

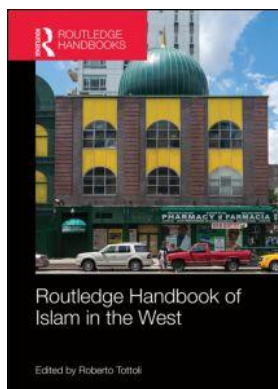
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### **Europe's identity crisis, Islam in Europe, and the crisis of European secularity**

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## Part 2

# Culture

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## Part 2.1

# Interactions, conflicting, converging

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# Europe's identity crisis, Islam in Europe, and the crisis of European secularism

Luca Mavelli

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## Europe's identity crisis and Islam in Europe

On November 19, 2009 the European Parliament hosted a British Council-sponsored debate entitled "Europe and Islam: Whose Identity Crisis?" As the organizers of the event observed,

we are facing a growing mutual mistrust that leaves Europe on the verge of a dangerous rift. One of the major cultural challenges that we face today is whether we can overcome the fear that difference and diversity will weaken national and social cohesion and succeed in building a Europe that is enriched by its different cultural identities.

*(British Council 2009)*

Hence, "In a continent progressively challenged by mixed identities," this challenge cannot avoid the question: "who is it with the identity crisis? Europe, or Islam, or both?" (British Council 2009). Perhaps surprisingly, this question has received limited attention. Most of the literature on Islam in Europe, in fact, has tended to focus on the identity crisis of Muslims, with a particular view on the transformation of Islam within European settings, the privatization of belief, the emergence of new forms of religious authority, and the development of a distinctively European understanding of Islam ("Euro-Islam") (Peter 2006; Cesari 2004, 2003; Al Sayyad and Castells 2002). Conversely, the crisis of European identity has been analyzed in relation to a number of domains – such as the limits and failures of the European Union and its foreign policy; the wars, violence, and nationalisms that have plagued Europe for centuries; fascism and the resurgence of extreme right-wing movements; the recent economic and financial crisis – yet hardly in relation to the "question" of Islam in Europe. However, signals that Europe's identity crisis may be linked in some important ways to a growing presence of people of Islamic faith in Europe have multiplied in recent years.

For instance, the famous *affaire du foulard* in France has been interpreted by some observers as an indication of the limits of the French model of integration and its inability "to redevelop and

implement secularity as an instrument of social cohesion and as token of national, republican unity” (Salvatore 2007: 146). In a broader perspective, the numerous tensions concerning the Muslim veil in several European countries have been taken as a sign of European insecurity in the face of more embodied manifestations of religiosity (Jansen 2011; Connolly 2006; Asad 2006; Mavelli 2013), and as a failure of European models of secularity to engender and sustain forms of solidarity open to diversity (Asad 2003). Similarly, in the case of the publication across Europe of the so-called “Danish cartoons” portraying the Prophet Mohamed as a terrorist, what was for many a vigorous affirmation of Europe’s secular and liberal idea of freedom of speech (Glucksman 2006) has been considered by others a symptom of its very crisis, which ultimately resulted in the grotesque celebration of “blasphemy as a sign of civilizational identity” (Asad 2009: 21). If these two cases – the willingness to restrict the use of the Muslim veil and the decision to publish cartoons considered offensive by Muslims – could still be considered by some as manifestations of the strength of European identity rather than of its weakness, the recent indictments of multiculturalism by three major European leaders – Angela Merkel, David Cameron, and Nicholas Sarkozy – explicitly linked the crisis of European identity with Muslims in Europe.

