Secularism Matters European Muslims and European Politics

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Over the last decade, my Dutch neighbourhood has seen its Badr mosque flourishing. On Fridays, Dutch Muslims, some in djellabas, gather outside before passing through the main entrance for prayers, while Dutch Muslimas, all veiled, are taking the side doors. On Sundays, Dutch children queue up for Quran classes. These encounters are not exceptional; everywhere in the European Union, we are experiencing public manifestations of Islamic monotheism. Like Jewish and Christian monotheisms, Islamic monotheism can historically be seen as a zeal system that condensated into scriptural-oriented socio-religious practices (SLOTERDIJK 2013). Social-religious practices are the public manifestations of the zeal system. As such, they externalize inner consciousness and piety in outer configurations of religion by inducing variable institutional and discursive fields that make different kinds of knowledge, action, and desire possible (ASSAD 2003, 217). Why bother about their presence?

In blurring the delicate line between the logic of private and the logic of public, socio-religious practices of European Muslims testify to Rosi Braidotti's analysis of the post-secular turn in view of a revival of the debate on the relationship between religion and politics (BRAIDOTTI 2008). In this article, I take the position that critically understanding the post-secular turn in public manifestations of Islamic monotheism requires redefining secularism. Only a robust notion of non-cultural secularism (BIGRAMI 2014) will provide insight in the intricate relationship between socio-religious practices of European Muslims and politics. I am going to value non-cultural secularism, amongst other things, not only because it permits Europeans to angrily question anti-integration involvements of ultra-orthodox European Muslims in European societies, but also because it entitles ultra-orthodox European Muslims to be opposed to what they quite understandably term the libertarian fabric of these societies, provided that their ultra-orthodox socio-religious practices are not contrary to the fundamental rights and other constitutions of liberal democracy. Whether these fundamentals pertain to public manifestations of Islamic monotheism, will be discussed in due course.

To grasp the intricacies of the relationship between socio-religious practices of European Muslims and politics in Europe, I first consider socio-religious practices of European Muslims in terms of religious group synthesis that appear to be incompatible with a majoritarian cultural legitimization of European nation-states. In this context, I will indicate that, for a sociological majority of nation-state populists, Europeanness boils down to Europe's Judeo-Christian roots. Before exploring in more depth what this means for socio-religious practices of European Muslims, I will clarify, by extension, the contrast between cultural and democratic legitimizations of the nation-state, so as to highlight the importance of the notion of non-cultural secularism in a culturally plural society that accords with the fundamental rights and other constitutional commitments of liberal democracy. Whereas references to Judeo-Christian roots deny European Muslims the legal space to deploy their socio-religious practices, this is basis of non-cultural secularism eventually sees that both supporters and despisers of socio-religious practices are to be tolerated within the bounds of liberal democracy.

Let me start, then, with a closer inspection of socio-religious practices of European Muslims. From a critical standpoint, socio- religious practices are instances of inter-subjectivization of actual concerns. Even in individualistic orientations in what is mostly superficially understood as 'belief', they act as catalysts to set off differentiated trains of socialities that thrive on bonding. This phenomenon can be typified as religious group synthesis. It is yet important to notice that within socio-religious practices, as in other social ensembles, individuals not only have different experiences of what group synthesis means for them personally, but also shared interests that overlap in intersecting clusters (CRENSHAW 1994). In socio-religious practices, there are middle-class and working-class women, black and white, Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Surinam, mothers and singletons, sisters and daughters, heterosexual and lesbian, to take some distinctions between women with overlapping implications for being members of a group. So while it is important to be vigilant against the essentialization of collective categories (RATTANSI 2007, 114-8), the persistently public expressiveness of socio-religious practices adds to the effectiveness of religious group synthesis in terms of bonding. This last stipulation is a crucial element in my argument. For in Europe, socio-religious practices of European Muslims are particularly at stake when religious group synthesis is being

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scrutinized as practices of bonding that are said to be strange to Europeanness.

