Manifestations of the Religious-Secular Divide: Self, State and the Public Sphere

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My aim in this paper is to present a succinct mental mapping of the changes, shifts, and displacements that are currently taking place in our ways of approaching the secular-religious divide. I propose an analysis and selective reassessment of the changes that have occurred during the last three decades in our approaches to secularism. Due to our ongoing conversations across cultures and disciplines, there is an increasing awareness in the social sciences that there is not one ideal-model of secularism, whether it is defined by the Anglo-Saxon liberal model, or by the French political *laïcité*, but there exists a plurality of secularisms in different national, cultural

and religious contexts, including the non-Western secularisms, such as the Indian and the Turkish ones. The point of departure of this book project is based upon the necessity of decoupling secularism and Western experience and acknowledging the plurality of secularisms. It aims to foster a comparative gaze between different genealogies, historical trajectories, cultural habitations and political formations of the secular. Not only the plurality of secularisms that supposes distinct national formations but also the cultural crossings, the interconnected histories of secularism needs to be highlighted to understand the present-day forces of the religious-secular formations and confrontations.

It is not therefore sufficient to open our readings of secularism to its multiple configurations in distinct national formations as if they are independent from each other. The formations of the secular follow different historical trajectories and have different religious genealogies in different places yet they are closely interconnected with the hegemonic impositions of the Western modernity and colonialism. The revival of religious movements, conservative values, various fundamentalisms and in particular the Islamist movements challenge the authoritarian modes of secularism that exclude religion from public life and from definitions of modern self. New modes of confrontation are taking place between the secular and the religious, but also across cultures and civilizations.

Coupling the incomparable, namely the French and Turkish examples, in spite of their differences, can help us understand the intercivilisational encounter of the secular. The two different historical experiences, European and non-European, with two different religious genealogies, Christian and Muslim, following two different trajectories of nation-State building, democratic and authoritarian, are historically connected to each other by the principle of *laïcité*. Both countries cherish Republican secularism, and idealize a public life exempt from religious signs, yet both witnessed in the last thirty years, the rise of Islamic visibility in public life and a destabilization of the established boundaries between the secular and the religious, leading to a process of confrontation, rivalry and mimicry between the two. If the Turkish secularism, *laiklik*, is derived from French *laïcité* and from dialogical encounter with Western civilization, today the debates on French secularism are engaged in relation to Islamic presence in Europe. The Islamic headscarf issue crystallizes, both in France and in Turkey, the debates on the presence of religious visibility in the public life, the civilisational aspect of the confrontation and the enforcement of Republican secularism by law-making or by the army-support.

The first point that needs to be emphasized is that Western master narrative of secularism undergoes a radical change as it shifts from an "indigenous" debate that is shaped by exchanges with Christian religion to that of confrontation with Islam.

The second shift concerns the acknowledgement of the plurality of secularisms and to a growing interest in depicting and understanding non-Western forms of secularity. The master narrative of Western secularity have imposed a sociological gaze that have evaluated the Non-European experiences with an established set of criteria and have measured the inconsistencies or deficiencies in respect to a model that is supposed to be Universal. However the studies of the secular have introduced the idea that secularity is a *longue-durée* history of reforms that initially had their loci within the religion itself and deconstructed the religious-free approaches to secularism. Marcel Gauchet's work that elucidates the particular role that Christianity played in the process of secularity (Christianity as "the religion of the end of religion") is a pioneer in re-articulating the secular with the religious (Gauchet, 1998). In his recent work *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor addresses a critique to the narrative of secularism that dismisses the changes that have occurred in the religious and spiritual realm and argues against what he calls "subtraction theories" that define secularity as minus religion and hence tells the story of a secular age as it develops within and out of Latin Christianity (Taylor, 2007, see especially p. 22 and 530-5).

Such approaches shift the interest to the religious context in which secularism evolves and thereby lead to an unpacking of secularity as a religious-free, neutral and Universal development of European modernity. Revealing the particularity of secularism and its intrinsic rela-

tion to Christianity goes hand in hand with a critique to Universalist claims of Western model of secular modernity. These criticisms have an impact on the ways we decenter European gaze of secularism and open our readings to the multiplicity of secularisms. Consequently we can adopt two different attitudes in studying secularism in non-Western contexts. Either we postulate that secularism is the product of Western history, intrinsic to Latin Christendom and consequently an alien ideology for the non-Western civilizations (as Bernard Lewis argues for Islamic civilization). Or, on the contrary we decouple the secular and the Western and study the multiple formations and manifestations of the secular in different historical and religious contexts.

