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Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam

BY JOSÉ CASANOVA

ONE of the most surprising and unexpected aspects of the global resurgence of civil society has been the role that religion has played in this emergence. It was surprising and unexpected at least for most social scientists and for all those who took for granted the main premises of the theory of secularization: that religion in the modern world is likely to decline and become increasingly privatized, marginal, and politically irrelevant (Casanova, 1994b). Insofar as this global resurgence is intrinsically linked with the “third wave of democratization,” one can easily follow its flows from Southern Europe (Spain) to South America (Brazil), to Eastern Europe (Poland), to East Asia (Philippines and South Korea), to South Africa. In all these cases—and one could add many others—the role of religion, of religious institutions, and of social movements that either had a religious identity or were influenced by religion, was significant. In particular, the Catholic Church and Catholic groups played a crucial role in many of those democratic transitions—to such an extent that Samuel Huntington (1991) and others (Casanova, 1996) have argued rightly that the third wave of democratization was predominantly a Catholic wave. Roughly two-thirds of the 30-some countries that have undergone successful transitions to

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democracy since the mid-1970s were Catholic. Huntington (1993, 1996), however, is more famous for his thesis that the third wave of democratization may have reached its civilizational limits; that other civilizations, particularly Islam, are based on principles that may be essentially incompatible with democracy and that, therefore, the public mobilization of Islam is unlikely to be conducive to democracy and the emergence of civil society; and that the civilizational clash between Islam and the West may replace the geopolitical clash between the superpowers during the Cold War.

In this paper I would like to examine both theses. In the first part I reconstruct analytically the transformation of Catholicism that made it possible for it to play such a significant historical role. In the second part I use these retrospective reflections as the point of departure for an analysis of the contemporary transformation of Islam in order to examine whether it could possibly play a similar role in the democratization of Muslim countries and in the emergence of Islamic civil societies.

I. Retrospective Reflections on the "Catholic Wave"

It should not be surprising to find Catholics playing a crucial role in politics in countries such as Spain, Brazil, or Poland, which are or were at the time almost homogeneously Catholic. But a few distinctions are necessary to clarify the argument concerning the role of religion in civil society formation or in processes of democratization:

1) It is important to keep in mind that this was a historical first for the Catholic Church. In other words, it was the first time that the Catholic Church had played a consistently proactive, positive role in the processes of democratization. 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. Thus, one can hardly make the argument that

Catholicism is intrinsically—that is, “essentially”—democratic or has elective affinities with democracy or with civil society. On the contrary, one could argue that the third wave of democratization could only be a Catholic wave precisely because so many (indeed, a majority) of Catholic countries at the time still had authoritarian regimes, many of them initially supported by the church and by Catholic militant groups.

2) However, Catholic groups also played a prominent role, disproportionate to their size, in recent democratic transitions in countries where they constituted small minorities—South Korea and South Africa, for example, countries where Catholics comprise less than 10 percent of the population. Therefore, Catholicism itself, or more precisely the official reformulation or *aggiornamento* of the Catholic tradition connected with the Second Vatican Council, has to be taken seriously into account as an independent factor, since it appears to have had sociohistorical repercussions even in non-Catholic countries. In this respect, it was a Catholic wave not just because the countries where it occurred happened to be Catholic, but because the transformation of Catholicism was itself an important independent factor in producing the wave.

3) Moreover, Catholicism was not the only religion that played a positive role in civil society formation and democratization throughout the third wave. Other religious groups played equally positive roles in various places: Lutherans in East Germany, Protestants as well as Catholics in South Korea, Episcopalians and various other churches in South Africa, and in Romania, a Hungarian Unitarian minister, who triggered that country's revolution. Thus, although my retrospective analysis is mainly based on a reconstruction of the transformation of Catholicism that made possible its new historical role in processes of democratization, the analysis can be generalized into one exploring the potential role of religion in civil society formation.

The reconstruction follows three steps.

First, religion in general and churches especially can serve as autonomous public spaces and as a countervailing power to state power. The more religious institutions have a hierocratic structure, as with the Catholic Church and the Shiite *ulama* in Iran, the more this is potentially the case. Adam Michnik (1993) has repeatedly stressed this point in his analysis of the role of the Catholic Church in Poland under the Communist regime and has stressed it since, referring to the church as "this particular institution of civil society." Insofar as the church sets or calls for limits to absolutist state power, then the church under certain conditions can indeed help in the constitution of civil society. But in and of itself the church is not an institution of civil society, nor is the presence of a powerful autonomous church an indication of the existence of civil society. There is no doubt that throughout history the Catholic Church has cherished and protected its liberty vis-à-vis state power. *Libertas ecclesiae* has always been, certainly in the modern period, the guiding principle of the church's relationship with the modern state. This is evident in the concordats that the church has entered with most states since the 1804 Concordat with Napoleon, trying to extract from every friendly and unfriendly regime the best possible conditions for furthering the freedom of the church. Ideally, and doctrinally, the best conditions were defined as those of an established state church, one which in Weber's definition claims the monopoly of the means of grace or salvation over a territory, a claim, of course, that can be upheld only with the help of the state's protection. Such a state church can hardly be viewed, however, as an institution of civil society.

When the conditions for church establishment were not present, as was the case in Protestant countries where Catholics constituted a minority of the population or in countries where a secular state had imposed disestablishment, the church learned to accommodate to reality while trying to obtain the best possible deal in protecting its institutional freedom, gaining an autonomous space for Catholic groups and their organizations,

especially religious rights for Catholics. The concordats with the fascist regimes in the 1930s may serve as an illustration (Casanova, 1996). From the Franco regime, which assumed the identity of a model Catholic state, the church received the best possible deal. From Mussolini the church was given almost everything it wanted.¹ From the Nazi regime the church received the minimal conditions for freedom of the church and the religious freedom of German Catholics, at least on paper. The public condemnations of Italian fascism and German Nazism through papal encyclicals only came after it became evident that those regimes were abridging the freedom of the church and the privileged rights for Catholics that the church had laboriously negotiated. *Non abbiamo bisogno* (1931), the encyclical directed at Italian fascism, came after the regime began to repress Catholic Action and youth organizations. The earlier, much harsher repression of other groups in Italy had provoked no church condemnation. But nothing reveals as clearly the particularistic logic of the rights and freedoms negotiated by the church than the fact that, while negotiating the concordat with the Third Reich, Secretary of State Cardinal Pacelli tried to inscribe a clause guaranteeing for baptized Jews the same status as that negotiated for German Catholics.

In and of itself, therefore, the privileged autonomous spaces the church may obtain or preserve vis-à-vis friendly or unfriendly authoritarian states neither constitute nor are necessarily conducive to the constitution of civil society. Eventually, however, those privileged autonomous spaces under certain conditions can be used to nourish and protect civil society spaces as happened in very similar fashion in Francoist Spain and in Communist Poland (Casanova, 1993). For example, Catholic media in Francoist Spain, which were exempt from state censorship, could later use this privileged space to demand universal freedom of expression. The same could be said about Catholic associations expanding and transcending their particular privileges to demand universal freedom of association, Catholic workers' organizations demand-

ing trade union rights, Catholic universities demanding autonomy and intellectual freedom, and so on.