Today, European Muslims are sharing socio-religious practices that many Europeans are willing to consider anything but European. Public manifestations of Islamic group synthesis noticeably feature in the assemblage of peculiarities, demarcations, tendencies, and tensions, that presently condition cultural diversity in Europe (CASANOVA 2009). Cultural diversity already stands for different kinds of socio-religious practices that fuel heated debates about the ostensibly evident character of Europeanness. It is the persistently public expressiveness of socio-religious practices that makes them culturally disputed (FERRARI AND PASTORELLI 2012). There are numerous European university teachers who strongly doubt the Europeanness of European students observing Islamic dietary habits in European university cafeterias. There are numerous European art school students who strongly doubt the Europeanness of European art school teachers observing Islamic dress codes in European art school studios.

Muslim or not, most European students and teachers live in nation-states that foster a society in which all citizens will have to feel at home (DUYVENDAK 2011). Home ground localism accounts for a cultural legitimization of the nation-state; a process that has been intensified in the tumult of the so-called refugee-crisis (WIKE ET AL., 2016). The nation-state is culturalized by a dominant ethnie as coined by Smith. (SMITH 2009, 27). A dominant ethnie is the sociological majority of nation-state populists that is masquerading its majoritarian interests at home – historical claims, civic language, white male privileges – as universalism. In Europe's nation-states, majoritarian interests are recognized, accommodated, and supported by specific government decisions on housing, education, law, taxation, internal boundaries, public holidays and nation-state symbolism. Across Europe, however, majoritarian interests are passed off as universalism in a transnational identity construction comprising cultured consensus about the authentication of Europe's Europeanness; what Europe's dominant ethnics are most willing to advocate today, after all, are Europe's Judeo-Christian roots. Although the European Union Parliament, in 2003, did not include Europe's Judeo-Christian roots in the draft text of the European Constitution, debates reflected almost unanimous sympathy to the cause, either as an impetus to caring for strangers, or as bulwark against Islam. Both stances are exclusionary, as I will point out further below, when I shall set up an interpretative confrontation with Europe's allegedly Judeo-Christian roots. Here it must already be stressed that speaking of 'Judeo-Christian roots' indirectly refers to highly questionable vistas of Europe's past. There are urgent reasons not to boast all too gleefully on 'Judeo-Christian roots' in the grim light of age-old Christian anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in European history (POLIAKOV, 1955-77).

Having said that, I first have to return now in more detail to the dominant ethnie that demands that 'we all' internalize its majoritarian interests. The sociological majority thus uses its prerogative of definition in order to impose what they proclaim to be the cultural legitimization of the nation-state. Cultural legitimization is almost

generally accorded a positive valence in all the nation-states in the EU. It is vocally exalted across the political spectrum in a wide repertoire of populist phraseology, especially when election times are coming up. The cultural legitimization of the European nation-state is obliging: to integrate into the nation-state coincides with being bound to integrate into mainstream culture by paying tribute to the cultured consensus of the dominant ethnie (SCHINKEL AND SCHROVER 2014). A cultured consensus about integrating into the nation-state, to name just one (not completely trivial) example, is prone to reject socio-religious practices that refrained from direct association with nation-state symbolism in official celebrations for the Vienna Congress Bicentennial in 2015. As a consequence, the dominant ethnie increasingly sees European Muslims' religious group synthesis as an unsurmountable obstacle to being unconditionally acknowledged as co-citizens who share the nationality of 'their' nation-state.

HAVING ONLY RELATIVELY RECENTLY COUNTED ON DIVIDING HUMANITY INTO EMPIRES AND COLONIES, EUROPE'S NATION-STATES ARE NOW CONSIDERABLY BEING WEAKENED BY THE FORCES OF GLOBALISATION

The cultural legitimization of the European nation-state, rooted in the political nationalisms of the nineteenth century in the aftermath of the 1814-5 Vienna Congress, has been aptly described by Will Kymlica (2001) as the establishment of national societies that condition common belonging. Having only relatively recently counted on dividing humanity into empires and colonies, though, Europe's nation-states are now considerably being weakened by the forces of globalisation. If Arjun Appadurai's prognostications prove to be correct, the nation-state has entered an acute crisis; one only needs to look closely at the variety of what have emerged as diasporic spheres to realize that in Europe, too, nation-states face the transpiring of a postnational world (APPADURAI 1996, 22). In a later paragraph, I will suggest that a postnational world might be a world in which everyone can be with everybody on non-exclusionary terms. Here I want to stipulate that the diminution of the European nation-state amply amounts to what Dipesh Chakrabarti has analysed as the postcolonial provincialization of Europe's Europeanness (CHAKRABARTI 2007). I hold that the dominant ethnie's cultural legitimization of the European nation-state is a brazen attempt to repudiate these signs. Because the nation-state's culture is being endangered, a normative project is formulated in defining and protecting the majoritarian interests of the sociological majority that must prevail by all ways.

