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RELIGION, POLITICS AND GENDER EQUALITY

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Problem and Justification

Religion continues to have a public dimension, and from the point of view of women's rights to equality, there is much at stake in how religion and politics intertwine. Research on gender, politics and society cannot therefore systematically ignore the public dimensions of modern religions. The task of social scientists is to develop analytical and normative criteria to differentiate the various forms of public religion and their social and political consequences.[1] This project asks whether there are distinct modes of insertion of religion into politics in different settings (or *varieties* of the religion-politics nexus). It is particularly concerned with the effects on gender equality[2] of this mixing of religion and politics, and how women as actors, both individually and collectively, engage in this arena to reinforce, contest and reinvent hegemonic norms, actions and representations.

The prediction that secularism would sweep the world has been confounded in recent years as religion has left the place assigned to it (by theories of modernity) in the "private sphere" and thrust itself into the public arena of moral and political contestation. Four seemingly unrelated, yet almost simultaneously unfolding developments, are often identified as signifiers of this shift: the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran; the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland (1970s-1980s); the role of Catholicism in the political conflicts of Latin America; and the public re-emergence of Protestant groups and organizations (such as the "Moral Majority") in the U.S.[3] In view of more recent developments – whether in India where a resurgent project of Hindu nationalism has repeatedly challenged the institutions of a secular Indian state, or in the United States where the Republican administration maintains close ties with Christian groups and forces, or in the Muslim world where Islamist movements and political parties of diverse orientations have registered significant electoral gains (in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey) – modernist reports of religion's demise seem highly premature.[4]

The initial question that has to be posed is whether religion was ever relegated to the "private sphere", as secularization theories claim—even in Western European countries which are supposed to be highly secular societies, marked by the progressive retreat of religion from public life—let alone in other country contexts? A different narrative of modernity highlights the ways in which religious ideas have continued to be maintained and enforced in apparently secularized states. A pertinent example is the role that religious ideas and religious political actors (such as Christian Democratic parties) have played in shaping the welfare regimes of different European countries. Christian Democratic welfare regimes are characterised by few publicly provided care services; a male-breadwinner bias in both tax and transfer systems; and a tendency to devolve authority over delivery of social policy to families and voluntary associations (based on the Catholic principle of subsidiarity). This regime

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[1] Casanova, Jose. 1994. "Introduction." In J. Casanova, **Public Religions in the Modern World.** The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London .

[2] For the purposes of this proposal, gender equality is understood broadly to embrace equality in access to resources and decision-making, bodily integrity and freedom from violence.

[3] Casanova, 1994, *op. cit*.

[4] Hefner, Robert W. 2001. "Public Islam and the problem of democratisation." **Sociology of Religion** 62(4).

type is often contrasted with the Social Democratic variety that funds and delivers care services, and encourages women's entry into the paid work force through tax and transfer systems.[5] Another illustration of the "*reinvention*" (rather than *retreat*) of religion in the public sphere is the way in which religion has become conflated with morality to form the bedrock of state laws and regulations. In the particular case of the United States, for example, it is argued that "the dominant framework for morality is not simply 'religious' or even 'Christian,' but is specifically Protestant"; Protestantism supplies the moral foundation of laws pertaining to sexuality (sodomy laws, for example).[6]

Some observers, including many women's rights activists, see incompatibilities between democracy, human rights and gender equality, on the one hand, and a world in which religion is privileged as the dominant structure through which society is organized. Such concerns seem justified in view of the crimes committed—in the name of religion—by regimes such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, the theocratic state in Iran, or the anti-Muslim militant Hindutva groups in India. In the not too distant past in Europe likewise alliances between political nationalism and religious authoritarianism produced many regressive measures against women – in Ireland[7] for example during the 1920s and 1930s, or in Spain during the first Francoist period (between late 1930s and late 1950s).[8]

In contrast, others have argued that religion (at its best) can act as a significant counterweight to the otherwise hegemonic institutions of the state and the market, revitalising public debate on their moral underpinnings and their social outcomes.[9] The role of liberation theology in Latin America and the Catholic Church in Poland during the Communist regime, provide two recent instances when the church aligned itself with democratic forces to oppose the authoritarian tendencies of the modern state. Likewise in the United States, progressive movements for African American civil rights were grounded in the Black Church, and movements for economic justice in the Catholic worker movement, not to mention the Quaker movements on behalf of abolition and against war.[10] Such movements, their histories and achievements, "should make clear that the entry of religion into politics and public life is not in and of itself conservative."[11]

Research on developing countries has indeed acknowledged the importance of religion in people's daily lives. For women in particular religion can provide access to a world of meanings that they can interpret and dwell on, to help transcend the

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[5] Kersbergen, Kees van. 1995. **Social Capitalism: A Study of Christian Democracy and the Welfare State.** Routledge, London.

[6] Jakobsen, Janet R. and Ann Pellegrini. 2003. **Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance.** New York University Press, New York and London, p. 22.

[7] Galligan, Yvonne and Nuala Ryan. 2001. "Implementing the Beijing commitments in Ireland." In Jane H. Bayes and Nayereh Tohidi (eds.) **Globalization, Gender and Religion: The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts.** Palgrave, New York.

[8] Valiente, Celia. 2001. "Implementing women's rights in Spain." In Jane H. Bayes and Nayereh Tohidi (eds.) **Globalization, Gender and Religion: The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts**. Palgrave, New York.

[9] Casanova *op.cit*. Chapters 4 and 5

[10] Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *op.cit*. p.12.