However both positions are problematic because they ignore the impact of Western secular modernity, the way it travels to different contexts, by different political forms of interaction, such as colonialism or modernism, the Indian and Turkish secularism being typical examples. They illustrate the manifold manifestations of secularism in relation to two different nation-building processes—the former shaped by the post-colonial and the latter by the post-Empire context—and in relation to Hindu and Muslim religious genealogies. The multiple forms of secularism, namely the Hindu or Turkish secularisms are shaped on the one hand by the formations of the national and on the other by the dialogical relations with the religious and the modern. In our readings of multiple secularisms in non-Western contexts, we cannot ignore

the way secularity is transmitted as a vector of Western way of life, as a way of self and public governance. Although one cannot dismiss the imprint of colonialism and modernism in shaping the formations of the secular, one cannot reduce the latter to a mere copy of the Western secularism.

In order to depict and translate the particularity of Muslim (or Hindu) habitations of the secular, we need to give up "deficiency theory" that presupposes that the non-Western experiences are lagging behind, incomplete and non-contemporaneous of the West. Secularism in non-western contexts is often conceptualized as a second-rank imitation of the Western original. That is how Turkish secularism is often studied as an authoritarian derivative of French *laïcité*, measured in terms of its gaps, inconsistencies and deficiencies with regard to the French ideal-model. Whereas each time a notion travels, and is repeated, it is never exactly the same because in the process of repeating a term or a concept, we never simply produce a replica of the original usage; every reiteration transforms the original meaning, adds new meanings to it (Benhabib, 2006). The French notion *laïcité*, is readopted to Turkish language as *laiklik* and thereby becomes part of daily political usage and collective imaginary. The use of the same notion with a slight change of the accent points to a process of iteration in which the workings of the secular power go beyond being a mere second-rank copy and

adds new meanings, discourses, images and practices. Instead of reading secularity in the mirror of an ideal-Western model and measuring its gaps and deficiencies, we need to depict the ways secularism is semantically adopted, politically reinvented, collectively imagined and legally institutionalized.

In sum, we are witnessing the weakening of the hegemony of the secular not only as a master narrative in social sciences and as an ideology of the Western modernity but also as a collective imaginary that regulates daily social lives of individuals. The decline of the power of the secular signifies that the old hierarchical boundaries with the religious are unsettled and become more porous. Rather than capturing the relation between the two in consecutive terms, as religion alternating the secular, and pointing to a "post" secular era, we need to understand the ways religion becomes contemporaneous of the secular modern.[1] We can hitherto speak of the re-compositions of the religious-secular divide as well as new confrontations, rivalry and mimicry between the two. The religious-secular divide manifests and competes, as I will argue in this paper, at three levels, namely the State, Public Sphere and Self. The battle-ground between the religious and the secular concerns foremost the formation of the State, the governance of the public sphere and the ethics of self.

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1 For the ways Islam becomes contemporaneous of Europe, see Göle, 2004.

Monopoly of the State over the Religious-Secular Distinctions

We speak of distinct models of secularism as nation wise, such as French, American, Indian and Turkish secularisms. The story of secularism can hardly be told independent of the history of Nation-State building. Secularism understood as a principle of separation between State and religion underpins the Nation-State building process, man-made law-making and popular sovereignty. There are two widespread tacit beliefs that are increasingly questioned. First, secularism and democracy are thought to be concomitant with each other. Second, secularism is understood as the impartiality of the State and therefore as guarantee of religious and confessional pluralism and atheism. Both presuppositions run counter to particular historical experiences. Secularism can foster liberal pluralism or authoritarian nationalism; it depends on the trajectories of the Nation-building process.