In October 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that multiculturalism had been a “total failure” which had contributed to widening the gap in relation to those immigrants, Muslims in particular, whose different cultural and religious traditions prevented them from fully embracing European liberal and secular values, with the effect of turning them into a threat to German identity and social cohesion (BBC 2010). “We feel tied to Christian values,” Merkel remarked. “Those who don’t accept them don’t have a place here” (Presseurop 2010). By the time of Merkel’s speech, a book published a few months earlier by a Bundesbank board member which accused the country’s Muslim population of “dumbing down” German society had already sold millions of copies, and the interior minister had stated that “Islam does not belong to Germany” (Spiegel 2010; Reuters 2010). In February 2011 it was British Prime Minister David Cameron who, echoing some of Merkel’s remarks, declared that the “doctrine of state multiculturalism” had “failed to provide a vision of society” and that a strong national identity should be the antidote to Islamic extremism (Cameron 2011). A few weeks later, French President Nicolas Sarkozy joined the debate by stating that multiculturalism was “a failure” which had led us to be “too concerned about the identity of the new arrivals and not enough about the identity of the country receiving them” (*Irish Times* 2011). For Sarkozy, the failure of multiculturalism was ultimately “the issue of Islam and our Muslim compatriots” (*Irish Times* 2011).

This attack on multiculturalism found a most tragic instantiation in the Utøya massacre of July 2011, when Anders Behring Breivik killed seventy-seven members of the Workers’ Youth League, a political youth organization affiliated with the Norwegian Labour Party. Their guilt, according to Breivik, was to be part of the future of that social democratic elite whose championing of multiculturalism, socialism, Marxism and, feminism had allowed “millions of Muslims to colonize Europe” and turn it into a “Eurabia” (Breivik, cited in Kinnvall 2012: 271). In his manifesto, “2083: A European Declaration of Independence,” which was published on the internet hours before the massacre, Breivik spoke of the need for a war in defense of “Christian Europe,” yet “Not a religious war but a cultural one, to defend ... Europe’s ‘cultural, social, identity and moral platform’” (Malik 2011). In his warped and distorted mind, however, Breivik rehearsed an argument which “finds a widespread hearing” in Europe, namely the idea that “Christianity provides the foundations of Western civilisation, and of its political ideals and ethical values, and that Christian Europe is under threat from Islam” (Malik 2011). Brought to its extreme and delirious consequences, this view armed Breivik not against the

Muslim “others” but against “his own” people who made the “cultural infection” (Kinnvall 2012) possible. This auto-immunitary reaction (Esposito 2008), however extreme and paranoid it may be, suggests that, as Slavoj Žižek (2011) remarks, “The problem is not [Muslim] foreigners,” but “our own (European) identity.”

If these cases lend support to Tariq Ramadan's observation that “Europe's identity crisis is revealed by the Muslims” (quoted in Laurence 2007: 134), they also raise a question which awaits further research: What is it, exactly, that is revealed by these events? In this chapter I want to explore the possibility that the crisis of European identity revealed by Muslims in Europe may be conceptualized as a crisis of European secularity. This latter crisis has been the object of the recent work of a major European philosopher, Jürgen Habermas. For Habermas, modern secular formations are increasingly unable, on the one hand, to provide a framework of public engagement and civic coexistence for increasingly pluralistic societies and, on the other, to act as a reservoir of moral resources which may counter the progressive fragmentation of values and the ensuing incapacity to engage with pressing political questions, such as social justice or euthanasia (Habermas 2007). Indeed, modern secular formations are part and parcel of that process of instrumental rationalization which has enslaved the individual in the impersonal, dehumanizing, and anomic forces of “neo-liberal modernisation and globalisation” (Barbato 2010: 549). The crisis of secularity is thus, for Habermas, the crisis of a “pure practical reason” that, “armed solely with the insights of a theory of justice,” can no longer hope to offer any meaningful resistance to “a modernization spinning out of control” and to the disruptive forces of “markets and administrative powers” which “are displacing social solidarity” (Habermas 2008: 211, 111). This crisis is propelling an increasing “awareness of what is missing” in secular modernity, namely a spiritual dimension to life which may be able to infuse new values and meanings by availing itself of the moral intuitions of faith (Habermas 2011; see also Habermas 2006).