Majoritarian interests are salvaged in defining a cultural sphere of common belonging versus a sphere of others by means of exclusion, hostility, hate movements, and, above all, the struggle against the fiercest and most intrepid enemies that have lodged themselves in the deepest pores of the nation-state, forming a kind of cyst that would destroy the nation-state's most fertile promises from within. The problem, in this sense, is how to separate the nation-state from that which gnaws at it without harming its very body. Thus, Europe's nation-states are now being drawn into a fervent desire for cultural surveillance. Hence the growing authoritarianism in stressing the social order as a cultural infrastructure of ethnic-supremacy. In the face of ethnic-supremacy, the public distinctiveness of Islamic group synthesis inevitably leads up to cultural friction, for it openly challenges triumphalist vistas of integration and contention within the

citizen. In other words, civic communality and political entity are being merged into a polity that operates as nation-state culture. Within the framework of this article, this polity can basically be seen as a constellation of people that the dominant ethnic is organizing as a fully-fledged society in the nation state, while politics refers to the actions or activities the dominant ethnic uses in order to ensure that its power is exercised as ethnic-supremacy in the polity. Rather than the political citizen, the politics of the nation-state-polity thus engages the cultural citizen in the vigorous pursuit of a mythical lost unity of a 'great society' that might be regained as a homogeneous safeguard against the irreducible heterogeneity of the globalising world's diasporic spheres. This concern about mixture and motley-ness reveals a dream of a hegemonic project for the sociological majority of the polity. It thrives on segregation. As segregation is diametrically opposed to a culturally plural society that accords with the fundamental rights and other constitutional commitments of liberal democracy, I find it utterly appropriate to shed a bit more light on the politics that can make for a polity, so that the contrast between cultural and democratic legitimizations will turn out even considerably sharper.

First and foremost, it is important to remember that politics designates not solely a modus operandi for exercising cultural dominance. It is also a template for the democratic legitimization of representational self-government in the nation-state; European liberal democracies must count for its constitutionality. So far, however, no compelling argument has been made that politics inherently entails democratic constitutions, deliberation, participation, rights, universality, or even equality. Examples are abundant. They range from Plato to Žižek, or, come to that, from Aristotle to Agamben. I restrict myself to two archetypical items that are significant for my objectives. In Plato's **Republic**, firstly, politics involves only an elite; and in spite of the fact that Plato fully recognized and harshly condemned aristocratic degeneration, his stance on politics in classical Athens culminated in extremely intellectual expressions of an increasing elitist position towards a people that he held to be ignorant and incompetent, a rabble subject to the blandishments of demagogues (WOOD 1978). For Plato, democracy is plainly a corruption of essentials, resulting from epistemological obfuscation. Ergo: a philosopher-king. For Aristotle, secondly, things are slightly more complicated. In the famous section 1281b of his **Politics** (ARISTOTLE/SH 1894), Aristotle estimates democracy by treasuring the *kuria* (sovereignty) of the *ekklèsia* (assembly). In the less famous yet equally vital section 1279a, however, sovereign power —*kurion*— hovers between 'constitution' and 'government'. Thanks to Giorgio Agamben (2012, 2-3), I notice that already in this founding text of European liberal democracy, politics is wavering between constitutional fundamentals and governmental management. I cannot enter here into more detailed textual exegesis, but it does seem obvious to me that the latter meaning prevails in contemporary ethnic-supremacy, where governmental management is carried out by cultural dominance.

Historically, all democracies have incessantly featured occluded substrates against which they forcefully expounded to legitimize themselves in governmental

Visitors entering Dutch Parliament debates on Burqa ban, 11th November 2016. Photo Bart Maat

nation-state. Socio-religious practices of European Muslims are the strains of disquieting differences that come from ethnic minority groups in the midst of mainly white male European dominant ethnies. Articulations of Islamic group synthesis not only disclaim the culturalization of the nation-state that accounts for majoritarian interests in the name of Europe's Europeanness. In doing so, they also uncover the nation-state that closes them out.