In the Turkish case, although the debates and the process of secularization concerning norms, laws and institutions have started during the second half of the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire, secularism reached its apogee with the Turkish State-building process after 1923 and became the founding ideology of Republican nationalism.[2] It created its own national elites by means of a

2 However one should not think that the historical genealogy of the secular in Turkey starts with Atatürk Republicanism; some aspects of the secular are part of the Ottoman State tradition

compulsory nation-wide secular education and the adoption of Latin Script. Hence, Turkish secularism works within the frame of politics of uniformization and homogenization of a national culture against the legacy of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire (Göle, 2005, p. 101-10, and 1997). The eradication of non-Muslim minorities, by population exchanges and massacres in the last days of the Empire and during the Republic, led to a social terrain in which Sunnite Islam became the religion of majority. Secularism underpinned the ideal of a national community "free of religion," yet implicitly defined as a Muslim and Sunnite majority, in counter distinction with non-Muslim minorities of the cosmopolitan Empire as well as the Alevites and Kurds.

In the process of Turkish Nation-state building, secularism became a vector for the homogenization of a national culture, whereas in the case of India, secularism is enacted as a guarantee of religious pluralism. In both cases, secularism plays an important role as a State ideology, and the State is declared as a Secular State in both Indian and Turkish Constitutions. However the context of State-building becomes decisive in the meanings and practices of secularism. In India anti-colonial resistance privileged cultural and religious differences whereas in

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and Islamic historical legacy. In order to locate the origins of Turkish Republican ideology in the Ottoman past and for the correction of dualistic representations of the secular and the religious, see Hanioğlu, 2008.

Turkey the dismantlement of a multi-religious and multi-ethnic Empire led to the making of a national community. Secularism as a guarantee for religious pluralism in India and for modern nationalism in Turkey played different roles. If today Hindu nationalism challenges national diversity and the legacy of religious pluralism in India, in Turkey political Islam challenges authoritarian and exclusionary politics of secular nationalism.

Islamic movements cultivate an ambivalent relation with nationalism. Islamic critical thought and political radicalism was first developed against the supremacy of the national, defending the community of believers (*oumma*) as a main reference for collective identity of Muslims. However Islam becomes also a form of nationalism (Gellner, 2000). Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 can be interpreted as a way of completing the Nation-state building process, ending the monarchy, centralizing religious education, and homogenizing the national culture by religion; but also providing a forceful symbolic and political example of Islam as an organized State power. In many respects, one should compare Turkish and Iranian examples as reverse mirroring. Turkish Republican secularism and the figure of Ataturk have been taken as an exemplary model and a source of inspiration in many Muslim countries, including in Iran. Hence social science literature compares Turkey and Iran in their respective engagements with secularization synonymous of Westernization. However the comparison

between the two countries can also be made in relation to their formations of the national. Turkey ended Ottoman monarchy and realized the transition to a nation-State within the ideological framework of secularism in 1923, whereas Iran ended the power of the monarchy with an Islamic revolution of 1979. Both countries are Republican States; but the secular-religious divide is reversed, the former completed the formation of the national by means of political secularism (*laiklik*), the latter by means of political Islamism. The organized State power is framed by national secularism in Turkey, by national Islamism in Iran. In both countries pluralism and democracy signifies the distancing and autonomy of the State in regard to political ideology of secularism and Islamism. What is at stake is the decline of the hegemony of the State over the definitions of the secular and the religious. The changes cannot be captured in terms of linear, consecutive and alternating replacements between the secular and the religious. Rather than either-or arguments, islamization *versus* democratization, one has to frame the changes in terms of re-compositions and mutual borrowings between the secular and the religious. The process of democratization in Turkey shows that in spite of the political polarization between the religious and the secular, the wall of separation between the two becomes more and more porous, mutual borrowings and cross-fertilizations blur the rigid distinctions. Hitherto it is difficult to speak of clear-cut distinctions be-

tween the secular and the Islamic. Islam-rooted AK Party (Party of Justice and Development) government takes on the project of European Union and enhances a series of reforms for the recognition of ethnic and religious pluralism while the political parties of secular-legacy turn towards more authoritarian nationalism and anti-European politics. It will be too simplistic to interpret the Islamic politics in Turkey as "the failure of secularism," as it will be too simplistic to interpret the opposition movements in Iran as "the end of Islam." The democratic resistance and protest movements in Iran during the general elections in May 2009 criticized the theocratic power as abandoning the original ideals of the Revolution and called for the end of monopoly of State over the definitions of Islam. In spite of different levels of pluralism and democracy, in both cases, we witness that the political distinctions of the religious-secular divide are unsettled. And in both cases nationalism plays an inhibiting role in claiming the monopoly of the State over the definitions of either the secular or the religious.