So what are the conditions under which the church's privileged autonomous spaces can be constitutive of civil society? To put it bluntly, the church only becomes an institution of civil society when it ceases being a church in the Weberian sense of the term: when it gives up its monopolistic claims and recognizes religious freedom and freedom of conscience as universal and inviolable human rights. This is what happened in the 1960s with the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and with the church's appropriation of the modern discourse of universal human rights beginning with Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961). From now on the discourse of human rights will be central to papal encyclicals and to the pastoral letters of national Conferences of Bishops throughout the world, leaving behind a long history of repeated categorical official condemnations of modern human rights doctrines that goes back to Pius VI's condemnation of the French National Assembly's Declaration of the Rights of Man in his Brief *Caritas* (1791). John Paul II particularly has made "the sacred dignity of the human person" the cornerstone of his global preaching (Casanova, 1997, 1999).

Significantly, the most eloquent voices in the crucial and very heated debate at the floor during the council came from opposite blocs: from the American bishops, who unanimously defended religious freedom not only on grounds of practical expediency but on theological grounds provided to them by their *peritus*, the great American theologian John Courtney Murray (1960, 1966), and from Cardinal Karol Wojtyaa from Cracow, who had learned from the experience of trying to defend the freedom of the church under communism that the best line of defense, both theoretically and practically, was the defense of the inalienable right of the human person to freedom of conscience. Theologically, according to Murray (1964), this entailed the transference of the principle of *libertas ecclesiae* that the church had guarded so zeal-

ously through the ages to the individual human, from *libertas ecclesiae* to *libertas personae*. Only now could the church play a truly positive role in the constitution of civil societies and in processes of democratization throughout the Catholic world.

The relocation of the church to civil society implies not only voluntary disestablishment from the state (grudgingly in Poland), but also disengagement from political society proper. From a political science perspective, one of the most surprising outcomes of the third wave of democratization was that the prominent role of Catholic elites, groups, and social movements in so many transitions notwithstanding, and despite the influence and prestige gained thereby by the church almost everywhere, not a single major Catholic party has emerged anywhere out of the third wave: not in Spain, not in Brazil, not in the Philippines, not in Poland. Indeed, we can speak confidently of the end of the era of Catholic parties, of the end of Christian democracy (though some Christian democratic parties may survive with a diminished Christian identity in countries such as Germany or Chile), and of the collapse of Catholic Action, the main form of Catholic political mobilization throughout the twentieth century.

This relocation of the church from the state and from political society to civil society—and this is the third step in my reconstruction—does not necessarily mean the privatization of Catholicism. On the contrary, this relocation is the very condition for the possibility of a modern public religion, for a modern form of public Catholicism (Casanova, 1994b). Indeed, if the significance of religion for civil society formation and renewal is not to be restricted to this peculiar and historically specific opportunity structure—this narrow window of opportunity that emerges in the original constitution of civil society in the moment of transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes when the church ceases being a state church—then the argument has to be generalizable to already existing democratic civil societies.

This is not the place to develop systematically the argument or to show empirically how religion, religious groups, and religious

movements have been central components of American civil society, at least since the second Great Awakening. One could reconstruct such an argument along Tocquevillian lines and bring it up to date with Robert Putnam's discussion of social capital. The role of religion is central in both analyses. And leaving aside the merits and relevance of Putnam's (2000) current attempts at quantifying social capital, or his thesis about the decline of social capital in American civil society, his analysis clearly shows that much of American social capital is saved, invested, or circulates through churches and religious groups. Alternatively, one could develop a parallel argument, more grounded in theories of the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society: what I have called the de-privatization of religion, when religion enters the public sphere of civil society to raise normative issues, participating in ongoing processes of normative contestation (Casanova, 1994b).

Looking particularly at those forms of religious intervention in the public sphere that have emerged in an advanced modern society like the United States, one could say that the de-privatization of modern religion has assumed three main forms. There is, first, the religious mobilization in defense of the traditional life-world against various forms of state or market penetration. The mobilization of Protestant fundamentalism and, to a certain extent, the Catholic mobilization against abortion, can be seen as examples of this first form of de-privatization. Even in those cases in which the religious mobilization could be explained simply as a traditionalist response and reaction to modern processes of universalization, which are promoted or protected by state juridical interventions and which disrupt, for instance, the traditional patriarchal family or established patterns of racial or gender discrimination—even then the de-privatization of religion may have an important public function. By entering the public sphere and forcing the public discussion or contestation of certain issues, they force modern societies to reflect publicly and collectively on their normative structures. Naturally, one should not minimize the dangers that a traditionalist backlash or a fundamentalist pro-

ject of restoration may pose to modern normative structures. But in the very process of entering the modern public sphere, religions and normative traditions are also forced to confront and possibly come to terms with modern normative structures. Such a public encounter may permit the reflexive rationalization of the life world and may open the way for the institutionalization of processes of practical rationalization.

A second form of de-privatization is manifested in those cases in which religions enter the public sphere of modern societies to question and contest the claims of the two major societal systems, states and markets, to function according to their own intrinsic functionalist norms without regard to extrinsic traditional moral norms. By questioning, for example, absolutist *raison d'état* principles, the morality of national security doctrines, and the inhuman premises of nuclear defense policies, religions remind both states and their citizens of the human need to subordinate the logic of state formation to the "common good." Similarly, by questioning the inhuman claims of capitalist markets to function in accordance with impersonal and amoral self-regulating mechanisms, religions may remind individuals and societies of the need to check and regulate those impersonal market mechanisms to ensure that they are accountable for the human, social, and ecological damage they may cost and that they may become more responsible to human needs. Moreover, transnational religions are in a particularly advantageous position to remind all individuals and all societies that under modern conditions of globalization, the "common good" can increasingly be defined only in global, universal human terms, and that consequently, the public sphere of modern civil societies cannot have national or state boundaries.

Finally, there is a third form of de-privatization of religion connected with the obstinate insistence of religious traditions in maintaining the very principle of a "common good" against individualist modern liberal theories that would reduce the common good to the aggregated sum of individual rational choices. As

long as they respect the ultimate right and duty of the individual conscience to make moral decisions, religions, by bringing into the public sphere issues that liberal theories have decreed to be private affairs, remind individuals and modern societies that morality can only exist as an intersubjective normative structure and that individual choices only attain a "moral" dimension when they are guided or informed by intersubjective, interpersonal norms. Reduced to the private sphere of the individual self, morality must dissolve necessarily into arbitrary decisionism. By bringing publicity into the private moral sphere and by bringing into the public sphere issues of private morality, religions force modern societies to confront the task of reconstructing reflexively and collectively their own normative foundations. By so doing, they aid in the process of practical rationalization of the traditional life world and their own normative traditions.

II. Prospective Reflections on Islam and Democratization

In the following section I try not so much to engage in the dubious exercise of positivist forecasting as to reflect upon what appear to be some potentially relevant trends in the hope of elucidating the present context of practical action. Although I cannot offer a systematic comparison of Islam and Catholicism (since I can claim at most a superficial acquaintance with some of the secondary literature on contemporary Islam), I believe that a look at the ongoing contemporary reformulations of the Islamic tradition from the comparative perspective of the Catholic *aggiornamento* may be instructive. At the very least, it should serve to relativize constructions of a clash between "Islam" and the "West" based on essentialist conceptions of both.