Habermas does not explicitly link the *awareness* of the crisis of European secularity with the crisis of European identity, and both of these with the growing presence of Muslims in Europe. He confines himself to saying that “The Muslims next door force the Christian citizens to face up to the practice of a rival faith. And they also give the secular citizens a keener consciousness of the phenomenon of the public presence of religion” (Habermas 2007). In order to find a more explicit recognition of these connections, we need to look at the work of one of Habermas's most important intellectual partners in his critical reassessment of secularity, namely Pope Benedict XVI. Together they co-authored *The Dialectics of Secularization*, a set of exchanges on the need to find a new balance and forms of cooperation between reason and faith (Habermas and Ratzinger 2007). In 2004, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger observed that, despite the fact that Europe's identity is fundamentally Christian, “Europe, unlike America, is on a collision course with its own history” as it almost denies “its religious and moral foundations” and the public relevance of Christian values (Ratzinger 2006a: 109). Islam, on the contrary, is on the rise “because of people's conviction that Islam can provide a valid spiritual foundation to their lives. Such a foundation seems to have eluded old Europe, which, despite its enduring political and economic power, seems to be on the road to decline and fall” (Ratzinger 2006b: 65).

These remarks may surprise some readers, as they suggest a seemingly positive interpretation of Islam which conflicts with the largely negative account that Joseph Ratzinger provided in 2006 at the University of Regensburg. On that occasion the now Pope Benedict XVI stirred up much controversy by comparing the mainstream Christian understanding of God with the Islamic idea of God put forward by the eleventh-century Muslim philosopher Ibn Hazm. Whereas Christianity, the Pope suggested, is shaped by Greek philosophy and thus considers human



reason as a source of immanent understanding of the good and a fundamental measure of God's will, "for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality" (Pope Benedict XVI 2006). In this latter case, because reason and faith are separated, the believer is under the yoke of "a capricious god," who is more likely to inspire acts of "unreasonable violence" (Pope Benedict XVI 2006). According to critics and Muslims all over the world who felt outraged at his words, the pope was suggesting that, unlike Christianity, "Islam commits itself entirely to faith rather than synthesizing faith with reason," and is thus "a fanatical rather than a rational religion" (Nirenberg 2008: 8), which is ultimately inferior to Christianity (Ruether 2006) and foreign to the Judeo-Christian core of Europe. Indeed, Benedict remarked, the "inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry," together with the "addition of the Roman heritage ... created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe" (Pope Benedict XVI 2006).

In the remainder of this chapter I want to suggest that these two seemingly conflicting assessments of Islam – the celebration of Islamic spiritual vigor as opposed to Europe's moral decay and the indictment of the Muslim incapacity to synthesize reason and faith, which places Islam outside the Christian civilizational boundaries of Europe – are revealing of a broader tension at the heart of European secularity. This is the crisis of a secular identity that from the onset has struggled to establish itself as a self-sufficient foundation of knowledge and morality. As I shall discuss in the next section (pp. 188–93), Habermas's recent call for a secular reappropriation of the moral intuitions of faith is the last instantiation of a crisis of European secularity which emerges as a tension with René Descartes, becomes manifest with Immanuel Kant and Émile Durkheim, and is explicitly acknowledged by Max Weber. Yet, I will argue, at the very moment that this crisis is recognized it is also converted into a sign of civilizational superiority to the Other of Islam.

### The crisis of European secularity and the construction of the Muslim Other<sup>1</sup>

Descartes's attempt to place "the self-evidence of the subject's own existence ... at the very source of access to being" (Foucault 2005b: 14) represents a remarkable break with the medieval scholastic tradition of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas strove towards the integration of what we would now label secular knowledge and religious faith by arguing that reason and revelation represent two different epistemological domains of knowledge which nonetheless converge to the same Truth, namely the existence of God, which is the condition of possibility of all truths. Aquinas, however, also considered that the domain of reason relies on the senses, which are ultimately fallible, and therefore, although reason and faith may in principle be different avenues to the same truth, "the human mind is incapable of grasping certain truths without the aid of special revelation" (Nash 1999: 171).