The nation-state that closes socio-religious practices of European Muslims out is a cultural artefact that the dominant ethnie fosters as an imagined community (ANDERSON 1991). Imagined communities persist because they hold out the prospect of coping with collective concerns that cannot otherwise be handled by individuals acting alone. Being the imagined community of the dominant ethnic, the nation-state suggests that it will bring relieve in all the confusion about ethnic minority groups manifesting themselves in the persistently public expressiveness of socio-religious practices that makes them disquieting. Communality is the telling point here: a dominant ethnic only occurs in communality. More exactly, it is the very regimentation of communality. To the extent that a dominant ethnic entails a communality that is civic, culture becomes the litmus test for being civilized; and that is why, to this day, in the imagined communities of social majorities, culture is the obvious legitimization of the nation-state. On

this basis, socio-religious practices of European Muslims are liable to disqualification from nation-state culture by a dominant ethnic that considers public manifestations of Islamic monotheism to be at variance with the civic communality of the imagined community. Cultural diversity from this viewpoint is disruptive, an upset of status quo normality, which must somehow be governed so that the mainstream culture can function undisturbed by any threat of difference from the inside. This is a strong motive for the new religious intolerance Martha Nussbaum, in her ethics of politics (NUSSBAUM 2012), is detecting in Europe.

Here my argument is reaching the point where I must contrast cultural with democratic legitimizations of the nation-state, so as to highlight later below the importance of the notion of non-cultural secularism in a culturally plural society that accords with the fundamental rights and other constitutional commitments of liberal democracy. I have shown that, although European Muslims are fully entitled to live in European nation-states, European Muslims share the persistently public expressiveness of socio-religious practices find themselves plunged into an endless racket of signs and gestures, symbols and tokens, delivered with increasing obstinacy like a series of continual reprimands, because the dominant ethnic considers its cultural legitimation of the nation-state to be the requisite of a participatory kind of communality for the civic benefit of every

management by cultural dominance —whether barbarians, slaves, natives, women, the poor, people of colour, or ethnicities. It is well known that Athenian democracy itself benefitted a male minority of its inhabitants, while failing to include women as well as slaves. Moreover, as Wendy Brown has stipulated, democracy's white, masculine, and colonial representatives have permitted and perpetuated democracy's hierarchies, exclusions, and repressions across the entirety of democracy's cultural regime (BROWN 2012, 52). Democratic fairness amongst fellow citizens still does not rule out the possibility of unfairness towards refugees and immigrants (RAMADAN 2011, 54). This does not attest that the notion of democracy needs to be invalidated; what needs to be invalidated is the seizure of the notion of democracy by democracy's self-appointed representatives.

European recent history saw the emergence of democracy's white, masculine, and colonial representatives in the guise of an a priori free subject establishing democracy as the only legitimate political form. Feminists in particular have analyzed how the discourse that links masculine democracy with muscular fraternity is not merely metaphorical (YOUNG 1989, 253). Under this banner democracy promoted and promised the liberty of the whole human being within the equality of all human beings (SIEDENTOP 2014). The a priori free subject is the authority of the democrat who makes democracy's legitimacy culturally incontestable by all means. In a colossal process of inversion of the political by the cultural, the democrat invokes culture so as to proclaim democracy's raison d'être. For him, political equality and cultural sameness are identical. Citizenship for everyone? Then everyone the same qua citizen. Since his conjectures clearly concern the maintenance of a polity in which a dominant ethnie hold sway as democracy's officials, everyone else is basically from elsewhere. The known polity of these officials —in our case: European nation-states— is not the polity of everyone (BADIOU 2006). Now that we are witnessing the perseverance of democracy's officials in a wide repertoire of populist phraseology across the political spectrum in the EU, we can easily see that the danger for democracy lies in the cultural legitimization of the nation-state that keeps the dominant ethnie in a fenced enclosure where its majoritarian interests can only be reinforced in a permanent devaluation of the fundamentals of liberal democracy.

