involvement,' that the discourse of modernity has striven to portray as a remnant of the past.

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References

1 These terms are taken from a debate on the Danish cartoons controversy published in 2006 in *International Migration*. See Tariq Modood, Randan Hansell, Erik Bleich, Brendan O'Leary, and Joseph Carens, 'The Danish Cartoon Affair: Free Speech, Racism, Islamism, and Integration,' *International Migration* 44:5 (2006): 3-62. Some of the arguments presented in this debate will be discussed later in the paper.

2 On the preference of applied political philosophy to focus on 'hard cases' and the related hermeneutical implications see Adrian Favell, 'Multicultureel Burgerschap in Theorie en Pratijk: Empirische Analyzes in de Toegepaste Politieke Filosofie', *Krisis: Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 72 (1998):67-85. (Translated as 'Multicultural Citizenship in Theory and Practice: Empirical Case Studies in Applied Political Philosophy.' English language version available at http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/favell/KRISIS.htm); see also Adrian Favell and Tariq Modood, 'The Philosophy of Multiculturalism: The Theory and Practice of Normative Political Theory', in *Contemporary Political Thought: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Alan Finlayson, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

3 According to Will Kymlicka, the 'Rushdie Affair,' 'perhaps more than any other single event … led people in the West to think carefully about the nature of "multiculturalism," and the extent to which the claims of minority cultures can or should be accommodated within a liberal-democratic regime.' Will Kymlicka, *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19.

4 Armando Salvatore, 'Power and Authority within European Secularity: From the

Enlightenment Critique of Religion to the Contemporary Presence of Islam,' *The Muslim World* 96:5 (2006): 543-61, 556.

5 Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

6 Ibid., 78.

7 Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity* (Reading, England: Ithaca, 1997), 71.

8 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' 82.

9 Salvatore, *Discourse of Modernity*, 72.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., xix.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., xiv.

14 Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

15 Talal Asad, 'Responses,' in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*, ed. David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 216.

16 Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition,' in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 62.

17 Charles Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism,' in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32; See also Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition,' 62.

18 Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism,' 33.

19 Ibid., 34.

20 Ibid., 38-48.

21 Ibid., 37.

22 Ibid., 51.

23 Ibid.

24 José Casanova, 'Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,' *The Hedgehog Review* 8:1-2 (2006): 7-22, 8.

25 Dale F. Eickelman and James P. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 46.

26 Ira M. Lapidus, 'The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6:4 (1975): 363-85.

27 Ibid., 364.

28 Cited in Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 47.

29 Tamara Sonn, 'Islam and Modernity: Are They Compatible?' in *Modernisation, Democracy, and Islam*, ed. Shireen Hunter and Huma Malik (London: Praeger, 2005).

30 Will Kymlicka, 'Two Modes of Pluralism and Tolerance,' in *Toleration*, ed. David Heyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

31 Tariq Ramadan cited in Sonn, *Islam and Modernity*, 77.

32 Grace Davie, 'Believing Without Belonging: Just How Secular is Europe?' (Interview at the Pew Forum's Biannual Faith Angle Conference on Religion, Politics, and Public Life, Key West, Fla., December 5, 2005, http://pewforum.org/events/?EventID=97); see also Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2002).

33 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.

34 Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism,' 37.

35 See the review essay by Frank Peter, 'Individualization and Religious Authority in Western European Islam,' *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 17:1 (2006): 105-18.

36 Casanova, 'Rethinking Secularization,' 7.

37 On the notion of secularism as a regime of knowledge see José Casanova, 'Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration,' in *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, ed. Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

38 And thus, for instance, among these historical 'contingencies,' the role of colonialism in blurring the importance of a conceptualization of the West and Islam as independent historical trajectories should not be overlooked.

39 Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 23.

40 See Charles Taylor, 'The Rushdie Controversy,' *Public Culture* 2:1 (1989): 118-22; see also Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition.'

41 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 28.

42 Ibid.

43 Alfred Stepan, 'Religion, Democracy, and the "Twin Tolerations,"' *Journal of Democracy* 11:4 (2000): 37-57, 45.

44 Ibid.

45 José Casanova, 'Catholic and Muslim Politics in Comparative Perspective,' *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 1:2 (2005): 89-108.