[11] *Ibid.*

immediate and closed world of limited experience. To take a controversial example, ethnographic research on the conservative Hindutva movement suggests that the appeal of this movement to particular groups of women, often high-caste middle-class housewives, is grounded in creating spaces beyond the confines of family and kinship where they can interact, and in weaving them into a "different and larger political fabric".[12] For the purposes of this research it is important to ask what the nature and implications of this larger political fabric are. Does it enhance gender equality (in access to resources and decision-making) and bring hitherto homebound women to reclaim public spaces and acquire a public identity, in an absolute or even relative sense? These are the elements that are often seen to constitute women's "empowerment". Important as these are, research in this area also needs to pose a second set of questions: is the appeal to women grounded in a non-discriminatory vision of society that critiques social hierarchies? Or is it one that fosters and naturalises discrimination (on the basis of gender, religion, class, race, ethnicity or other identities) through paternalistic and authoritarian politics?

What are the social and political implications of religion assuming ever more prominent and contested public and political roles? If Islamist, Hindu or Christian political parties rise to power, will they respect the rights of women, religious minorities, and the right *not* to be religious? Are they likely to contribute to the creation of more inclusive societies that respect the principles of universalism and equality while acknowledging cultural difference? Or are they more likely to foster discrimination by turning religion into the only basis of people's identity while erasing the cross-cutting cleavages that are the prerequisite for a pluralistic and democratic society? What about the risks and dangers of a traditionalist backlash or a fundamentalist project of restoration for women's rights? How are different strands of women's movements positioning themselves vis-à-vis other political actors in these contexts in defence of women's rights?[13] Are they able to articulate their gender interests, even while they organize in pursuit of broader goals? Have they been able to overcome their differences (ideological, political, and strategic) and collaborate over specific issues at specific junctures? Is there any learning and cross-fertilization between secular women's groups and those that identify with particular religious worldviews?

Locating the Project

The state, religion and gender equality
Gender provides an important lens for analysing the nexus between religion and politics, because women (their roles, deportment, dress code, physical mobility) and the family have often symbolised the modernist aspirations of secularist elites, as well as being markers of cultural "authenticity" for political actors and movements who define their platforms in religious terms.

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[12] Sarkar, Tanika. 1991. "The woman as communal subject: Rashtrasevika Samiti and Ram Janmabhoomi Movement." **Economic and Political Weekly**. August 31, p.2060.
[13] The plural form "movements" is used here advisedly to highlight the heterogeneous nature of women's movements.

While there may have been little research or discussion of the ways in which "church-state" relations affect the rights of all women in the liberal Western democracies,[14] the relation between religion and women's subordination has received considerable attention from scholars and activists in developing country contexts, particularly the Muslim world. Some of the work on Islam and women has come out of the Western Orientalist tradition, with its ahistorical and ethnocentric depictions of Muslim societies. An ahistorical approach is also shared by some gender analysts—both Muslim feminists attempting a progressive reading of the holy texts,[15] and critics who see Islam as intrinsically patriarchal and against women's rights.[16] This impasse, however, has been broken by comparative and historical analyses of women's positions in Muslim societies, which are grounded in a detailed examination of the political projects of contemporary states and their transformations.[17]

It is clear from these historical analyses that in the process of establishing nation states and forging new notions of citizenship, modern states have had to constantly search for new legitimising ideologies and power bases in their respective societies. "The ways in which women are represented in political discourse, the degree of formal emancipation they are able to achieve, the modalities of their participation in economic life and the nature of the social movements through which they are able to articulate their gender interests are intimately linked to state-building processes and are responsive to their transformations".[18]

Projects of modernization and nation-building by post-independent states often included interventionist measures to reform family legislation, as well as efforts to reach women through more general education, employment and population control policies. For a variety of reasons, however, the transformative potential of such measures remained limited.[19] First, modernist and "secular" pretensions notwithstanding, few states have been willing to risk their political survival by radically interfering in matters of the family, marriage and personal law which are widely seen as the domain of religious and traditional authorities and where religious and customary precepts (the latter often giving women even fewer rights than the former) continue to hold sway.[20]

Second, the drive for modernization (in the 1950s and 1960s), to which "women's emancipation" was appended, was often driven by authoritarian states and in contexts where few autonomous spaces were allowed where different constituencies of women could represent their interests and debate policies. On the contrary, "women's emancipation" from above was often accompanied by a heavy-handed approach to independent women's organizations (where they existed) and the setting up of state-

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[14] Stopler, Gila. 2005. "The liberal bind: The conflict between women's rights and patriarchal religion in the liberal state." **Social Theory and Practice**, Vol.31, No.2.

[15] Al-Sadawi, Nawal. 1982. "Women and Islam." In Azizah al-Hibri (ed.) **Women and Islam.** Pergamon Press, Oxford.

[16] Sabbah, Fatna Ait 1984. **Women in the Muslim Unconscious.** Pergamon Press, New York.

[17] Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1991. (ed.) **Women, Islam and the State**. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

[18] Kandiyoti, Deniz "Introduction", in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *op.cit.*, pp.2-3.

[19] Kandiyoti, Deniz "Introduction", in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *op.cit.*

[20] Jalal, Ayesha. 1991. "The convenience of subservience: Women and the state in Pakistan." In Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) **Women, Islam and the State**. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

sponsored equivalents that tended to be docile "wings" of the ruling State/Party.[21] In the context of Cold War politics, this had the unfortunate outcome of associating both modernity and "women's emancipation" with an "alien", often Western, and imperialist project—which has obvious parallels with the colonial era.