In his thesis on the "clash of civilizations," Samuel Huntington (1993, 1996) has raised provocatively the argument that democracy may be a civilizational achievement of the Christian West and therefore not easily transferable to other civilizations or world

religions other than through Western hegemonic imposition or through the conversion to Western norms. If the thesis is correct, it would follow that the third wave of democratization may have reached its civilizational limits and that few other countries are likely to attain successful transitions to stable democracies. Ironically, this is a view shared by Western hegemonists like Huntington, by postmodern critics of hegemonic Western universalism, and by some religious and political elites in non-Western countries who want to protect themselves and their societies from the contagion of undesirable elements of Western modernity.²

Huntington's vision of the impending conflict between the Christian democratic West and other civilizations, particularly "Islamic-Confucian states," has been widely and rightly criticized on many grounds, above all for his essentialism—that is, for the assumption that world religions have some unchangeable core essences. Huntington's (1991) own analysis of the Catholic wave of democratization can be used to question this assumption. Indeed, had Huntington developed his argument only a few decades earlier, before the Catholic *aggiornamento*, the formulation of the thesis could possibly have taken the form of the clash of the Protestant secular West against "the Rest," and Catholic culture could have been easily construed as essentially inimical to democracy. This, after all, was an old thesis, not totally without foundation in reality, that Tocqueville had already tried to refute in the 1830s. The thesis found particular resonance in Protestant America, where from the 1830s to the 1960s it took the expression of the alleged incompatibility between "Republicanism" and "Romanism."³

At the very least, and irrespective of how one judges the old anti-Catholic prejudices, the swift and radical transformation of the political culture of Catholic countries as the result of the official reformulation of the religious teachings of the Catholic Church puts into question the notion of the unchanging core essence of a world religion as dogmatically structured as Catholicism. The premise of an unchanging core essence should even be

less valid for other world religions with a less dogmatically structured doctrinal core or with a more pluralistic and contested system of authoritative interpretation of the religious tradition.

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

Tragically, the terrorist attacks of September 11, perpetrated as they were by Muslim militants, and the military response of the Western alliance in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime and against Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda network of Muslim militants, have only exacerbated these debates. Not surprisingly, many have viewed the terrorist attacks and the Western military and police responses as a dramatic confirmation of the civilizational clash between Islam and the West. Such an interpretation of the conflict appears to have found considerable resonance throughout the West as well as throughout the Muslim world. The public denials of Western leaders that their interventions are not directed against Islam seem hardly credible when they are accompanied by the widespread and indiscriminate surveillance and detention of Arabs and Muslims in America and when those infringements of individual liberties go unchallenged by the courts, unquestioned by Congress, and condoned by public opinion—as if to confirm that Arabs and Muslims are collectively suspect of potential complicity with the terrorist perpetrators and presumed guilty by ethnic and religious association. In turn, the public condemnations of the attacks by most Muslim political and

religious leaders and their attempts to dissociate Islam from the illegitimate terrorist methods, if not from the legitimate anti-Western grievances that may have fueled them, are received in the West as ambiguous and inadequate responses to the American categorical presidential ultimatum to be “with us or against us” in the global war against terrorism. Such a charged atmosphere is hardly conducive to a reasonable debate on the conditions of possibility for democracy and civil society in Muslim countries. But the question is as relevant as and perhaps more urgent than ever.

It is undeniable that the majority of Muslim countries today have authoritarian political regimes and repressive states. One should certainly not blame the victims, ordinary Muslim people, for the injustices and political hardships they must all too often endure. Many of these authoritarian regimes rely on the military and financial support of the United States and other Western powers. Many of these regimes also claim to be “Muslim” states or seek the religious mantle of Islam as a source of political legitimation for the most diverse institutions and political practices. It would seem farfetched indeed to attribute the common undemocratic nature of regimes as diverse as the Saudi patrimonial monarchy, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the despotic tyranny of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, or the military dictatorships of Pakistan to some alleged Islamic essence. Furthermore, the claimed Islamic attributes of practically every state and regime throughout the Muslim world are openly or clandestinely challenged by opposition groups or movements as diverse as the regimes they oppose, and which claim for themselves the same authentic Islamic attributes. Indeed, practically every political movement or project, in power or in opposition, throughout the Muslim world claims to be “Islamic” if not “Islamist.” It is this very fact of the apparently inevitable fusion of religion and politics in Muslim countries that has led so many external observers and “experts” to attribute a “fundamentalist” essence to Islam that allegedly makes it incompatible with the differentiated structures of modernity and with

the privatization of religion supposedly required by liberal democracy (Lewis, 1988; Tibi, 1990).

It is less the ongoing intellectual debates among orientalists and “experts” concerning the nature of Islam and more the very open and contentious contemporary debates among Muslims concerning their own tradition that raises the question as to what constitutes, if not the essential core of Islam as a civilization, certainly its authoritative interpretation and its authentic representation today. What constitutes authentic Islamic norms, values and practices? Who has the authority to define and represent the Islamic tradition? Are Islamic norms, values, and practices compatible with modern democratic political structures and with an open pluralist civil society? Obviously, given my lack of expertise I am not in a position nor is this the proper place to attempt to address these questions systematically. In any case it is up to Muslim practitioners to answer these questions in their own multivocal ways.

But essentialist interpretations of Islam tend to preclude the possibility that contemporary Muslims may find their own models of Muslim *aggiornamentos* (they are likely to be plural), which like the Catholic one would offer viable responses attuned both to their religious tradition and to modern requirements. These essentialist interpretations in principle deprive contemporary Muslims of any agency or history, since they force Muslims to repeat the past compulsively in order to remain faithful to their identity. The comparison with Catholicism may be instructive because, like Islam today, it was viewed for a long time as the paradigmatic antimodern fundamentalist religion.⁴ Catholicism served as the central focus of the Enlightenment critique of religion. It offered for centuries the most spirited, principled, and seemingly futile resistance to modern processes of secularization and modernization. It resisted capitalism, liberalism, the modern secular state, the democratic revolutions, socialism, and continues to resist the sexual revolution and feminism. Even after its official accommodation with secular modernity and after relin-

quishing its identity as a monopolistic state church, the Catholic Church refuses to become just a private religion, just an individual private belief. It wants to be both modern and public. Indeed, since Vatican II, it has kept a highly public profile throughout the world.

Even a superficial acquaintance with the complex history of premodern Muslim societies across three continents and over a millennium makes abundantly clear that the patterns of relations and differentiation between religious and political institutions and structures are as diverse as anything one finds in Latin Christendom or indeed in any other world religion (Lambton, 1981; Lapidus, 1975). As Talal Asad (1997: 191) has pointed out, it is "the idea that Islam was originally—and therefore essentially—a theocratic state" that has led to the "irresponsible" notion that Islamist modern politics are the natural "outgrowth of tendencies essential to an original politico-religious Islam" to which Islamic revival movements are condemned to return. Asad traces the genealogy of such an idea to nineteenth-century European historiography that, when analyzing the rise of Islam in seventh-century Arabia, used anachronistically the modern categories of "religion" and "state." Paradoxically, modern Islamists have adopted from Western orientalists the vision of a "symbiosis" (Dabashi, 1987) of religion and politics in the prophetic charismatic age and so their calls for religious revival are often accompanied today by calls for the establishment of an Islamic state. Consequently, both Islamists and orientalists also share the view that later Muslim history with its differentiation of religious and political institutions signals a falling away from the original sacrosanct model. According to Asad (1997:190-1), "for the former (Islamists) this history constituted the betrayal of a sacred ideal that Muslims are required as believers to restore; for the latter (orientalists) it defines a schizophrenic compromise that has always prevented a progressive reform of Islam."