Descartes agreed that the senses are ultimately fallible, but contended that the solution lay not in integrating secular knowledge and religious faith, but in separating them and in emancipating secular knowledge from the deceptiveness of the senses. To this end, Descartes envisages the possibility of a withdrawal into the space of individual consciousness by bringing "the mind away from the senses" (Descartes 1996 [1641]: 37), because "human knowledge is founded not on the senses but on 'the clear and distinct notions that are in us'" (Patterson 2000: 80). According to Descartes,

my mind contains within itself ... [what] enables me to know ... I now know that even bodies are perceived not by the senses ... but by the intellect alone, not through their

being touched or seen but through their being understood; and in view of this I know plainly that I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else.

(Descartes 1996 [1641]: 22–3)

This approach notwithstanding, Descartes was still puzzled by the unreliability of the senses. Why are they deceptive? Is there “some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning” who is employing “all his energies in order to deceive me” (Descartes 1996 [1641]: 15)? And, if so, how is it possible that God, with His supreme goodness, may allow such a “malicious demon” to lead me astray? According to Descartes, the answer to this question lies in the fact that “the scope of the *will* [that is, of the freedom that God gave human beings] is wider than that of the *intellect* [that is, of their capacity to know]” (Descartes 1996 [1641]: 40, emphasis mine). However, instead of confining the use of the will within the same limits of their capacity to know, human beings bring their will to bear upon questions which they do not understand. It is thus man’s “misuse of the will,” and not God, that deceives man. Hence, Descartes’ conclusion is that, if I confine myself to “what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further, ... it is quite impossible for me to go wrong” (Descartes 1996 [1641]: 43). The reason for this, Descartes explains, is that

Every clear and distinct perception is undoubtedly something real and positive; and hence cannot come from nothing, but must necessarily have God for its author ... God ... is supremely perfect, and ... cannot be a deceiver on pain of contradiction ... For I shall unquestionably reach the truth, if only I give sufficient attention to all the things which I perfectly understand, and separate these from all the other cases where my apprehension is more confused and obscure.

(Descartes 1996 [1641]: 41)

This account contains the seeds of a paradox that is central to the genealogy of European secularity. Descartes’s anthropocentric secular mode of knowledge as based on a process of emancipation from the senses, in fact, ultimately requires “a benevolent God to rout the Evil Demon and guarantee his transition from knowledge of his own perceptions to knowledge of the external world” (Patterson 2000: 73). This tension is clearly identified by Bernard Williams, who observes:

The road that Descartes constructed ... essentially goes over a religious bridge. Taking his concern to be the foundations of scientific knowledge, these are provided by God; taking it to be the foundations of the possibility of knowledge, these too ... are to be found in God.

(Williams 2005: 146)

The non self-sufficiency of the secular idea of knowledge envisioned by Descartes can be observed even more clearly with Kant. According to Michel Foucault (2005b: 26), Kant further advances Descartes’s secular idea of knowledge “by saying: if knowledge has limits, these limits exist entirely within the structure of the knowing subject, that is to say in precisely what makes knowledge possible.” For Kant, in fact, knowledge is no longer the attempt to grasp an externally God-given order, but an interrogation of the individual rational faculties based on a process of transcendence of the senses whereby the individual joins the metaphysical domain of pure intelligible beings where all moral concepts have the status of universal principles. This secular understanding of knowledge is thus grounded in “man” rather than “God,” and

encompasses the separation of reason and faith. Kant, however, observes that this secular route to the universal law of morality may not be enough to ensure that the moral agent will comply with the categorical imperative, particularly when this would imply a sacrifice on her part (Kennedy 2006: 138). Kant's solution is to bring back faith into the picture as a postulate of practical reason, namely as "a theoretical proposition" which is "not demonstrable as such," but which should be considered true "insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid practical view" (Kant 1999 [1788]: 238). Hence, Kant suggests, although the ideas of God, and of faith more generally, lie beyond the domain of proper knowledge, they nonetheless retain a practical usefulness, as they can enforce compliance with the moral law through their force of moral persuasion and threat of eternal sanction. Religion thus becomes for Kant a necessary prop for the motivational moral weakness of the secular domain.