Third, the drive for industrialization and capitalist transformation very often failed to create for vast sections of the population, especially for the majority of women in rural and poor urban settings, sources of employment/income, welfare and security which were independent of family, kinship and community. Primary solidarities of family, kinship and community continued to provide the main source of security and the bulwark against hard times, supplemented by low-paid work where it could be found. In the context of massive rural-urban migration and the deflationary policies that were put in place in one country after another, jobs have increasingly disappeared and basic social services become out of reach for significant segments of the population. This has placed the "social contract" between the state and popular classes under strain and fuelled discontent. It has also created a void in social provisioning into which various voluntary organizations, including religious ones ("social Islam") have stepped in.[22]

In the 1980s mosques and religious associations in Turkey focused on grassroots community issues ("garbage, potholes and mud") and established a fine reputation for delivering services which won them massive victory in the 1994 municipality elections, while in the very different context of southern Lebanon Hizbollah filled the vacuum created by the absence of the state to deliver infrastructure, social services, and attended to the daily needs of the *Shi'a* population.[23] In the very different regional context of Latin America likewise, the phenomenal growth of Pentecostal religion, particularly among women, has been partly attributed to the "pragmatic reasons"—the social and economic benefits for many poor women, and more importantly the way these Pentecostal churches provide a space for women to pool their meagre resources, share child-care needs, support each other financially and emotionally during crises and raise their standard of living in the face of government indifference or even antagonism.[24]

Where the state in its modern and secular guise has failed to deliver physical security, welfare provisioning or a sense of national purpose and belonging, traditionalist and religious-based groups and scripts have enjoyed a revival as they have rushed in to fill the gaps. The resilience of these institutions, their ingenuity in substituting for state services (be it health, education, or some minimal form of social protection) and their effectiveness in providing members with a sense of dignity and purpose can render them indispensable to the communities they serve.[25] In a growing number of countries these movements have become important political actors (with links to political

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[21] Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 1991. "Hazards of modernity and morality: Women, state and ideology in contemporary Iran." In Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *op.cit.*

[22] Bayat, Asef. 2000. **Social Movements, Activism, and Social Development in the Middle East.** CSSM Programme Paper No.3, UNRISD, Geneva.

[23] Kfoury, Assaf 1996. "Hizb Allah and the Lebanese state". In Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds.), **Political Islam,** University of California Press, Berkeley.

[24] Hallum, Anne Motley. 2003. "Taking stock and building bridges: Feminism, women's movements, and Pentecostalism in Latin America." **Latin American Research Review**, Vol. 38, No.1.

[25] UNRISD. 2005. **Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World,** UNRISD, Geneva.

parties), especially where they are effective in mobilizing socially marginalized groups.

While there is no conclusive evidence to show that women are more attached than are men to faith-based movements and political parties, it is clear that women form a visible component of their membership. Gender relations are matters of central importance to many of these groups and movements, particularly where "women's liberation", as was noted above, has been associated with failed or repressive modernization. Women's deportment, mobility, dress code and family roles are often central to the pious society envisaged by these groups, and women's behaviour can be upheld as a marker of authenticity and moral purity. The emphasis on the complementarity of gender roles and of valuing women's care work, which is one of the main messages of some of these groups, can be attractive in contexts where economic recession has eroded men's breadwinning roles and where poverty has pushed women into low-paid and low-status work. Other groups (e.g. Pentecostals in Central America) have strong positions on domestic violence, on male alcoholism, and on women's rights to inheritance—issues that concern large numbers of women.[26] Some gender analysts draw attention to the ways in which in such contexts religion can become both a force for women's mobilization as well as a space for some degree of "empowerment".[27]

The politics of "authenticity" and its gender implications
The interface between what are often called "cultural rights" and "sexual rights" has constituted a hotly contested set of issues for more than a decade now in the context of debates about cultural diversity and difference and their accommodation within liberalism.[28] Attention has been drawn to the ways in which ostensibly "universal" rights can be based on the particular cultural or religious standpoints of powerful groups. To achieve the same kind of equality, so the argument goes, the less powerful or marginalized may need different rights or guarantees from others.[29] If the claims of multiculturalism are indeed accommodated how is this likely to affect the rights of women? The statement that multiculturalism is "bad for women" because it subordinates women's individual rights to masculine privilege, enshrined in group rights that are legitimised by "culture", "tradition" and religion, has provoked heated reactions.[30]

It is easy to see why such statements can provoke negative responses from those who are committed to both women's rights and to the broader rights of less privileged social groups, be they indigenous communities, religious minorities, or other subaltern groups with a history of economic and cultural dominance that continues to this day.

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[26] Hallum, Anne Motley. 2002. "Looking for hope in Central America: The Pentecostal Movement." In Ted Gerard Jelen and Clyde Wilcox (eds.), **Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, the Few and the Many.** Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
[27] Sarkar, Tanika, *op.cit*; Arat, Yesim. 2005. **Rethinking Islam and Liberal Democracy: Islamist Women in Turkish Politics**, State University of New York Press, Albany.
[28] Phillips, Anne. 2002. "Multiculturalism, universalism, and the claims of democracy." In Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi (eds.) **Gender Justice, Development and Rights,** Oxford University Press, Oxford.
[29] Kymlicka, Will. 1995. **Multicultural Citizenship**, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
[30] Moller Okin, Susan. 1998. "Feminism and multiculturalism: Some tensions.' **Ethics** 108(4): 661-84; Moller Okin, Susan with J. Cohen, M. Howard, and M. Nussbaum. (eds.) 1999. **Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?** Princeton University Press, Princeton.