Religious freedoms are highly illustrative of these fundamentals. They permit European Muslims everywhere in the EU to participate in socio-religious practices that are the public manifestations of Islamic monotheism. Therefore, a basic set of religious freedoms is to be upheld within a liberal framework that enshrines fundamental rights and constitutional commitments, as it is most stringently advocated by John Rawls (2005) and Charles Taylor (2007). Once this is recognized, attention can be paid to the justice of minority rights claims (KYMLICKA 1995, 108). As a result, while individuals are free to conform to religious group synthesis for themselves, and to try to persuade others to act accordingly, it does not allow the group to restrict the basic civil liberties of its members in the name of particular socio-religious practices. Further, it is up to the individuals themselves to decide how they view practicing their religion. For the pursuit of practices

TOLERANCE IS A DEMOCRATIC MEANS TO SETTLE CONFLICTS ON ACCOUNT OF NON-CULTURAL SECULARISM

that are valued for religious sakes, freedom of conscience is a precondition. For that reason, too, the nation-state must succeed in relegating cultural differences to a democratic polity that involves jurisdiction and political institutions. Such a polity, as a civil constellation or body, is inevitably pluralistic, offering space for different socio-religious practices. This diversity is yet balanced and constrained by the juridico-institutional cohesion that is characteristic of liberal democracy. (KYMLICKA 2002, 34).

Under these conditions, different ways of life can be tolerated. The boundaries of toleration are delineated in the non-cultural stipulation of secularism I referred to as the core subject of this article. In a culturally plural society, non-cultural secularism requires a free excercise of religious group synthesis except when socio-religious practices are inconsistent with the fundamental rights and other constitutional commitments of liberal democracy. I therefore resolutely contest the idea that tolerance is an intellectual charity of the high-ups, as Tariq Ramadan has put it forward (RAMADAN 2011, 39). In my view, tolerance is a democratic means to settle conflicts on account of non-cultural secularism. In the case of conflicting interests, e.g. involving gender equality or free speech, there is an ordering in which the democratic ideals of the polity are placed first by virtue of law. It must be explicitly stressed that the ideals of the polity are democratic, not cultural. A defence of the democratic ideals of the polity, then, does not necessarily include an obligation to share or respect a culture consensus. Even if people do not share or respect, then religious difference does

not necessarily turn into mutual ignorance or hatred. Laws are meant not just to make coexistence between people with different socio-religious practices possible, they are also meant to make the vigorous pursuit of those practices allowable, as far as they are not inconsistent with the democratic ideals of the polity.

As I pointed out earlier in this article, cultured consensus about the authentication of Europe's Europeanness offers quite another picture. In the authentication of Europe's Europeanness, the democratic ideals of the polity are outweighed by Europe's supposedly Judeo-Christian roots. I already indicated that speaking of 'Europe's Judeo-Christian roots' indirectly refers to highly questionable vistas of Europe's past. It yet makes sense to critically relate Europe's supposedly Judeo-Christian roots to Europe's supposedly Europeanness, because such an approach can offer us insights that might play havoc with the conventional classifications of cultural binaries. It is the interrelatedness of dominant ethnic and majoritarian culture that is presently leading up to the denunciation of Islam as a generic menace to Europeanness, while practicing a collective identity that would be detrimental to its Judeo-Christian roots. Europe's Judeo-Christian roots are propagated in populist discourses that lay out a pattern of imperial culture that makes imaginable, even natural orientalising images of Muslims as a herd requiring controlling, radically other, different from European civilization (SAID 1993). This construction of Islam may simply talk of diversity, but it is clearly discriminatory nonetheless. Martha Nussbaum therefore rightly insists on sound principles that we ought to uphold in the area of socio-religious group practices. (NUSSBAUM 2012, 244). Again, the non-cultural stipulation of secularism fulfils the requirements. To the extent it takes a stance vis-à-vis religion, non-cultural secularism comes down to the democratic realm of the polity, as I just indicated, rather than a cultural regime that insists on redirection of either personal belief or any range of religious group synthesis in dress codes or dietary habits or, for that matter, mosque-going. Thus, in itself, non-cultural secularism is a sound principle, in that it contrasts sharply with the formulation of a cultured consensus demanding that all participate for the same cultural reason in pursuance of Europe's Judeo-Christian roots.