The relevant question, of course, is whether one should attribute the widespread impulse found in the contemporary pol-

itics of Muslim countries to establish "Islamic" states to some Islamic essence Muslims cannot relinquish without also abandoning their religious tradition and their identity; or alternatively whether "it is the product of modern politics and the *modernising* state" (Asad, 1997: 190). I am not in a position to evaluate the competing claims concerning the history of Islam, but since one finds similar "fundamentalist" impulses to symbiotic fusions of religions and politics throughout the history of nation-state formation in the Christian West and similar "fundamentalist" impulses today within Judaism in Israel, within Hinduism in India, and within Buddhism in Sri Lanka (van der Veer and Lehman, 1999; Marty and Appleby, 1991), I would be inclined to attribute the common "fundamentalist" impulse to the common context of nation-state formation, rather than to some common symbiotic fusion of religion and politics at the genesis of all these religions that has left an indelible mark in their makeup.

Only with great poetic license could one possibly construct such a myth of origin in the case of Hinduism or Buddhism. Yet, even in the absence of such original historical precedent, the modern nationalist impulse to fuse the religious and the political communities obviously is operative in both cases. In the case of Judaism such a myth of origin was of course readily available in the image of ancient Israel depicted in the Torah, although at first only secular Zionists found an interest in re-creating the myth for modern nationalist purposes. The scant interest prior to the Holocaust on the part of world Jewry, Orthodox Jews in particular, in joining or supporting the Zionist project would seem to indicate that most Jews did not consider that having a Jewish nation-state essential to Judaism.

It is an undeniable fact that religion is at the center of politics in Muslim countries. This fact in itself is neither so remarkable nor unique. Only the blinders of secularist and liberal ideologies have obscured the fact that religion has historically been and in many cases still is a pervasive factor in the politics of modern Western countries. Certainly the party system of most continental

European countries shows how central religion has been to political conflicts there. In the United States the party system was not structured along denominational lines or along religious-secularist cleavages as in Europe, but religion has certainly been and still is an important factor in American politics. But secularists tend to hold on to the notion that this is a traditional residue likely to disappear with progressive modernization and secularization, or that it is a manifestation of American "exceptionalism." What is remarkable given this context is to find Ernest Gellner (1992), an anthropologist of Islam and student of modern European nationalism, proposing the thesis that the continuous vitality of religion in modern Muslim countries, a vitality that actually seems to increase rather than decrease with modernization and that he attributes to the fusion of religious and national identities, is a peculiar form of "Islamic exceptionalism." Islam, according to Gellner, is proving to be exceptionally immune to the allegedly general forces of secularization, otherwise operative elsewhere. Of course, similar arguments have been made about Hindu and Japanese "exceptionalisms." Indeed, after so many exceptionalisms one wonders what is left of the European rule of secularization. More and more it looks as if European secularization is the one historical process that is truly "exceptional" (Casanova, 2002).

Tocqueville is probably the single modern classic theorist of democracy and civil society who remained unconvinced by the Enlightenment prediction that religion would decline and become politically irrelevant with the advancement of democracy and individual freedoms. On the contrary, he thought that the incorporation of ordinary people into democratic politics would only increase the relevance of religion for modern politics. The empirical evidence from American democracy confirmed him in the correctness of his uncommon views. He saw religious associations as "the schools" of civil and political associationism crucial for a democratic republic, thought that transcendent religion was the foundation of the kind of "self-interest rightly understood"

that transcends egoistic and solipsist individualism, and wrote that "religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions" (Tocqueville, 1990, I: 305).

It is true that Tocqueville attributed the positive role of religion in American politics to the republican character of American Protestantism, but he was simultaneously inclined to generalize this argument and find elective affinities between the equalization of social conditions characteristic of modern democracy and the equalization of all individuals before God brought on by Christianity or, one could add, by any monotheistic religion. Particularly, he was eager to extend this argument to Catholicism in order to counter the view, widely held on both sides of the French republican-laicist/ monarchist-Catholic divide, that Catholicism was incompatible with modern democracy and with individual freedoms. He argued that the absolutist monocratic authority of the pope had the same kind of leveling effect among Catholics that royal absolutism had in France, equalizing conditions and preparing the ground for the revolution and for democracy. In any case, and irrespective of how persuasive one finds the analogy, Tocqueville was happy to confirm that Catholics in America had adapted perfectly well to republican conditions by learning to compartmentalize rigidly the religious and the secular spheres. "Thus the Catholics of the United States are at the same time the most submissive believers and the most independent citizens" (301-2).

The Tocquevillian argument can easily be applied to Islam. More perhaps than any other religion, Islam stresses discursively and ritually the equalization of all Muslims before God. Moreover, in comparison with the clerical, hierarchic, and hierocratic centralized administrative structure of the Catholic Church, the Islamic *umma*, at least within the Sunni tradition, has a more counciliar, egalitarian, laic, and decentralized structure. Moreover, in comparison with the canonical and dogmatic modes of official "infallible" definition and interpretation of the divine doc-

trines, Islam has more open, competitive, and pluralistic authoritative schools of law and interpretation with a more fluid and decentralized organization of the *ulama*. According to prophetic injunction, only the uncoerced consensus of the *umma* is guaranteed no error. The pluralistic and decentralized character of religious authority that had always been distinctive of traditional Islam has become even more pronounced in the modern age. Actually, if there is anything on which most observers and analysts of contemporary Islam agree, it is that the Islamic tradition in the very recent past has undergone an unprecedented process of pluralization and fragmentation of religious authority, comparable to that initiated by the Protestant Reformation and operative ever since within Protestant Christianity. Unlike the sectarian tendency of Protestantism to fragment into separate communities, however, Islam has been able to preserve its identity as an “imagined community.”

The sociohistorical context of the contemporary pluralization and fragmentation is associated with familiar general processes of global modernity:

- the intrusive penetration and colonization of the traditional life world by administrative states and markets, under colonial and postcolonial regimes;
- the mass migration to urban centers and distant lands, Muslim and non-Muslim;
- the expansion of mass education promoted by nationalist “developmental” regimes (Eickelman, 1992);
- the revolution in mass communications: print, electronic, and high-speed travel (Sardar, 1993);
- the proliferation of global networks building upon already highly developed Muslim transnational networks (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1990).