It is nevertheless imperative to raise questions about the potential tensions between cultural claims, of which religious ones form an important component, and women's claims to equality, because culture and religion do not speak for themselves or make claims—particular individuals or institutions do this in the name of religion and culture. Who frames cultural and religious norms? Are there platforms for debate and contestation on these issues? Who has the authority to decide the boundaries of the group: to decide, for example, who counts as a Jew or a Muslim. Who are the gatekeepers? Are intra-group differences and inequalities recognized, including differences in the group's self-definition?

Beyond the specifics of this debate, gender analysts and advocates from different political and ideological standpoints have often questioned appeals to "culture", "tradition", and religion *where these are used to legitimate female subjugation*. The fact that the roles and symbolism associated with femininity together with patriarchal authority and masculine privilege are often made into cultural signifiers, places women's individual rights in conflict with those seeking to impose "traditional" or "authentic" customs on their people, be it in the name of nationalism or piety.[31]

Women's groups and feminist theologians of diverse world religions have provided reinterpretations of religious texts and symbols, drawing on elements of traditional Christian, Jewish, or Muslim thought to unmask and delegitimize the sexism in traditional theology.[32] American history, scholars argue, provides ample evidence of the involvement of religious women in each wave of US feminism and in US feminist organizations, thus questioning the stereotype of feminism as secular and homogeneous.[33] Muslim feminists have been engaged in a similar process of revisionism in many different countries including Malyasia, Indonesia, Iran, Morocco and Turkey to name a few.[34] It is also important to highlight that women are not alone in providing gender-sensitive theological interpretations; some male theologians have been among the most outspoken on these issues (e.g. Abdullah An-Na'im and Mohsen Kadivar provide two examples from the Muslim world).

What impact, if any, have these gender-sensitive interpretations had among religious elites, within religious institutions and social movements? Are they being reflected in the legal edifice, in state policies and programmes, and in the organizational practices of religious institutions and movements? Are discriminatory laws being revised and policies/programmes reformulated to reflect and enhance gender equality?

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[31] Molyneux, Maxine and Shahra Razavi. 2002. "Inroduction." In Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi, *op.cit*.

[32] Maloney, Susan Marie 2003. "United States Catholic Women: Feminist Theologies in Action." In Jane H. Bayes and Nayereh Tohidi *op.cit*.; Misra, Kalpana and Melanie Rich. 2003. **Jewish Feminism in Israel: Some Contemporary Perspectives.** University Press of New England, Chicago and London.

[33] Baud, Ann 2004. **Transforming the Faiths of our Fathers: Women Who Changed American Religion,** Palgrave, New York.

[34] Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. 2004. "The Quest for Gender Justice: Emerging Feminist Voices in Islam." **Islam** 21(36). The Malaysian NGO, Sisters in Islam, is one example of such insider revisionism. As their website puts it: "We are deeply saddened that religion has been used to justify cultural practices and values that regard women as inferior and subordinate to men and we believe that this has been made possible because men have had exclusive control over the interpretation of the text of the Qur'an." http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/mission.htm Accessed 15 August 2006.

Politics, religion and democracy

One critical finding that emerges from the comparative sociological literature is that religion has been "Janus-faced", i.e. that it has acted both as the carrier of "exclusive, particularistic and primordial identities" as well as of "inclusive, universalist and transcending ones" (with many other possible scenarios falling between these two extremes).[35] In other words, the nexus between religion and politics is highly contingent and has tended to vary across time and place; as such, it defies any essentialist conceptualization. In some contexts religious authorities have assumed "prophetic" roles in alliance with the powerless and the marginalized and in opposition to authoritarian states and oppressive social practices, while in other contexts they have taken on "priestly" attributes resisting democratic impulses from society.[36]

Indeed, one of the most surprising aspects of the global resurgence of civil society in the 1980s and 1990s—whether in Southern Europe (e.g. Spain), Latin America (e.g. Brazil), Eastern Europe (e.g. Poland), or East Asia (e.g. Phillipines)—was the significant role played by religion, religious institutions (especially the Catholic Church and Catholic groups), and social movements that either had a religious identity or were influenced by religion.[37] Some even argued that the "third wave of democratisation" was predominantly a "Catholic wave".[38] However, rather than being indicative of some essential affinity between Catholicism and democracy, this was a "historical first" for the Catholic Church: in previous waves of democratization "the church and Catholic groups in general had been almost consistently on the other side of the democratic barricades, either resisting democratization or adapting to it at best lukewarmly".[39] Hence a modest conclusion to be drawn from this episode is that religion in general and religious institutions *may* serve as autonomous public spaces and as countervailing forces to state power.

Do social movements and groups associated with Islam have the potential to play a similar role in the democratisation of their societies? The 9/11 attacks perpetrated by Muslim militants and its aftermath have led to a pernicious tendency in public and media discourses to see Islamic politics as monolithic, fanatic and dangerous, often subsumed under the "fundamentalist" label. While such negative stereotyping may reflect one segment of the new Islamist leadership that has been drawn into acts of violence and terrorism, it conceals the wide diversity of ideas and movements that actually exist under public Islam. At least three broad tendencies can be identified, which are neither static nor homogeneous themselves.[40] They include "conservative

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[35] Casanova, Jose. 1994, *op. cit*., p.4.

[36] Jelen, Ted Gerard and Clyde Wilcox. 2002. "Religion: The one, the few and the many." In Ted Gerard Jelen and Clyde Wilcox (eds.), **Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, the Few and the Many.** Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

[37] Casanova, Jose. 2001. "Civil society and religion: retrospective reflections on Catholicism and prospective reflections on Islam", **Social Research,** 68(4).