Europe's Judeo-Christian roots are nowhere stronger acclaimed than via the work of the influential Jewish-French thinker Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas' theo-philosophy is a suggestive search for traces of transcendency in terms of an ethical dignity. Traces can be detected on others' faces that appeal to us unconditionally but powerless. (<u>LEVINAS 1971, 77</u>). They are appealing because, for all their powerlessness, they beseech us not to seize the others' otherness, that is, according to Levinas, not to violate their ethical dignity. What is important here is not only to realize that others' otherness exhibits sentimental helplessness and submissiveness, but also that, for their ethical dignity, others' faces are indebted to something supplementary other manifesting itself in them. For what we are encountering in them is an epiphany of the indefinite – which is Levinas' idiosyncratic mode of indicating a divine agent whose oneness the scriptures consider the epitome of otherness. Others, then, owe their otherness to one Other. They open up the locus of the fundamental Judeo-Christian experience of the human essence grounded in a traumatic encounter of one Other, and of this divine Other qualifying them as enigmatic stakeholders of humanity (<u>ŽIŽEK 2001, 106-9</u>). Only insofar we acknowledge that otherness presents itself in traces of transcendence, others' faces do what one Other has made them fit for: to summon mankind to living up to universal ethical dignity (<u>LEVINAS 1971, 175</u>).

It is this unshakable self-evidence of theo-philosophy, with its insatiable drive to being accepted, that makes it impossible to acknowledge the radically disruptive effects of otherness once it has fossilized into Europe's Judeo-Christian roots. What was radical other settles into radical convention; minority positions become enfranchised by a supplementary understanding of otherness in a *punctum divinum* outside the world. The alternative for this plainly patronizing approach is far more complex, I am afraid, but it is the only one, I think, compatible with the hybrid nature of contemporary societies, as it hinges on a more considered judgement of otherness according to the politico-philosophical axioms of an ontology of the present (<u>NANCY 2000</u>). From that perspective, a supplementary understanding of otherness is at odds with a postnational world that is singularly plural and plurally singular, a world in which everyone can be with everybody, everyone each time being singular, and everyone each time singularly sharing the same possibility of being that none of them can claim to be exclusively the world's essence. In other words, sharing the world is an understanding that all the people share understanding all the people's world.

TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IS PROCESSED IN MODALITIES OF EXCLUSION THAT ARE VOICED IN FEVERISH PHANTASMAGORIAS OF 'THE ENEMY'

Otherness is therefore to be sought beyond a theo-philosophical articulation of ethical dignity. It implies a recognition of others that need not internalize a set of maxims, that mainstream pundits perceive as Europe's indispensably cultural essentials that are the openly imperative character of that which must be read as the universal constitution of otherness. Universality breaks down the moment we realize that the world has no supplement; it is indefinitely the world in and for itself. Ethical dignity, by contrast, designates a being-together of existences in the name of one Other, which, in terms of cultured consensus, has become a Judeo-Christian point of reference for Europeanness tout court. Within these limits, a defence of one's way of life necessarily includes ethical culturalism in which all sides are to share or respect the imagined communities of social majorities. Beyond these limits, a realm of questions crops up that point to a non-referential belonging, that is, an unconditional communality (Agamben 1990) of humans who co-belong without any representable condition of being obliged to paying tribute to a theo-philosophical articulation of an ethical dignity that is rooted in a Judeo-Christian master narrative.

I now can explore in more depth what Europe's Judeo-Christian roots mean for socio-religious practices of European Muslims, while simultaneously highlighting the importance of the notion of non-cultural secularism. As a socio-religious practice, Islam deals with most distant, ever elusive and pertinently evasive factors, such as God, omnipotence, sin, bliss, purity, salvation and damnation, that are all propelling Muslims into strategies of togetherness. Those who are closest to their socio-religious practices, their Judeo-Christian mirror-image, are by contrast their greatest cultural adversaries. In the Judeo-Christian master narrative, social cohesion is projected in times past, an era when all citizens basically were sharing the same set of beliefs, norms and traditions. This nostalgic concept Oion of culture is directed especially against Islam. Although there are many lenient devotees in scriptural-oriented monotheisms who show great tolerance for each other, the political force that does not reduce Muslims to second-rang citizens and which allows them the legal space to deploy their religious group synthesis are the non-cultural secularists who protect their critics as well: their only true allies are those who, in accordance with the freedom of expression, allow their despisers the legal space to reprint the Muhammad caricatures (<u>ŽIŽEK 2016, 27</u>).