The general de-traditionalization associated with these processes assumed striking manifestations, especially in the religious sphere. Rather than furthering secularization, as social science would have predicted, it has actually led to greater and wider

access to religious education, one that is moreover no longer under the control of the traditional *ulama*. As Robert Hefner (2001) has pointed out, “today populist preachers, neotraditionalist Sufi masters, and secularly educated ‘new Muslim intellectuals’ challenge the monopoly of religious power earlier enjoyed by classically trained religious scholars (*ulama*).” Particularly a new breed of militant new Muslim intellectuals, who often proceed from the ranks of engineers, doctors, soldiers, and schoolteachers, have had a significant impact on Islamist movements and on the fragmentation of religious authority (Kepele and Richard, 1991). They are often as hostile to the traditional *ulama* as they are to the governing elites, accusing the latter of being un-Islamic and of pagan idolatry (*jahiliyya*), and the former of having been co-opted by the state. The new activists tend to orient themselves to a broad public rather than to circles of scholarly virtuosos, and to present political versions of Islam that in form and content are closer to modern ideologies than to traditional doctrines. While traditional scholars may decry those versions as “bizarrely eclectic or even un-Islamic. . . this eclectic mix makes the new public Islam all the more attractive to mass audiences” (Hefner, 2001).

Print and electronic mass media have had a particularly prominent role in the destabilization of religious hierarchies. James Piscatori (2000: 86) asks the poignant question: “Now that the sacred texts have been digitized and are easily available on CDs, what does this do to the authority of the traditional *alim* who has excelled at what is no longer efficient—memorizing the texts and orally instructing the faithful? New kinds of interpreters emerge, therefore, claiming a right to *ijtihad* (independent judgment) and possessing scriptural literacy.” Not surprisingly, some traditional scholars have responded to the challenge by adopting successfully modern technologies and by turning into popular audiocassette preachers and televangelists able to reach large mass audiences throughout the Muslim world. The result, as Eickelman and Piscatori (1996: 5) point out, has been an open “competition and contest over both the interpretation of [religious] symbols and

control of the institutions, formal and informal, that produce and sustain them." As in the Protestant precedent, crucial in this process has been the direct immediate access to scripture. More and more Muslims, male and female, are reading the Koran with their own eyes, looking for answers to the complex realities and exigencies of the modern world.

Few would deny that this pluralization and fragmentation of religious authority amounts to a participatory revolution and to a democratization of the religious sphere. But can this often-chaotic ferment be transformed into a force conducive to the democratization of political structures and to the institutionalization of an open and pluralistic civil society made up of "publics" and "associations" based on protected individual freedoms? One should not expect, of course, an unambiguous and uniform answer to this question. Scholarly "experts" and professional "observers" of Islam are engaged in a contentious debate on this issue. For some (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996), as chaotic as it may be, the fragmentation of authority is preparing the ground for democratic pluralism. For others (Roy, 1994) it just amounts to a violent and destructive "rebellion of the masses." Ultimately, time will tell. But since many "scholarly" interventions in public affairs actually have practical repercussions and may even have the character of self-fulfilling prophecies, I would rather contribute to wishful thinking in viewing the contemporary revival as a form of Islamic *aggiornamento*. Before discussing briefly three selective contemporary manifestations of political Islam in Turkey, Iran, and Indonesia, which highlight in my view the potential the contemporary transformation has for the institutionalization of democracy and civil society in Muslim countries, I would like to introduce two caveats.

The Catholic transformation had the character of an official, relatively uniform and swift reform from above that found little contestation from below and could easily be enforced across the Catholic world, generating as a result a remarkable global homogenization of Catholic culture at least among the elites

(Casanova, 1997). Islam, by contrast, lacks centralized institutions and administrative structures to define and enforce official doctrines and, therefore, the ongoing Muslim *aggiornamentos* to modern global realities and predicaments are and will likely remain plural, with multiple, diverse, and often contradictory outcomes. Global terrorist networks declaring jihad on infidels are as much and as little representative manifestations of the contemporary Islamic revival as the global networks of liberal Muslim intellectuals, religious leaders, and elites working with their counterparts from other civilizations and world religions to construct a more just, fair, humane, and peaceful global order. The brutal repression of women by the Taliban is as much and as little a manifestation of this chaotic ferment as the mobilization of "Sisters in Islam" in Malaysia and elsewhere to defend the human, civil, and political rights of Muslim women, including their religious right to participate in the interpretation of the Islamic tradition. In between there is a whole gamut of manifestations of the multiple Islamic *aggiornamentos* in all spheres of life (Haddad et al., 1991). Depending upon which particular manifestation one chooses to highlight as "relevant," the answer to the above question is likely to be very different.

The second caveat would be to avoid viewing those *aggiornamentos* simply as a belated capitulation on the part of religion, once it recognized the futility of its protracted fundamentalist resistance to secular modernity. It is true that *aggiornare* has the connotations of "catching-up" and "bringing up to date," but it also means discernment of "the signs of the times" in light of the tradition and reformulating the tradition in ways relevant for the age. The Catholic *aggiornamento* was partially a form of Protestantification, a recognition that there have been aspects of the Protestant Reformation that were valid. But the council and later formulations also maintained a distinctive distance from liberal Protestant modernity, insisting on its own Catholic reading of the signs of the times and on responses to new modern problems informed by the Catholic tradition. The result has been not so

much modern homogenization as the enrichment of multiple modernities. We can talk of a Catholic model of modernity distinct from a liberal Protestant model of modernity. Similarly, one should be open to the possibility that the Islamic tradition, with its distinctive public discourse and Muslim practices, will inform and shape the type of civil society and the democratic institutions that may emerge in Muslim countries. There are multiple Western modernities and there will likely be multiple Muslim modernities. Turkey, Iran, and Indonesia are three countries in which Muslims are engaged today discursively and practically in various attempts at political reform, liberalization, democratization, and the constitution of civil societies. The contexts and the projects are radically different but all three can be viewed as ongoing experiments in Islamic democratization.

Turkey

Officially, Turkey is a secular democratic republic facing the challenge of Islamic parties that represent, if not a majority, certainly a plurality of Turkish voters and that are openly challenging through electoral politics and normal democratic channels the secularist ideology of the state (Tapper, 1991). The state's by now routine response through the intervention of the army, the guardian of the sacred Kemalist secularist principles, has been to declare those parties unconstitutional, banishing them and their leaders from the political sphere, because they break the constitutional ban on religious parties, religion and ethnicity being forms of identity that are not allowed public representation in secular Turkey. The banished parties soon reemerge with new names and new leaders, only to be banned again when they present a new electoral threat. The Islamic parties are often accused of being "fundamentalist" and of representing a threat to democracy. But so far, unlike the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria, which chose armed struggle and terror when the military

denied the party the electoral victory it had clearly won, the Islamic parties in Turkey have respected the democratic rules and when they have gained power at the local level in large cities, their administrations have been comparatively exemplary and free of corruption.

One wonders whether democracy does not become an impossible "game" when potential majorities are not allowed to win elections, and when civilian politicians ask the military to come to the rescue of democracy by banning these potential majorities. Nearly every continental European country has had at one time or another religious parties. Many of them, particularly the Catholic ones, had dubious democratic credentials until the negative learning experience of fascism turned them into Christian Democratic parties. Unless people are allowed to play the game fairly, it may be difficult for them to appreciate the rules and to acquire a democratic habitus. One also wonders about democratic representation when a representative of the people, duly elected, loses her parliamentary seat when she dares to assume office wearing a Muslim veil. The veil was banned, along with every other public representation of Islam, by Kemal Atatürk, the father of the modern Turkish nation, who was bent on begetting through state administrative measures a new imagined community of secular Turks. The veil in parliament could not possibly have posed a real threat to Turkish democracy, but it certainly was perceived as a blasphemous affront against the secularist constitutional principles of the state. One wonders who are the real "fundamentalists" here.