Yet, on a closer look, Kant's reliance on religion in his construction of an independent secular domain goes beyond resorting to faith as a motivational force. As Ian Hunter observes, it is the very interrogation of the individual's rational faculties as envisaged by Kant that, to return to Williams's expression, "goes over a religious bridge." For Hunter, in fact, Kant's categorical imperative is the product of an exercise in self-transcendence which belongs to the Christian–Platonic spiritual tradition. In this tradition,

the metaphysician activates the higher intellect he shares with God, thereby participating in the self-authenticating principles of an intellect that creates what it thinks. Doubtless it will seem odd to many that the voice of Kantian reason should sound so similar to the voice of God. But this will seem the less so the more we understand that the exercise through which Kant listens to reason is in fact a version of that through which Christian–Platonists attuned themselves to the emanations of the divine intellect.

*(Hunter 2002: 923–4)*

If Hunter's reading is correct, it emerges that Kant's secular domain cannot do without religious faith as an inspirational force which may compel the individual to a moral course of action, and as a form of inquiry in which the communion with God is partially superseded by the communion with our "higher intellect" shared "with God."

Why is neither Descartes nor Kant able to articulate their secular systems of knowledge and morality without resorting to a religious dimension which involves a spiritual reliance on or close association with God? An answer to this question is provided by Durkheim, who offers a critical and sociological rendering of Kant's account. For Durkheim, we need to consider that our soul – what enables us "to communicate with God" – is not a metaphysical endowment impervious to scrutiny, but more simply a product of society (Durkheim 1973 [1914]: 159). The soul belongs to the domain of the sacred, which encompasses those "collective ideals that have fixed themselves on material objects" through a process of "communion" of "a plurality of individual consciousnesses," and that inspire in us a feeling of reverence and respect (Durkheim 1973 [1914]: 159–60). Hence, for Durkheim, religion and the idea of God are an immanent instantiation of the system of collective societal representations which contributes to providing moral guidance for the individual. If these remarks bring to the fore the historical symbiosis between morality and religion, it does not follow from them that in a secular society morality may simply be stripped out of "every supernatural element" (Durkheim 1975 [1925]: 195). The force of moral norms, Durkheim contends, is a product not just of their rational content but, more importantly, of their belonging to a sacred domain. Hence, Durkheim concludes, if

one confines himself to withdraw from moral discipline everything that is religious without replacing it, one almost inevitably runs the danger of withdrawing at the same time all

elements that are properly moral. Under the name of rational morality, we would be left with an impoverished and colourless morality.

(Durkheim 1975 [1925]: 196)

However, according to Max Weber, the process feared by Durkheim of withdrawing morality from religion is more than a potential threat: it is a historical development which has long been under way in secular modernity. For Weber, this process is part of a broader dynamic of fragmentation in the value spheres of those domains – the intellectual sphere, the moral sphere, the economic sphere, the political sphere, the aesthetic sphere, and the erotic sphere – which once fell under the unifying purview of faith and now have established their own “immanent laws” (Weber 1991 [1915]: 331). With the death of God, Weber contends, our moral universe has lost its original unity and is shaken by a “polytheism of values” in which “the various spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other” (Weber 1991 [1919]: 147–8). In this process of compartmentalization and fragmentation, Weber (1991 [1915]: 355) suggests, science “has come forward with the claim of representing the only possible form of a reasoned view of the world.” However, this is a view unable to provide guidance for the most fundamental ethical questions. For instance, while modern medicine has become a remarkably sophisticated enterprise, its capacity to answer the question as to whether “life is worth living and when” (with regard, for instance, to terminally ill patients, or patients with serious brain injury) has sharply declined; jurisprudence can help us to devise rational laws, but is unable to tell us “whether there should be law and whether one should establish just these rules”; social sciences explain phenomena, yet often leaving aside the question of whether these phenomena “are worth while” (Weber 1991 [1919]: 144–5). “The intellect,” Weber remarks, “has created an aristocracy based on the possession of [a secular] rational culture and independent of all ethical qualities of man” (Weber 1991 [1915]: 355).