The configurations between the secular and the religious are not only shaped by Nation-States but also by transnational dynamics and global migratory flows. European Nation-States become gradually migrant, multi-religious, and culturally heterogeneous. The established division between pious America and secular Europe does not hold any longer. Muslim migrants in Europe or Polish citizens of Europe claim for freedom of religion. Eu-

ropean Union remembers its spiritual roots and Christian heritage to define its Constitution, cultural unity and geographic frontiers. Is Europe secular or Christian? What about Muslims and Jews living in Christian Europe? Whether three monotheistic religions define equally the European heritage or Judeo-Christian Europe is distinguished from the Islamic other? Do the debates over the legitimacy of Turkish membership in European Union reveal a religious difference or a "Civilizational" one? Turkish membership bringing forth both Muslim and secular affiliations unsettle the established boundaries of European identity, whether they are defined in cultural or religious terms.

On the other hand, Muslim migrants claim their Islamic visibility in European public sphere while they distance themselves from the national origins of their religion. The way Islamic religion is learned, interpreted and practiced in Europe is a novel experience to the extent that it is not in direct continuity with "parent's religion" and affiliated to a given nation. Islam becomes part of "disembedded," imagined forms of horizontal solidarity. Charles Taylor describes social disembeddedness as a condition for a different kind of social imaginary; that is "horizontal forms of social imaginary in which people grasp themselves and great number of others as existing and acting simultaneously" (Taylor, 2002, p. 83). To the extent that European Islam is disembedded from national cultures, it becomes a "religious experience" both

in individual and collective terms, leading to new hybrid forms between secular Europe and Muslim religion. Once again we witness the unsettlement of the distinctions between Islam and Europe, between religion and secular. New re-compositions, tensions, co-penetrations between the two give rise to new definitions of self and everyday life practices.

The story of secularism is not confined to a given Nation-State but follows a transnational dynamics in which the encounters and confrontations among different cultures and civilizations become paramount in shaping debates, unsettling distinctions and accelerating borrowings between the secular and the religious.

Secular and Pious Self

Secularism is a mode of State governance as well as a set of moral values for self governance. Secularism works as an organizing principle of social life, penetrates into everyday life practices and underpins the politics of emancipation and sexuality. In non-Western contexts secularism is closely interrelated with the project of "civilizing mission" of the West and transmits a set of norms that define rationality as well as ethical and esthetical forms. Colonial or modernist elites embody such norms by means of their access to Western ways of rational thinking and life practices. The norms of the "Western civilization" are transmitted and adopted at the level of everyday life practices, definitions of self and habitus.

The creation of a "secular habitus" in a Muslim culture means a series of changes in traditional and religious culture that brings women to the forefront as markers of new life. Practices and reforms such as abandoning the veil, compulsory co-education for girls and boys, social mixing of men and women, free-love, equal rights for men and women, women's performance in public, all denote the changes against the traditional-religious norms of women's covering, ban of women's performance and visibility on public scene, segregation of men and women in social life, arranged marriages and polygamy.

Secular self means a set of bodily practices to be learned, rehearsed and performed, ranging from ways of dressing (and undressing), talking and socializing with men to enacting in public. The habitations of the secular are not transmitted "naturally" and implicitly, but on the contrary become part of a project of modernity and politics of self that require assimilation and "acculturation" to a Western culture.