46 Luca Mavelli, 'Islam and European Integration: Re-enforcing or Overcoming the Divide?' (Paper presented at the conference 'Religion and Politics in the Construction of the EU,' London, June 16, 2007; see also Casanova, 'Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration.'

47 Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 23.

48 Ibid., 166.

49 Mahmood Mamdani, 'Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism,' *American Anthropologist* 104:3 (2002): 766-75, 767 (emphasis added).

50 Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 59.

51 Brian M. Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 31-32.

52 Brown, 15.

53 Ibid., 16.

54 Modood et al., 'The Danish Cartoon Affair,' 3-62.

55 Brendan O'Leary, 'Liberalism, Multiculturalism, Danish Cartoons, Islamist Fraud, and the Rights of the Ungodly,' *International Migration* 44:5 (2006): 22-33.

56 Ibid., 23.

57 Randall Hansen, 'The Danish Cartoon Controversy: A Defense of Liberal Freedom,' *International Migration* 44:5 (2006): 7-16.

58 Randall Hansen, 'Free Speech, Liberalism, and Integration: A Reply to Bleich and Carens,' *International Migration* 44:5 (2006): 42-51.

59 Erik Bleich, 'On Democratic Integration and Free Speech: Response to Tariq Modood and Randall Hansen,' *International Migration* 44:5 (2006): 17-22.

60 Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 16-17.

61 O'Leary, 'Liberalism, Multiculturalism, Danish Cartoons, Islamist Fraud, and the Rights of the Ungodly,' 25.

62 André Glucksmann, 'Separating Truth and Belief,' *Le Monde*, March 3, 2006 (English version available online, http://www.signandsight.com/features/640.html).

63 Ibid.

64 Peter, 'Individualization and Religious Authority,' 105.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Salvatore, *Discourse of Modernity*, 73.

68 My argument here bears some similarities to that of Armando Salvatore. He argues that 'the widely shared fear of essentialising the "other" among scholars of Islam has led to a tendency pre-emptively to normalize it, pointing out that Muslims are capable of integration into European societies, if only exposed to the normal mechanisms of social solidarity and discipline that are essential to European society or, in other words, as long as they are not exposed to extra-European forms of militancy or the rejection of democratic values. This approach also shows that the fear of essentialising Islam produces an essentialisation of Europe's socio-political "normality"'. Armando Salvatore, 'Making Public Space: Opportunities and Limits of Collective Action Among Muslims in Europe,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30:5 (2004): 1013-31, 1022. However, whereas for Salvatore the assumption of European 'normality' comes from the fear of essentializing Islam, in my account it is the original assumption of European normality which drives European attitudes toward Islam. A 'positive' attitude based on the claim that Muslims are Europeanizing and a 'negative' attitude which stigmatize Muslims for not being European enough (not liberal and secular enough) are only variations of the same logic which reifies the moral and normative centrality of Europe.

69 Peter, 'Individualization and Religious Authority,' 70.

70 Discourses of appropriation which discount the element of reciprocity can be found in Larry Siedentop, *Democracy in Europe* (London: Penguin Books, 2001); David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); and Michael Walzer, 'Comment—The Politics of Recognition,' in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

71 Salvatore, *Discourse of Modernity*, 67-79.

72 Ibid., 97-112. This space, to be sure, has also been filled with 'Occidentalist' assumptions, with Islam and the West engaged in 'opposing essentialisms in an imbalanced game.' (Salvatore, *Discourse of Modernity*, 67). There are, however, important differences to be made. Oriental Occidentalism cannot be considered a mirror image of Western Orientalism because, due to power asymmetry ('the material power that Europe had acquired and exercised upon Arab Muslim territories since the beginning of the [19th] century'), 'the

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Orient' did not have the same capacity for elevating Occidentalism to the level of systemic and standardized intellectual practice (Salvatore, *Discourse of Modernity*, 75). A compelling question that follows—although beyond the scope of this essay—is whether Occidentalism should be considered an endogenous development of Islamic societies or a derivative reaction to Western Orientalism. For a very interesting discussion see Salvatore, *Discourse of Modernity*, 75 ff.

[73] Norbert Elias, *Involvement and Detachment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Norbert Elias, 'A Theoretical Essay on Established and Outsider Relations,' in *The Established and the Outsiders*, 2nd Ed.(London: Sage, 1994).

[77] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.'