The crisis of secular consciousness analyzed by Weber finds probably its most powerful illustration in the modern capitalist condition. As Weber argues in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001), the underlying force behind the development of capitalism is ascetic Protestantism, and in particular Calvinism and its idea of predestination. Although this notion implies that the way one chooses to live one's life does not change what God has reserved for them in the afterlife, earthly life may still “be considered as a symptom or index of one's own state of religious grace as established by god's decree,” and therefore a way “to penetrate god's design ... to ascertain one's own personal destiny” (Weber 1978 [1922]: 523). Hence, should a virtuous and moral behavior be accompanied by economic and social success, this may be taken as an indication of future salvation decreed by God. For Weber, the ascetic Protestant way of life thus originates in a religious calling. However, with the process of secularization and the separation of the sphere of morality from that of the economy, the process of capitalist accumulation is no longer an instantiation of a sober ethical behavior, but an impersonal and instrumental drive towards the amassing of wealth which is devoid of any moral concern. Weber's argument, though, does not stop here.

Although the separation of value spheres and the ensuing decline of a unifying spiritual dimension are the defining feature of Europe's modernity and its crisis of secularity, Weber also invites us to consider a more “positive” reading of these processes. For the German scholar, in fact, they are part of a broader dynamic of rationalization which has turned Europe into the beacon of a “broad range of ideas and cultural forces” marked by “universal validity,” such as modern historiography, jurisprudence, economy, music, and architecture (Weber 2002 [1920]: 149). According to Weber, the universal force of these ideas is a product of the “capacity and disposition” of the people of Europe “to organize their lives in a practical–rational manner”

(Weber 2002 [1920]: 160) and, on a more conceptual level, a product of “the modern Occidental search for the individual self in contrast to all others – the attempt to take the self by the forelock and pull it out of the mud, forming it into a ‘personality’” (Weber 2005 [1958]: 65). This argument introduces us to a civilizational geography in which there are, on the one hand, the people of Europe, whose fragmented moral horizon may well have triggered a crisis of value and meaning but has certainly contributed to making them masters of their own destiny by making the intellectual sphere independent from the religious sphere. On the other hand, there are those non-Western subjects who live in a world not of their own making (as their economy, jurisprudence, and architecture are a product of the civilizational strength of Western/European subject) and are still trapped in the “mud” of traditional forces like religion. For Weber, the archetype of the non-Western subject is embodied by the Muslim subject.

At the heart of Weber’s sociology of Islam, which has been aptly described as a sociology of absence (Zubaida 2006), is the attempt to account for the uniqueness of the West by accounting for all those elements seemingly missing in Muslim societies, such as “rational (Roman) law, the modern state, the application of science to all areas of social life, ... [and] the bureaucratization of social procedures” (Turner 1994: 39). Although these features have contributed to the crisis of European societies, they have nonetheless endowed Europe with an undisputed civilizational superiority. How does Weber explain the defectiveness of Islam? Once again, we need to go back to the question of predestination.