The changes in dress codes are particularly charged with political symbolism. Two figures that incarnated Turkish and Indian independence, both known as the "father" of the nation, namely Kemal Ataturk and Mahatma Gandhi, communicated in their public lives and ways of clothing their commitments to the local and Western cultures, traditional and modern, spiritual and secular distinctions. Both in different ways embodied the governance of self and governance of public. Both leaders performed their clothing preferences publicly and sym-

bolically. Ataturk opted for Western style clothes (his wardrobe is exhibited in his mausoleum in Ankara) whereas Gandhi wore the traditional Indian *dhoti* (fabric made from local traditional raw cotton) and shawl (Chakrabarty, 2002). He ate simply vegetarian food and practiced fasting as a means of self-purification. While Ataturk avoided any spiritual activity in public, marking hitherto a role-model to be followed by Turkish secular politicians who abstained from the use of any religious idiom and practice, including fasting during the month of Ramadan. One marked "religious disobedience "and expressed the desire for belonging to the home of "civilized (read westernized) nations," while the other marked "civil disobedience" and resistance to colonial powers of the West. While Gandhi, ended untouchability in India, Ataturk advocated women's participation in public life and replaced Sharia law with Family code to ensure gender equality. The abolishment of Caliphate (the Ottoman emperor as Caliph was the supreme religious and political leader of all Sunni Muslims across the world) in 1924 by the pro-Western nationalist movement of Ataturk connected histories of the two countries in an unprecedented way. The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the end of Caliphate system evoked sympathy among Indian Muslims, but also among the members of Indian independence movement, leading to political and social mobilization on behalf of the Ottoman Caliphate, known as "Khilafat movement" in India.

One can establish a relation between the end of Caliphate and the renewal of Islamic movements. The abolishment of Caliphate engenders a vacuum of religious authority and unity in the Muslim world, and leads since the end of 1970s to a plethora of Islamic movements competing with each other over the interpretations of religious norms and political authority.[3] The Revolution in Iran and the establishment of Islam as an organized State power provides a model of political reference and aspiration for contemporary Islamist movements. However the State-oriented political agenda of these movements should not overshadow the cultural-religious repertoire. Contemporary actors of Islam are engaged critically with the cultural program of secular modernity and Western colonialism.

Islamic movements challenge the established equation between definitions of Western self and Civilized self and elaborate an alternative performative politics of pious self and habitus in modern contexts (Göle, 2007). Religion becomes part of interpretation and improvisation for self-definitions of Muslims who seek to restore piety in modern life. Individuation (more precisely personalization) of religion goes hand in hand with the establishment of collective bond among Muslims who recognize each other by means of a shared repertoire of performative piety.

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3 For the relation between the end of Caliphate and the revival of Islamist movements, Sayyid, 1997.

In the revival of religious movements, there is an element of Islamic "self-fashioning" that follows dynamics of modern individuation (Greenblatt, 1980; Pieters, 2001). As Stephen Greenblatt argues, the modern individuation is not boundless, and the fashioning of the self is the outcome of the mechanisms of discipline, restraint and a partial suppression of the personality. Similarly Islam provides an alternative repertoire for self-fashioning and self-restraint by means of disciplinary practices, which ranges from supervision of the imperatives of faith and control of sexuality, both in mind and body, called "*nefs*" in Islam. The Islamic headscarf expresses the self-fashioning of Muslim girls with disciplinary categories of Islam but for whom the category of faith is not a pre-arranged category and enters into the domain of improvisation, adaptation and invention. It is a sign of self restraint (*hijab* means modest behavior and dress), and self-fashioning; including in literal terms, the production of Islamic aesthetics and fashion.

The Islamic self-fashioning and self-governance confronts contemporary secular feminism. A nonverbal but embodied communication in the veil conveys a sense of disobedience to secular notions of self-formation and sexual freedom. If Islamic veil, by means of covering women's body is a reminder of sacred intimacy in public, secular feminism claims for equality and transparence in bringing the personal and the intimate into public. If covered women remind the limits of sexuality and

indispensability of Muslim women in public, the uncovered women interpret emancipation as the free display of desire and body in public. Islamic veil, once it is not enforced on women by State power or communitarian pressure, and expresses the personal trajectories of women and their self-fashioning piety, presents a critique to secular interpretation of women's emancipation. Islamic feminism unsettles the religious-secular divide to the extent that Muslim women are both pious and public, blurring the distinctions between religion and gender effacement. There is a reverse mirroring between pious and secular self-fashioning, however in each case the boundaries between personal and public, self and sexuality, religious and secular becomes fuzzy as they are intertwined with each other.