[38] Huntington, Samuel. 1991. **The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century.** University of Oklahoma Press, Norman; Casanova, Jose. 1996. "Global Catholicism and the Politics of Civil Society." **Sociological Inquiry** 66(3): 356-363.

39 Casanova, Jose. 2001, *op cit.*

[40] Zubaida, Sami. 2004. "Culture, international politics and Islam: Debating continuity and change." In William Brown, Simon Bromley and Suma Athreye (eds), **A World of Whose Making? Ordering the**

Islam", often associated with authoritarian states such as Saudi Arabia; radical and militant variants, typically pursued by students and militant youth[41]; and the more reformist and modernist orientations which seek to Islamise state and society, but in the context of economic development, social reform and democratisation. One of the most consistent themes of reformist tendencies is the claim that modern ideals of equality, freedom and democracy are not uniquely Western values, but modern necessities compatible with, and even required by, Islam.[42]

It is the radical and militant Islamists who tend to pursue the fusion of state and religious authority (along the lines of Iran's Islamic Republic), while historically many Muslim scholars endorsed some measure of separation between religious leaders and state authorities so that the "transcendent truth of Islam" would not be subordinated to the "whims of all-too-human rulers"[43]—a view that is shared by many Muslim reformists today. "The more significant 'clash of civilizations' taking place in today's Muslim world has less to do with an alleged struggle between 'Islam' and the 'West', than it does with rival visions of Muslim politics".[44]

Scholars also agree about the recent pluralization and fragmentation of religious authority, the emergence of divergent political tendencies within Islam, and reformulations of the Islamic tradition, all of which could play a role in the democratisation of politics in the Muslim world.[45] Some would even argue that an "Islamic reformation" is already happening, especially as Islamist groups are drawn into the electoral process, there tends to be a gradual shift away from radicalism as they seek to appeal to wider constituencies.[46] But whether this chaotic ferment is transformed into a force conducive to the democratization of political structures and to the institutionalization of an open and pluralistic civil society based on protected individual freedoms ("civil Islam"[47]), or fed into a violent and destructive "rebellion of the masses" [48] is likely to differ across countries, depending on domestic political configurations as well as geo-political factors and circumstances.

Secularization and the public-private dichotomy
The theory of secularisation—the view that religion in the modern world would decline and become increasingly privatised, marginal and irrelevant—seems to be in conflict with the newly appreciated empirical reality. Is the Enlightenment concept/theory of "secularisation", so deeply embedded in historical accounts of Western modernity and sometimes seen as a precondition for gender equality,[49] no

International: History, Change and Transformation, Pluto Press and The Open University, London and Ann Arbor, MI.

[41] Roy, Olivier. 2004. **Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah.**. Columbia University Press, New York.

[42] An-Na'im, Abdullah A. 1999. "Political Islam in national politics and international relations." In Peter L. Berger (ed.) **The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics**, Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington D.C.

[43] Hefner, Robert W. 2000, p.7

[44] Hefner, Robert W. 2001, *op.cit.*

[45] Hefner, Robert W. 2001, *op.cit.*

[46] Eickelman, Dale F. 1998. "Inside the Islamic Reformation". *Wilson Quarterly* 22(1): 80-89. http://www.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/IAS/HP-e2/papers/eickelman.html Accessed 26 July 2006.

[47] This is Hefner's term for the role of Islam in Indonesian politics.

[48] Roy, Olivier. 1994, *op.cit.*

[49] Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris. 2003. **Rising Tide: Gender equality and cultural change around the world**. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

longer defensible? What elements of it can be retained, and which aspects need to be abandoned?

José Casanova's differentiation of three very distinct, uneven and unintegrated propositions that are collapsed into the secularisation thesis is helpful: first, secularisation as differentiation of the secular spheres (in particular, the state, the economy and science) from religious institutions and norms; second, secularisation as decline of religious beliefs and practices; and third, secularisation as marginalization of religion into a privatized sphere.[50] While the first thesis remains the valid core of the secularisation thesis, the second and third propositions are difficult to reconcile with modern realities, even though they may accurately reflect modern structural trends in some Western societies (Western Europe but not the US).

A central premise of the theory of secularisation is the public-private dichotomy. Religious freedom is quintessentially seen as a private matter and hence intrinsically related to the "right to privacy", itself the very foundation of modern liberalism and modern individualism. Hence, liberals (including some secular feminists) insist on the need to confine religion to a private sphere; fearing the social potency and volatility of dangerous differences like religion these advocates insist that the public sphere must be kept clear of religious issues and differences. Other secular feminists accept that religion has a palpable presence in public life but stress the importance of "state disestablishment" (i.e. refusal on the part of the state to support any religion). "The enforcement of the boundary between church and state does not mean that concerned citizens cannot bring their religious beliefs to their community activities or even their political activism."[51] Hence, they argue that the state and the public realm should not be conflated.[52]

The notion of relegating religion to the private sphere can also be a double-edged sword with respect to women's rights. Feminist theorists have often criticised the way in which the public/private dualism can exclude from "public dialogue" and public deliberations a wide range of matters that are declared to be "private", such as domestic violence. Such dichotomies, they maintain, can lead to the silencing of the concerns of certain excluded groups.[53] How can these different positions be reconciled?

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[50] Casanova, Jose. 1994, *op.cit*, Chapters 1 and 8.