Ultimately, the project of constructing such a nation-state from above is likely to fail because it is too secular for the Islamists, too Sunni for the Alevis, and too Turkish for the Kurds.⁵ A Turkish state in which the collective identities and interests of these groups cannot find public representation cannot be a truly representative democratic state, even if it is founded on modern secular constitutional principles. What Turkey represents is the paradox of a Muslim country being, at least constitutionally, more

secularist than the European ones it wants to emulate, with the possible exception of France. Turkey wants to join Europe and be part of the West. If accepted, it could prove that Huntington's civilizational battle fronts and fault lines are less fixed and more porous and mobile than the theory assumes. After all, millions of Turkish immigrants and their descendants in Western Europe have found, along with much prejudice and discrimination, work, new homes, and new identities as well as the opportunity to organize in support of those identities—Islamic, Alevi, Kurdish—that are forbidden public representation and mobilization at home. Officially, Europe's refusal to accept Turkey so far is based on Turkey's deficient human rights record. But there are not too subtle indications that an outwardly secular Europe is still too Christian when it comes to the possibility of imagining a Muslim country as part of the European community. One wonders whether Turkey represents a threat to Western civilization or rather an unwelcome reminder of the barely submerged yet inexpressible and anxiety ridden "white" European Christian identity.

Iran

Observing Iranian political developments, one can follow the rise and fall of the utopian revolutionary idea, tinged with Shiite millennialism, of a modern Islamist state. The triumph of the Islamic Revolution represented the high point of this modern Islamic ideology, which was born of a rejection of the various post-colonial secular nationalisms—Arab, Persian, Indonesian. It may be too early to predict "the end of Islamic ideology" (Dabashi, 2000) throughout the Muslim world, but the idea and the reality of an Islamist state is unraveling from within in revolutionary Iran. Once the revolutionary élan died out, particularly after the death of the charismatic imam, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Islamic state was revealed as a relatively inefficient and repressive theocracy run by a clerical establishment determined to hold

on to its privileged constitutional position and power. This theocracy now faces the dual challenge of a project of liberalization and constitutional reform from above and a project of democratization from below. Both converge into the charged political slogans of "rule of law" and "civil society" (Arjomand, 2000). The scenario, the discourse, the actors, the electoral dynamics all sound familiar from the vast literature on recent democratic transitions. The similarities with Spain, Brazil, or Hungary are striking. Iran is clearly in transition. Whether the transition will lead to democracy or something else is uncertain. But the regime is in crisis. The costs of repressing large electoral majorities have become simply prohibitive.

The chances for democratization are probably good because of the converging dynamics of liberalization, constitutional reform, and state rationalization from above and demands for democratic participation from below, as well as because of the shared discourse of rule of law and civil society. Both dynamics converge in what Janos Kis calls "refolution," a term coined to characterize a hybrid of reform from above and revolution from below that brings a radical change of political regime but with legal constitutional continuity, that is, without revolutionary break. Spain inaugurated this road of negotiated transition. Poland and Hungary followed it in Eastern Europe, Chile continued it in Latin America, and South Africa was the high end of this road. The existence of a truly constitutional or quasi-constitutional order and of a relatively institutionalized regime serve as limiting and enabling conditions, which Iran meets, for this new type of transition. Another condition associated with such transitions is the need to guarantee safe exit to the "hard-liners" so that they may relinquish power quietly and peacefully. This condition may prove trickier in Iran because of the constitutional theocratic character of the regime and the hierocratic claims of the Shiite *ulama*. They need to be offered not only safe exit but safe "face" and reassurances that the ideal and material interests they represent, as guardians of Shiite Islam, are not threatened. The closest parallel would be

that of military forces that agree to return to their barracks, to submit to civilian control, and even to punish their most egregious human rights violators, without compromising the "honor" and integrity of the institution.

In this respect, Iran offers some lessons about the costs and dangers of theocratic rule. The obvious but banal lesson is that modern revolutionary theocracies can be harshly repressive worldly regimes, although they are unlikely to ever match the totalitarian excesses of their modern secular counterparts. The more important lesson for hierocratic rulers and their followers is that the failure of theocratic rule, when administrative results fall far short of messianic utopian expectations, is likely to compromise not only their worldly political legitimacy but, more important, their transcendent religious authority. In its hierocratic structure, Iranian Shiism bears some resemblance to the Catholic Church in that the Shiite *ulama*, like the similarly hierocratic church, have often served as an effective countervailing power to external colonial rule, to despotic shahs, and to the absolutist claims of the modern state. Much of their social power and legitimacy derive from this autonomous role as guardians. But neither the *ulama* nor the church could play this role effectively if they did not maintain some administrative distance from state rule and/or some ideological and social distance from modern nationalism. It is when they succumb to the seduction of the modern nation-state and become nationalist state churches that they become a real threat to the freedom of the people they claim to guard and are likely to undermine not only the people's faith and trust but their own institutional privileges. All important differences notwithstanding, the modern transformation of the Shiite *ulama* into a national Iranian church and of Shiism into a revolutionary state ideology parallels the transformation of the Catholic church in Spain into a church of the nation-state and of "National-Catholicism" into a fascist state ideology under the Franco regime.

The tortuous process of extrication of Spanish Catholicism from the Franco regime, which allowed the church to regain its countervailing autonomy and play a positive role in the democratic transition, was linked to a combination of internal and external factors that are not easy to replicate in the Iranian context. Ultimately, the Franco regime was not a theocracy and the state was not controlled by the church. In turn, the church always maintained its internal institutional autonomy and its transnational ties and dependence on the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican *aggiornamento*, though shocking at first, impelled the Spanish Catholic Church to redefine its identity and its relationship to the Franco regime, to the Spanish state, and to civil society. The extrication of clerical Shiism from the state is going to be more difficult. The optimistic scenario of a peaceful constitutional "refolution" sketched above can only succeed if the emerging internal split within Shiism itself consolidates so that the reforming *ulama* themselves become a countervailing force to the theocratic rulers and offer religious legitimation for the project of constitutional reform, political liberalization, and democratization. One can easily imagine, of course, other less optimistic and more unpredictable alternatives, either a freezing of the liberalization and a hardening of theocratic rule that would require massive and in the long run unsustainable repressive measures, or an anticlerical revolt from society.