As was argued before, the European (Protestant) idea of predestination revolved around the uncertainty surrounding the afterlife. The secular world was thus an independent space in which the individual enjoyed the freedom to pursue an ascetic way of life as a means to worldly success which could stand as a potential sign of salvation. The Islamic idea of predestination, on the contrary, revolved around the idea that “The religious fate of the individual in the next world ... [would] be adequately secured by the individual’s belief in Allah and the prophets” (Weber 1978 [1922]: 574). Hence, whereas for “the puritans governed by the Christian ethic ... belief in predestination often produced ethical rigorism, legalism and rationally planned procedures for the patterning of life,” in the case of Islam it required only an uncritical acceptance of the laws of Islam, which clashed with the possibility of the emergence of the rational subject (Weber 1978 [1922]: 573). As Weber explains (1978 [1922]: 573), “In the case of the Muslim warriors of the first generation of Islam, the belief in predestination often produced a complete obliviousness to self in the interest of fulfilment of the religious commandment of a holy war for the conquest of the world.” Subsequently, Weber (1978 [1922]: 574–5) contends, when Islam changed from warring religion to religion of the masses, proselytizing fervor was replaced by a fatalistic attitude of compliance with the will of God which failed to produce any meaningful form of rationalization.

It is at this juncture that Weber’s argument meets that of Benedict XVI discussed in the previous section (pp. 187–8). Although the two thinkers move from completely different epistemological perspectives and normative concerns, they nonetheless converge in identifying the fragmentation of the European moral horizon as a key dimension of the crisis of European secular modernity. The loss of unity following the epistemological and ontological separation of reason and faith which has enthroned secular reason as the sole and exclusive language of the public sphere and confined faith to the private dimension is the cause of a moral decay in which an underlying unifying principle is no longer available. The separation of life into “value spheres” paves the way for the crisis of a secular domain which, unable to establish itself as a self-sufficient foundation of knowledge and morality, has become the battleground of contending moral positions. This struggle has weakened the sense of identity and moral direction of the Western/European subject.

And yet, although this crisis has its very origins in the separation of secular reason and religious faith, this separation is turned into a source of civilizational superiority precisely against an Islam that, according to Weber and Benedict XVI, this separation has not experienced. The Muslim "Other" thus turns into a projection of European anxieties; into a means of displacing the crisis onto "Them," rather than reflectively interrogating ourselves on what generates our perception of "Them" as "Others." From this perspective, the construction of Muslims in Europe as Others of European secular modernity is what makes possible the reproduction of the latter, despite its longstanding crisis. Drawing on Wendy Brown (2006: 27), it can be suggested that Muslims in Europe occupy "the position of Derridean supplement; that which conceptually undermines the binary of identity/difference or inside/outside yet is crucial to the conceit of integrity, autarky, self-sufficiency, and continuity of the dominant term," that is, Europe.

### Postsecularity: a way beyond?

[I]f [a] philosophy of the future exists, it must be born ... in consequence of meetings and impacts between Europe and non-Europe.

*(Michel Foucault, quoted in Afary and Anderson 2005: 2, 87)*

As was observed in the first section of this chapter (pp. 187–8), although Habermas does not explicitly connect the crisis of European secularity with the crisis of European identity and how their awareness may have been prompted by the growing presence of Muslims in Europe, he nonetheless concedes that contemporary attempts to rethink and possibly move beyond the crisis of secularity cannot ignore "the background assumptions" which make the contemporary "discussion on 'Islam in Europe' so explosive" (Habermas 2007). Equally, they cannot ignore the fact that "Muslim immigrants cannot be integrated into Western society in defiance of their religion but only with it" (Habermas 2007). Habermas's "postsecular turn" is the attempt to address both the crisis of secularity – that is, the crisis of values of modern instrumental rationalization – and the problem of the integration of Muslims in Europe. For Habermas (2008: 131), "Religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life," and therefore can provide a useful corrective to the distortions of modern secular rationalization:

This potential makes religious speech a serious candidate to transporting possible truth contents, which can then be translated from the vocabulary of a particular religious community into a generally accessible language.