[51] Jakobsen, Janet R. and Ann Pellegrini. 2003, op.cit., p.112.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] Benhabib, Seyla. 1995. "Cultural complexity, moral interdependence, and the global dialogical community." In Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (eds.) **Women, Culture and Development**. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

A three-level typology has been proposed capturing, in a somewhat stylised manner, the diverse ways in which religion can "go public"[54]: at the state-level (e.g. theocratic states like Iran's Islamic Republic; or state religions or established churches like Church of England or Scandinavian Lutheran churches); at the level of political society (e.g. European Christian Democrats, Islamist political parties like Hamas in Palestine, Justice and Development Party or AKP in Turkey, and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP in India); and at the more amorphous level of civil society (e.g. religious organizations and movements that are independent of the state, anti-abortion movements in the US and Latin America). There are also different trajectories through which religion and the public sphere can /become intertwined: on the one hand, religion-based groups can voice their concerns in the public arena, and on the other, already established public institutions or actors (e.g. a political party, the judiciary) can adopt a religious discourse to legitimise their positions on certain issues.

The above-mentioned tripartite model (of state, political society and civil society), however, presupposes what is broadly recognized as a "modern" society. But for many contexts it is equally important to conceptualise the interface between what can be labelled "the customary sphere" and formal religion. For example in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan the issue of Islam would necessarily have to feature the interface between state-clergy and sub-national entities of various kinds such as tribes and ethnic groups.[55] As far as women's rights are concerned it is in that nexus that many of the dangers and challenges are located, as religious precepts are selectively applied or totally disregarded. Similarly, there is a need for a broader conception of civil society, which can include the nature of "society" itself. This is very important because it can explain resistance, or absence of pressures, from below to pluralize and democratize religion. For example, it has been difficult for conservative clerics in Iran to impose a Taliban-style rule, in great part due to the every-day social resistance from the urban youth and middle class women in response to draconian measures such as the strict gender segregation of public space and the imposition of an Islamic dress code.

This project raises two key questions: first, how are religion and politics intertwined? Are there distinct modes of insertion in different settings? And second, what are the social and political effects, especially from a gender perspective, of this blending of religion and politics? When is it likely to pose a danger for gender equality and democracy?

Based on his book-length comparative historical analysis (of mainly European and American experiences), Casanova hypothesizes that only public religions at the level of civil society are consistent with modern universalistic principles and modern

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[54] The notion that religion is "going public" or becoming "de-privatised" has been coined by José Casanova to convey "the fact that religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatised role which theories of modernity and theories of secularisation had reserved for them" (1994: 5). As was noted above, the notion of "de-privatization" does not correspond to social reality in many countries, both developing and developed.

[55] Kandiyoti, Deniz. 2005. **The Politics of Gender and Reconstruction in Afghanistan.** Occasional Paper No.4, UNRISD, Geneva.

differentiated structures.[56] Can this hypothesis be substantiated as far as gender equality is concerned, going beyond the Western countries? There are several arguments that suggest caution. Is civil society always "thick" and vibrant enough, as liberal theories would suggest, to prevent it from being monopolized by one particular tendency? Does it necessarily include sufficiently strong movements and forces that endorse gender equality and democratic pluralism? What about elements in civil society that resort to violence and armed confrontation? Is civil society protected from incursions by the state and political society, given the tendency of the latter to create their own "civil society" organizations? Moreover, is the presence of religion in political parties necessarily problematic for women's rights and democracy? As noted above, having to compete in elections could have a moderating effect on religion based political parties with discriminatory policies and stances towards women.

Research Methodology

The countries where religion has assumed contested public roles are far from homogeneous. They represent diverse political regimes in terms of the nature of the state and its openness to inputs from society (totalitarian, post-totalitarian, authoritarian, and formally democratic); different levels of development, both economic and social; and diverse religious configurations (Catholic, Protestant, Muslim and Hindu).

The academic literature tends to be uneven in its geographical coverage; the more extensive research within sociology of religion has tended to focus on Western European countries (exemplifying the process of secularisation) and the United States (which is often seen as the "exception" to the secularisation thesis) and comparisons between the two. But there are also focused studies on selected regions (Middle East and/or the Muslim world more broadly) and countries (such as Poland, Brazil, Indonesia, Iran, India). In recent years there have also been a number of important attempts to explore the nexus between religion and politics through cross-country comparative analysis.[57] These analyses provide important insights for the present project.

The research questions, sub-questions, and methods as well as a tentative structure for the paper are outlined below. **Inevitably what is specified here is suggestive and would have to be adapted according to specific country contexts. This is a comprehensive list and we do not anticipate each paper to cover all the levels (state, political society, civil society, customary sphere) specified in great detail. For the extensive outlines, please identify the most relevant levels and elaborate those.**

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[56] Casanova, Jose. 1994, *op.cit.*

[57] Notable comparative analyses include José Casanova's **Public Religions in the Modern World** (cited above) which deconstructs "secularisation theory" using selected case studies; the multi-volume *Fundamentalism Project* coordinated by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby and published in five volumes (**Fundamentalisms Observed,** 1991; **Fundamentalisms and Society,** 1993; **Fundamentalisms and the State,** 1993; **Accounting for Fundamentalisms**, 1994; and **Fundamentalisms Comprehended,** 1995) which uses fundamentalism as the analytical lens for cross-country comparative analysis; and **Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, The Few, and The Many**. Ted Gerard Jelen and Clyde Wilcox *op.cit.* which describes the nexus between politics and religion in selected countries but without offering any theory or hypothesis on their interaction.

(1) Introduction: In what context is the country case study situated?