It is too early to ask the hypothetical question whether there are any "Islamic" limits to the project of constitutional reform and democratization in Iran, to what President Mohammad Khatami calls "the consolidation of Islamic democracy and popular government." The clerics count on the constitutional clause of "conformity with the standards of Islam" to be able to protect their power on the basis of their claims to be the authoritative interpreters of these standards. Khatami retorts that "sacred terms such as 'revolution,' 'freedom,' 'Islam' and '*leadership*' are not the monopoly of any group" (Arjomand, 2000: 297). In principle, therefore, "the standards of Islam" could mean whatever Muslims

consensually and democratically determine it to be. Such a standard could be in accordance with democratic principles of majority rule and popular sovereignty, assuming that the *ulama* do not successfully resist this democratization of religious authority. But could non-Muslims, such as secular Iranians, Bahais, and Jews participate fully and equally as citizens in the determination of these standards? Will the rule of law protect “human rights” or “Islamic rights” (Mayer, 1996)? Ultimately, can an Islamic republic protect the right of each individual to freedom of conscience, including the right to religious conversion and to apostasy? The acceptance of the modern individual inalienable right to religious freedom was the litmus test of the Catholic *aggiornamento*. Symbolically at least, the acceptance of the right to apostasy would be the equivalent litmus test of Islamic *aggiornamento*. I am not bringing this up because I consider this to be a serious, practical issue in need of urgent resolution, although the abysmal treatment of the Bahais precisely because they are viewed as “apostates” and therefore not as a true religion worthy of state protection like Judaism, Christianity, or Zoroastrianism is worrisome and reprehensible (Kazemzadeh, 2000). In principle, democracies have to be ready not only to tolerate and protect the rights of minorities, but also the right of minorities to form majorities. Could an Islamic republic allow a majority of its citizens to cease being Muslim, that is, to become secular, and thus allow the secularization of its own republican identity? I repeat, those are only hypothetical and perhaps not very urgent questions practically in Iran today. But Muslim political thinkers and theories of an Islamic Republic need to answer them some day.

Indonesia

The Indonesian experience offers an answer to such questions. Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation and the largest majority-Muslim country in the world. Some 88 percent of

Indonesia's 210 million people officially profess Islam. But it also has significant numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, the other religions officially recognized and protected by the state. Indonesia is also undergoing its own democratic transition and although the process has been messy and democracy is by no means consolidated, it has made significant and probably irreversible strides in dismantling the three-decades-long dictatorship of Suharto and his "New Order" regime. The process certainly must count as an extension of the third wave of democratization reaching East and Southeast Asian shores in the last decade. Most important in the context of this paper, Indonesia has sustained the longest and most systematic open debate between two versions of political Islam, which Hefner has characterized as "regimist Islam vs. civil Islam."⁶ It seems that civil Islam is clearly gaining the upper hand discursively and electorally among Indonesian Muslims.

What distinguishes this model of civil Islam is a conscious reflexive rejection of the modern "mythology of the Islamic state" and of the Islamist project to conquer and use the administrative machinery of the modern state to impose a coercive regime of Islamic sacred laws, regulative norms, and disciplinary practices upon society. Indonesian civil Islam, however, is not predicated on the privatization of Islam and the secularization of society, but rather on the self-organization of an autonomous Muslim public "civil society," able to counteract and counterveil state power and willing to mobilize the normative and organizational resources of Muslim parties, associations, and institutions to promote and defend a public culture of pluralism, political participation, and social justice. Countering the criticisms of Islamists and nationalist authoritarian state elites, who deride their project of pluralist democracy and civil society as a naive yielding to the seduction of foreign and un-Islamic Westernization, Muslim "renewalists" (*pembaruan*) retort that their project is grounded on a proud affirmation of the valuable Indonesian heritage of ethnoreligious and political pluralism and on a reflexive engagement with the

rich, pluralist, and universalist normative tradition of Islam, a tradition that transcends historically particular and contextually embedded Arab versions of Islam.

The Malay-Indonesian archipelago “was never conquered by invading Muslim armies, smothered under a centralized empire, or supervised by an omnipresent clergy” and politically, prior to the Dutch centralizing colonization, “it was organized around a ‘pluricentric’ pattern of mercantile city-states, inland agrarian kingdoms, and tribal hinterlands” (Hefner, 2000: 14).

Not surprisingly, the Islam promoted by diverse Muslim rulers and traders and the Muslim identities shared by hundreds of diverse ethnolinguistic groups always had plural manifestations, and neither the courts nor the *ulamas* were in a position to assert monopolitic control over Muslim practices. Ironically, the strict Dutch colonial restrictions on Muslim participation in public affairs predicated upon Enlightenment conceptions of religious privatization impelled Muslims to develop their own autonomous structures and associations away from power centers. The contentious debate between the two competing visions of Islam emerged already in the anticolonial struggles for national independence. A majority of puritan (*santri*) Muslims saw independence as the avenue to a deeper and more uniform Islamization of state and society. But some pious Muslims joined fellow Javanese Muslims (*abangan*) and non-Muslims (Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and secular nationalists) in advocating a plural, tolerant, and democratic nation-state. While assuming various forms and changing coalitions, this debate and political competition between the two versions of Islam has been constant throughout modern Indonesian history.

In the first national elections in 1955, against the expectations of a Muslim victory, the vote was divided evenly between non-confessional nationalists and those advocating an Islamic state. Following the failed 1965 left-wing military coup, Muslim organizations joined the army in the bloody repression of Communists and left-wing sympathizers, a campaign they sacralized as

holy war (jihad) and that left half a million people dead. The parallels with the Spanish civil war and the Catholic Church's sacralization of the war as a *crusade* of national liberation against a "Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik" conspiracy are all too obvious. Unlike the Franco regime, however, Suharto not only did not reward the Muslim parties with access to state power, but actually weakened them through manipulation and repression. In the 1971 elections Suharto's own government party of national unity easily defeated the Muslim parties. Forced to rely once again on their own resources, the Muslim organizations concentrated on society-oriented programs of religious "appeal" (*dakwah*) and on building autonomous institutions. "Senior modernist" Muslim leaders who were connected with Masyumi, the dominant Muslim party, viewed this society-oriented strategy as an interim measure conducive to rebuilding a mass base that could eventually be used to take over the state. The "junior modernists" associated with Muslim student organizations, by contrast, drew more sobering lessons from the experience of the manipulation of Islamic symbols and Muslim organizations by the army and the regime and rediscovered the Indonesian Muslim heritage of civil autonomy and skeptic distance from state power, which now revealed themselves as necessary in order to preserve the integrity of Islam.

As in many other Muslim societies, the rapid expansion of education, urbanization, and economic development promoted by the regime did not lead to the expected secularization. On the contrary, in the late 1970s and early 1980s Indonesia experienced an unprecedented Islamic resurgence. Around this time Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, the religiously traditionalist Nadlatul Ulama (NU), emerged as the main force of a civil society-oriented public Islam, promoting various Muslim NGOs and the pluralization and democratization of its own political culture. When global discourses of democracy, civil society, and human rights reached Indonesia they could be translated easily into vernacular experiences and promoted not as imitative Westerniza-

tion but as the reformulation of universal Islamic principles and indigenous Muslim practices. This democratic and civil society orientation was reinforced by the attempts of the by now discredited and corrupt Suharto regime to build an alliance with conservative Muslim forces eager to promote policies of Islamization from above and by the blatant appeals at nationalist ethno-religious mobilization against an internal prodemocracy movement accused of being lackeys of an external conspiracy led by Jews, Americans, and Chinese-Catholics bent on weakening Muslim Indonesia.