The building of mosques, the call to prayer, dress codes, gender inequality, anti-integration pronouncements by ultra-orthodox imams and Islam-inspired extremism are all popular subjects that media decry as *Fremdkörper* in Europe. Especially where Europe is conceptualized as the stockroom for transnational Judeo-Christian identity, islamophobia sets the tone (<u>MODOOD 2013, 41</u>). The transnational identity formation is processed in modalities of exclusion that are voiced in feverish phantasmagorias of 'the enemy'. Islamophobia is tinged with racialization (<u>RATTANSI 2007, 111-3</u>), since Judeo-Christian identification is liable to shade off into support for European nation-states as cultural communities of whites. Colour, that is, eventually trumps religion. In Europe, racialization is fed by a backlash against cultural diversity in which the positions of left and right mirror when Judeo-Christian motifs are ventilated in populist phraseology across the political spectrum.

Against the Islamophobic racialization of Islam, two points must be stressed. First, cultural critics of Islamic group synthesis are ignoring the democratic predisposition of non-cultural secularism at the very moment when many of democracy's fundamentals —egalitarianism, fundamental rights— can serve as a weapon against an unconstitutional usurpation of public space by socio-religious practices. A religious ban on pork shall be without prejudice to the fifteen best places for a pulled pork in Europe. Second, there is nothing in non-cultural secularism that presses an attack on religion as a generality; it only focuses on the compatibility between socio-religious practices and the fundamentals of liberal democracy. Since jihad-terrorism, female genital mutilation, and honour killings are blatant violations of the democratic ideals of the polity, these socio-religious practices will be banned not because they are foreign to Europeanness, but because they are against criminal law. By reason of non-cultural secularism, however, the building of mosques, the call to prayer, dress codes, and anti-integration pronouncements by ultra-orthodox imams will be tolerated as socio-religious practices that condition present-day cultural diversity in Europe. If group synthesis imposes the burqa by violence, it is that violence that ought to be prosecuted. Otherwise, it falls in the same category of being culturally obliged by socio-religious practices to wearing garments like hats, yarmulkes, gloves, veils, djellabas or suits (NUSSBAUM 2012, 125-6).

To recap briefly my main argument, non-cultural secularism has its relevance only in context; as indicated above, it is a stance to be taken about religion. What a stipulation of non-cultural secularism makes sharply visible is the freedom of establishing meaningful collectivities in social-religious practices that run against a cultural majority capable of acts of elision and domination. To some, religious group synthesis might be an indispensable way of making life bearable. To others, the persistence of socio-religious practices may be less malleable than strategies of cultural management suggest. Religious group synthesis can yet not be dismissed as if it were some denim cut that is no longer in fashion. Even in most individualistic orientations in what is most superficially understood as 'belief', religion comprises instances of intersubjectivization of actual concerns that still shape and are shaped by knowledge, experience, and compassion. In that sense, the protean Islamic concept of togetherness —umma— can be interpreted as an ecumene that makes itself felt in religious group synthesis at local, translocal, and global levels (SALVATORE 2016, 10). In Islamic ecumene, actual concerns are co-conditioned by colonial subjugation, multinational exploitation, immoral embargos, racializing attitudes towards Muslim migrants in the EU, and, added to that, miseries in Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, just to mention the most poignant conflict zones. It is the recurrence of these things that may give European Muslims the stamina to steadfastly distinguish themselves in socio-religious practices from those whom they deem to be the hypocritical stakeholders of cultural Europeanness (RAMADAN 2009).

Now once again, in conclusion: why bother about their presence? Whatever the implications of being personally committed to Muslim group synthesis for any single European citizen would be, they have one thing in common: every personal commitment pertains to the persistent expressiveness of socio-religious practices within the bounds of the democratic polities of all European citizens. So yes, public manifestations of socio-religious practices are due to the same non-cultural secularism that grants the cultural despisers of Islamic group synthesis a legal room to castigate Muslims for sharing socio-religious practices in public. But no, cultural criticism against stigmatizing garments is no legal ground for telling a Dutch Muslima in burqa to refrain from persisting in the expressiveness of religious group synthesis —even if her personal commitment to Islam involves her compliance with what she readily considers to be exemplary of Muslim dress codes amidst a crowd of Christmas shoppers on main street Coolsingel, in front of the Rotterdam town hall, where local authorities are at loggerheads over ever stricter regularizations of public manifestations of Islamic group synthesis. ●

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