(a) **Historical context**: provide a nuanced analysis of the role of religion and the religious establishment in the development process, especially its relation to the state and to nation-building, and particularly vis-à-vis gender issues (family, marriage, and sexuality; women's public roles), highlighting the contentious issues (across historical narratives). The analysis of the current political system should also include some "hard" indicators of democratic pluralism such as the Freedom House indicators of Political Rights and Civil Liberties (the shortcomings of many such indicators notwithstanding) [length: ca. 5 pages].

(b) **The status of women**: provide background information about the gender issues at stake in the respective country in order to allow comparison and to situate the case study. Besides a description of recent developments and current trends in the status of women, some "hard" indicators should be collected and discussed, such as political participation (f/m), labour force participation (f/m), gender wage gaps, age at marriage (m/f), literacy rates (f/m) and women's access to education and health services (including reproductive rights), gender-based violence, etc. Despite their known shortcomings, the Human Development Report's composite indicators – Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) – should also be included. [length: ca. 5 pages]

(2) Research Question 1: How do religion and politics intertwine? Are there distinct modes of insertion?

This section examines:
How religion manifests at the four levels (the state, political society, civil society, and the customary sphere), and the **interactions between and within different levels.** Clearly the analysis of the four different institutional levels and the interactions among them would not necessarily be separated into discrete sections in the paper. It also goes without saying that many real life institutions can fall into several of these ideal types (e.g. Hizbollah is both a political party and a civil society institution).

Level of the State incorporates the national bureaucracy, courts and the legal system, police and armed forces
- analysis of Constitution (if one exists),
- laws pertaining to citizenship and personal status;
- symbols and discourses
How have women's groups engaged the state in changing laws and the constitution?

Level of Political Society refers to the parliamentary realm where applicable or to political organisations seeking to attain power within the governmental system
- analysis of key political parties' rhetoric and programmes (using primary sources produced by the political parties about their objectives and programmes, semi-structured key-informant interviews with party leadership and possible further focus-group discussions with party members);
- In countries where religion-based parties have been participating in the electoral process, has this had an impact on their programmes, especially with regard to gender issues?

- disaggregated data (where available) on party membership by religious affiliation and gender;
- analysis of relevant academic literature and other sources (e.g. newspapers, weeklies, advocacy literature by NGOs);

How present are women as activists and party members in the selected political parties (in women's wings and/or party leadership)? Do they play a role in recruiting electoral support for the party? Do they champion women's rights issues? Is there any evidence of women voting differently from men (for different political parties)?

Level of Civil Society: We use here a narrow conception of civil society as "civic associations" or un-coerced, voluntary associational life.[58] Civil society thus defined incorporates those groups with a voluntary membership whose purpose is primarily directed outwards from those engaged in them to others. Their purpose is to serve their members and the wider community (some of whom they will not know) and make some contribution to the collective life of a neighbourhood, city, country or world. They tend to be inclusive in the sense that they are open to anyone.
- mapping out those parts of civil society with contested perspectives on the role of religion with respect to gender relations (role of the family, social cohesion, pro-life, etc.);
- detailed investigation of selected elements of civil society relevant to the key issues at stake in the country context (using sources produced by the organizations about their objectives and programmes; semi-structured interviews with their leadership/staff and membership/communities they serve; and analysis of relevant academic literature and other sources);

Are there any gender differences in the appeal of religion-based groups? Why do women support these groups?

- **in-depth analysis of women's movements** – both secular and religious women's groups – as important subsets (How are different strands of women's movements positioning themselves vis-à-vis other political actors in these contexts? Are they able to articulate their gender interests, even while they organize in pursuit of broader goals? Have they been able to overcome their differences (ideological, political, and strategic) and collaborate over specific issues at specific junctures? Is there any learning and cross-fertilization between secular women's groups and those that identify with particular religious worldviews? What impact, if any, have they had in shaping laws and state policies, political party agendas and the customary sphere? What kind of alliances have they forged with civil or political society actors and forces in advancing their agenda, and which actors and forces have they had to oppose?)

Customary Sphere: Incorporates groups with a non-voluntary membership (e.g. based on ethnicity, religion or geography) who claim their authority as gatekeepers of morality and behavioral prescriptions on the basis of traditional, religious or customary social regulations. For example Traditional Authorities in some parts of Southern Africa and tribal leaders in some Asian countries (e.g. Afghanistan,

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[58] Young, Iris Marion. 2002. **Inclusion and Democracy.** Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, p.161.

Pakistan) constitute developing country examples of this phenomenon; but more loosely structured means of social control also exist in the more developed countries, for example Irish Catholic church groups in the USA.

- description of normative structures drawing on religion which constitute the customary sphere;
- review and analysis of ethnographic research on the way in which "customary rules" impinge on women's rights and gender equality;
- key informant interviews with "gatekeepers" and spokespersons for "the community" to explore how and by whom "customs" and "traditions" are defined and enforced.
- Are there actors providing/using gender-sensitive interpretations of religious texts to contest dominant understandings?

[length: ca. 20 pages]

Research methods to capture interactions between the above include:

- process-tracing (for example, from the feminist agenda to policy-making and the judiciary);
- key-informant interviews with civil/political society leaders, law- and policy-makers

(3) Research Question 2: What are the social and political effects, especially from a gender perspective, of this blending of religion and politics? When is it likely to pose a danger for gender equality and democracy?