In its final crisis the regime repeatedly showed no reluctance to promote ethno-religious violence in East Timor, in Maluku, in Eastern Java in an attempt to split the two main wings of the prodemocracy movement: secular Indonesians and nominal Muslims linked to Megawati Sukarnoputri and traditionalist Muslims in Abdurrahman Wahid's Nahdlatul Ulama. On various occasions the ethno-religious conflicts could have been much more severe and destabilizing if civil Muslim organizations would not have counteracted to stop the violence. Muslim youth organizations played a predominant role in the prodemocracy movement that forced President Suharto to step down in May 1998. In the 1999 elections the overwhelming majority of practicing Muslims voted for parties promoting democracy, constitutionalism, and pluralism. Though Megawati's nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party obtained the largest share of the popular vote, maneuvering in the semidemocratic parliament gave the presidency to Wahid, the respected blind scholar and Muslim leader, who offered the vice presidency to Megawati. As president, Wahid proved an ineffective and undecisive state administrator, but his policies of civilian control of the military, civilian conciliation, and strengthening of an independent judiciary did contribute to further consolidation of Indonesian democracy. His refusal to mobilize his considerable Muslim popular support against the impeachment process initiated by parliament and his willingness to resign to spare the

divided nation further instability were an important final contribution to civil Islam and Indonesian democracy.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to place the seemingly unrelated stories of the contemporary transformation of the two largest world religions with global reach, Catholicism and Islam, in a comparative analytical framework in order, first, to examine the potential role of religious norms and religious institutions in the formation of civil societies and processes of democratization, and second, to intervene in the fashionable but mostly misguided debate about the civilizational clash between Islam and the West. The problem, so often reiterated by the critics, is not just that Huntington's analysis rests on an essentialist conception of Islam, but that the construction of "the West" on which it is based is no less essentialist. The juxtaposition of Catholicism and Islam shows that the problem lies not only in simplistic depictions of a uniform "fundamentalist" Islam that fail to acknowledge the extraordinary diversity one finds among Muslim societies in the past and in the present. Equally problematic and misleading is the essentialist construction of a modern secular West that fails to recognize Catholic Christianity as an integral part of the past and present of Western modernity. Every incrimination of Islam as a fundamentalist, antimodern and anti-Western religion could have been directed even more justifiably against Catholicism not so long ago. Moreover, most features of contemporary political Islam that Western observers rightly find reprehensible, including the terrorist methods and the justification of revolutionary violence as an appropriate instrument in the pursuit of political power, can be found in the not too distant past of many Western countries and many modern secular movements. Thus, before attributing these reprehensible phenomena all too hastily to

Islamic civilization one should perhaps consider the possibility that global modernity itself somehow generates such practices.

The suggestion that contemporary transformations of Catholicism and Islam, all their crucial differences notwithstanding, can be viewed as parallel, even equivalent, processes of modern religious *aggiornamento* can be interpreted differently. Modern secular conceptions of religion are likely to interpret all reflexive reformulations of religious traditions either as doctrinal capitulations that make evident, at least to the cynical observer, the vacuity of the claims of those religions to possess transcendent revealed truths valid for all times and places or as superstructural ideological adjustments to changes in the dominant material base. Religious traditions of course view differently their own hermeneutic task of interpreting and reevaluating the meaning of their unchanging principles for changed circumstances. It is by proving their continued relevance and their ability to offer guidance in changed circumstances that religious traditions can attest that their reinterpreted principles are unchanging and universally valid.

The swift democratization of Catholic countries following the Vatican *aggiornamento* demonstrates not so much the fact that at long last the Catholic Church gave up its traditional resistance to modernity, allowing democratization to proceed and, thus, the final triumph of modernity over tradition, but rather the practical advantages that accrue when actors are able to offer traditional religious legitimation for modern developments. The sacralization of the modern discourse of human rights by the church was the single most important factor in the mobilization of Catholic resources for democratization (Casanova, 1999). The struggles for democratization in Turkey, Iran, and Indonesia offer similar lessons. There is no guarantee, indeed it is unlikely, that movements of Islamic revival or renewal will be uniformly conducive to democratization. What is more certain is that democracy is unlikely to grow and thrive in Muslim countries until political actors who are striving for it are also able to "frame" their dis-

course in a publicly recognizable Islamic idiom. Calls for the privatization of Islam as a condition for modern democracy in Muslim countries (Tibi, 1990) will only produce antidemocratic Islamist responses. By contrast, the public reflexive elaboration of Islam's normative traditions in response to modern challenges, political learning experiences, and global discourses has a chance to generate various forms of public civil Islam which may be conducive to democratization. The problem is not that an essentially fundamentalist religious tradition prohibits such reflexive elaboration, but rather that modern authoritarian states in Muslim countries do not allow the open public spaces where such reflection could take place. Whenever such open public spaces appear, either in Muslim countries or in the diaspora, Muslims seem to find a way of reformulating their tradition in a civil, democratic direction (Kurzman, 1998).

Of course, unreflexive secularists are unlikely to be persuaded by my comparative juxtaposition of Catholicism and Islam. If anything they are likely to be confirmed in their belief that both religions in their resistance to privatization represent a fundamentalist threat to a modern secular global order. In a certain sense they are correct. If there is to be a modern global "order" that is not simply imposed hegemonically, it will have to come to terms with the continued vitality of these and other religious traditions. Therein lies the merit of Huntington's thesis, in recognizing the increasing relevance of religious traditions and civilizations for world politics. Where Huntington is probably wrong is in his geopolitical conception of civilizations as territorial units akin to nation-states and superpowers, which leads him to anticipate future global conflicts along civilizational fault lines. No doubt, globalization represents a great opportunity for transnational religious regimes like Catholicism and Islam to free themselves from the straightjacket of the nation-state to regain their transnational dimensions and their leading roles at the global centerstage (Casanova, 1997, 2001). But they are likely to play these roles more as transnational "imagined communities"

than as territorial geopolitical actors. Nations will continue to be, for the foreseeable future, relevant imagined communities and carriers of collective identities within the global space, but local and transnational identities, particularly religious ones, are likely to become ever more prominent. While new transnational imagined communities will emerge, and the cosmopolitan citizenship promoted by secular elites will be one of them, the most relevant are likely to be once again the old civilizations and world religions.

Notes

¹Upon signing the 1929 Lateran Treaty, Pope Pius XI exclaimed effusively, “we have given back God to Italy and Italy to God” (Holmes, 1981: 56). The Lateran agreement comprised both an international treaty between the kingdom of Italy and the Vatican city-state that settled definitively “the Roman question” and a concordat between the Holy See and the Italian state.

²Sometimes in the discussion it is not fully clear whether other civilizations are likely to clash with the West because they have autonomous geopolitical interests and thus are likely to resist Western hegemony, in which case rather than of normative civilizational conflict one should speak of traditional geopolitical conflict, or whether there is genuine normative incompatibility between civilizations and thus Western modernity would present a serious threat to other civilizations, while the other civilizations in turn would present a serious normative threat to the West and to the modern global order. It is this second type of potential civilizational clash I will be discussing in the following analysis.

³“The Catholic religion has erroneously been regarded as the natural enemy of democracy” (Tocqueville, 1990, I: 300).

⁴Paradoxically, in the global age of fundamentalisms, “The Fundamentalism Project” could not find anywhere in the world a large Catholic social movement worth the name “fundamentalist” (Marty and Appleby, 1991; Casanova, 1994a)

⁵This is an idea I have learned from Sheriban Sahin’s dissertation, *The Alevi Movement: Transformation from Secret Oral to Public Written Culture* (2001).

⁶In the following presentation of the Indonesian story and debates I rely completely on Hefner’s persuasive account.

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