*(Habermas 2006: 10)*

On the other hand, Habermas (2006: 8) contends, "Given that in the liberal state only secular reasons count, citizens who adhere to a faith are obliged to establish a kind of 'balance' between their religious and their secular convictions." The problem is that "many religious citizens would not be able to undertake such an artificial division within their own minds without jeopardizing their existence as pious persons" (Habermas 2006: 8). A postsecular public sphere is thus the opportunity to establish a more pluralistic space of confrontation which may take advantage of the "world-disclosing power of religious semantics" (Habermas 2008: 217) and the "regenerative power" that it can offer for a "dwindling normative consciousness" (quoted in Harrington 2007: 544). However, Habermas (2008: 243) warns, this religious semantics cannot freely flow into the public sphere, but needs to be properly translated into a

secular language, the embodiment of the universality of reason, in order to protect religious and cultural minorities and, most of all, to avoid the possibility that the “boundary between faith and knowledge” may become “porous,” because “once religious motives force their way into philosophy under false pretences, reason loses its foothold and succumbs to irrational effusion.”

Habermas’s account has been the object of extensive assessment, often resulting in the criticism that his vision of postsecularity employs the very instrumental rationality that it would want to challenge, with the effect that he reduces religion to a tool of the reproduction and moral regeneration of a “dwindling” secular domain (Harrington 2007; Mavelli and Petito 2012; Dallmayr 2012; Cerella 2012; Pabst 2012). For the purposes of this chapter, the main limit of Habermas’s account is that it fails to connect the crisis of secularity with the crisis of European identity and reduces the issue of the integration of Muslims in Europe to a question of pluralism. As this chapter has attempted to suggest, the possibility of a less confrontational encounter between Europe and Islam in Europe requires a recognition of the limits of the European secular tradition, particularly its incapacity to provide a self-sufficient base for knowledge and morality and, more broadly, a sound spiritual foundation for people’s lives. It requires a recognition that the anxieties stemming from this condition may be an important component of the European crisis of identity and the object of an act of displacement which projects onto the Muslim “Other” this anxiety by turning their apparent lack of secularity – which may seem to make them unaffected by the moral decay of the West – into a marker of a civilizational inferiority characterized by irrationality, indolence, and violence.

The possibility of moving beyond this asphyxiating construction requires recognition of the fragilities and limits of Europe’s secular tradition, rather than entrenchment in the dogma of secularity in order to cover up its contradictions. The point, to be sure, is not to discard secularity but to reinterpret its emancipatory and pluralistic dimensions in the light of the crisis of European identity and the challenge of Islam in Europe. If Habermas (2011: 19) is correct in suggesting that “practical reason ... no longer has sufficient strength to awaken, and to keep awake, in the minds of secular subjects, an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, an awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven,” then what is required is a postsecularity which may be able to articulate new forms of identities, subjectivities, and solidarities beyond the strictures of a rigid separation of the secular and the religious. The possibility of such postsecular modes of being and becoming requires a Europe which may, to use the words of Étienne Balibar (2003: 334), “use its own fragilities and indeterminacies ... as an effective mediation in the process of bringing about a new political culture, a new pattern of politics.” Although these words have been used in a different context, they are nonetheless very relevant to our discussion, as they open the conceptual space to imagine postsecular Europe as a “space of translation” between different cultures. Translation, in this perspective, is no longer the Habermasian conversion of the moral intuitions of faith into the supposed universality of secular reason, but an idiom in itself, indeed “the only ‘genuine idiom of Europe’” (Balibar 2003: 334). This is the possibility of an idiom which may articulate a new postsecular language of identity and solidarity across the categories of the secular and the religious, where the uncertainties of one’s own identities, roots, traditions, and allegiances (including those of Muslims in Europe and in America, which have been explored at length by other contributors in this volume) may be recognized in the Other, rather than projected onto them. A hope, for sure, but also a political imagination, which may help us “to have the courage to begin anew ... to abandon every dogmatic principle” (Foucault 2005a: 185), and to conceive of the possibility of different forms of encounter between Europe and its Muslim population.

## Note

- 1 An extended version of the argument presented in this section (although explored from a slightly different perspective) can be found in the [second chapter](#) of my *Europe's Encounter with Islam: The Secular and the Postsecular* (Mavelli 2012).

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