This section (a) analyses the consequences of the mixing and mingling laid-out in section 2 and (b) describes the factors that intervene in the relationship between religion and politics on the one hand and gender equality on the other. The following questions may guide the analysis of "intervening variables":

- What role, if any, do external forces such as transnational actors, movements and social norms play in shaping the national constellation of forces?
- What is society's response to the blending of religion and politics? (in terms of social norms, public opinion, social behaviour, etc.) Do they reinforce and/or challenge the alliances between religion and politics at different levels?

[length: ca. 10 pages]

(4) Conclusions
[length: ca. 5 pages]

Case Selection

The countries selected present maximum variation with respect to (a) religious denominations and (b) the level at which the blending of politics and religion takes place (e.g. state or civil society). Furthermore, a regional balance was sought, including at least some developed countries, since a certain degree of economic

development is a prerequisite for the existence of civil societies (and a pluralist party system).

In terms of religion, the world's three largest denominations were included, i.e. Christianity (majority Catholic: 3 cases / majority Protestant: 1 case / majority Orthodox: 1 case), Islam (majority Sunni: 2 cases / majority Shiite: 1 case) and Hinduism (1 case). One case has a mixed Christian/Muslim population. Finally, Judaism (1 instance) was added due as a special interest case.

Thematic Papers

Complementing the country case studies the project will be commissioning thematic papers on a number of overarching conceptual and empirical issues. Possible themes include: different understandings of secularization and the question of the public/private divide; dominant theoretical approaches to "public religions" and feminist critiques; the role and influence of "transnational" flows of ideas, finance, and people in the politicization of religion; analysis of World Value Survey data on religiosity and its relationship with class, sex, education, and other relevant social divisions; the contribution and limitations of gender-sensitive readings of religious texts; the social construction of "honour killings" in developed countries with Muslim immigrant communities; micro level analysis of religiosity among women in grassroots organizations; the significance/role of religious organizations in welfare delivery in a neoliberal context and its social implications; possible gendered links between socio-economic insecurities and a turn to religion in contexts of economic crisis and state collapse.

Chart 1: Case Selection

Criteria for Case Selection		Selected Descriptive Variables				
Country Case	Main Religious Denominations (1)	GDP per capita [PPP USD] (2)	Gender Empowerment Measure (3)	Gender-related Development Index (4)	Political Rights (5)	Civil Liberties (6)
Iran	89% Shi'a Islam, 8% Sunni Islam	7,525 / 8,624	.326	.736	6	6
Israel	80% Judaism (8% Haredim, 9% Orthodox, 39% Traditionals, 44% "secular Jews"), 12% Sunni Islam, 3.5% Christians, 1.5% Druze	24,382 / 30,464	.656	.925	1	2
Pakistan	86% Sunni Islam, 10% Shi'a Islam, 0.5% Ismailis, 4% Non-Muslims (8)	2,225 / 2,722	.377	.513	6	5
Chile	70% Roman Catholicism, 15.1% Pentecostals (29% among indigenous), 4.4 other, 8.3% no affiliation	10,874 / 12,983	.506	.850	1	1
India	80.5% Hinduism, 13.4% Muslims, 2.3% Christians, 1.8% Sikhs	3,139 / 3,737	/	.591	2	3
Nigeria	Ca. 50% Catholicism and Protestantism, ca. 50% (mainly Sunni) Islam, animists	1,154 / 1,213	/	.443	4	4
Serbia (7)	78% Serbian Orthodox, 5% Muslims, 4% Roman Catholics, 1% Protestants, 3% no affiliation	--- / 6,771	/	/	3	2
Turkey	99% Islam, mainly Sunni	7,753 / 9,107	.289	.745	3	3
Nicaragua	57% Roman Catholics, 29% Protestants including Pentecostals, 3% other, 11% no affiliation	3,634 / 3,844	/	.684	3	3
Poland	96% Roman Catholics	12,974 / 14,880	.610	.859	1	1
USA	52% Protestantism, 24.5% Roman Catholic, 1.3% Jewish, 0.5% Muslims, 0.5% Buddhists, 13.2% no affiliation	39,676 / 43,444	.808	.946	1	1

(1) US Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2006", data for USA based on the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2001.
(2) According to a) UNDP Human Development Report 2006, based on HDI 2004 and b) the International Monetary Fund 2006.
(3) UNDP Human Development Report 2006. Indicator includes: economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, power over economic resources.
(4) UNDP Human Development Report 2006, based on HDI 2004. Indicator includes: long and healthy life, knowledge, decent standard of living.
(5-6) Freedom House "Freedom in the World 2007" indicators, 1 represents the most free, 7 the least free rating; checklist of 10 political rights questions (grouped into three subcategories) and 15 civil liberties questions (grouped into four subcategories).
(7) Figures for Serbia include Montenegro.
(8) Official figures from a 1998 census likely to overestimate the Sunni population. According to minority religious leaders, Shiites account for 20% and non-Muslims for 10% of the population.

Chart 2: Project Timetable (tentative)

2007	2008	2009
May-July Preparatory Phase for UNIFEM countries (3) Selection of researchers, preparation of research proposals and ToRs	January-March Country level research 15 March Submission of draft paper & payment of 2nd instalment	January-June Peer review of papers and preparation for publication of Programme Papers, edited volume, and Research and Policy Brief
July-November Preparatory Phase for HBF countries (8) Selection of researchers preparation of research proposals and ToRs	April Comments on draft papers sent by UNRISD May Turkey Workshop Presentation of draft papers by 11 researchers	Early 2009 HBF Conference involving 11 researchers March-Dec Preparation of Conference News and further dissemination and book launch
15 December Submission of extended research proposal & payment of 1st instalment	May-December Country level research 15 December Submission of revised paper & payment of 3rd instalment	

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