Secular Public Spaces and Religious Visibilities

The claims of religious visibility in public and the controversies they provoke reveal the unspoken secular rules and norms of the public sphere in European countries. There are different levels of State control of the religious presence in public life, ranging from active, aggressive to more pluralistic conceptions of secularism depending on the national politics of secularism (Kuru, 2009). However the question of religion in the public sphere cannot be reduced to choices of liberal versus authoritarian politics of secularism. French and Turkish policies that ban the Islamic headscarf in the public schools (France) and

in the universities (Turkey) can be considered as exclusionary and active, if not an authoritarian interpretation of *laïcité*. However the two countries are not "exceptional" in debating and attempting to restrain Islamic presence in the public sphere. In Germany and Italy, where the presence of religion is not as unwanted as in France, the polarizing debates on the construction of mosques, the height of the minarets, and the shape of the domes, reveal the disturbing irruption of Islamic visibility in the public landscape.[4] The question of religious difference cannot be solely framed in terms of abstract principles of toleration and recognition of the plurality of faith. The question of religious difference appears in a materialized form and in a given physical space. The incursion of religious signs, symbols and behavior (headscarf, minarets, segregation of sexes) disturbs the European public eye and collective consciousness to the extent that these are considered not to be in conformity with unspoken secular norms of public life. The spaces in which Muslims make their religious difference visible, are subject to public controversy; schools, cities, swimming pools, hospitals, cemeteries all become public spaces in which

4 For the public debate on the construction of a new mosque in Cologne, Germany, see for instance these two articles, http://www.7sur7.be/7s7/fr/1731/Islam/article/detail/420197/2008/09/18/Cologne-affronte-samedi-un-congres-anti-islamisation.dhtml and http://www.armenews.com/article.php3?id_article=34011.

religious-secular divide becomes problematic and subject to re-composition.

With migratory dynamics and global technologies of communication, public sphere escapes the grip of Nation-States and becomes a site for transnational flows of communication, bringing in close interaction different cultures and civilizations. Public sphere that was conceptualized in relation to the European historical development of nation-States, as a mono-national and mono-linguistic entity becomes a site of migration, religious pluralism and civilizational encounter. How can we re-think of the public sphere without reducing the public to a mono-national community, and to its confinement with a State legislation?

The weakening of the hegemony of the national-secular calls for a new conceptualization of commonness without the vertical hierarchy of the nation-State as a prerequisite of the public sphere. The notion of space needs to be at the forefront of our analysis to depict the re-compositions between the secular and religious. The notion of space does not refer to an empty space but to a space of production of social relations, defining boundaries of exclusion and inclusion, of the acceptable and forbidden. A space is always regulated by certain norms, whether religious or secular. These norms are not only dictated by State law, but also are shared values by those who inhabit and utilize those places. The unspoken norms are revealed once they are challenged by the intrusion of new

comers, foreigners, by those who are not supposed to be present in those spaces. The Islamic intrusion, by not being in conformity with European norms of publicness, provokes controversy and confrontation by means of which the "secular" and "civilizational" norms of public life are disclosed. However, confrontations create a new public; bring together, in unintended and unpredictable ways, dissonant, competing persons, cultures, foreigners in proximity, in assembly. They create a new space, an interstice that affects the meanings of religious and secular modern. The wall of separation between the two becomes porous and religious-secular distinctions become fuzzy in the course of common and confrontational public experience.

At the level of everyday life practices, individuals appropriate new ways of combining not only secular and religious norms, but also choose among spiritual experiences, convert to other religions or compose between different religiosities, producing new forms of syncretism. Buddhist Catholics but also Yogi Muslims are among such nascent examples. The spatial proximity among cultures and religions create anxiety, confusion of boundaries and sporadic violence. But it also opens up possibilities for new ways of connecting between cultures and religions once the hegemony over definitions of religious and secular distinctions, Civilized and Uncivilized taxonomies declines.

Nationalism, public sphere and definitions of self are mainly conceptualized within the secular paradigm. I tried

to argue that the revival of religion is concomitant to the loss of hegemony of the secular at these three levels of social organization; State, Public and Self governance. Consequently the secular-religious divide is unsettled, leading to mirroring and rivalry between the two for the orientation of the norms of the disciplinary practices of self, State and public life. Rather than sequential replacement of one with another, of the secular with the religious, and the assertion of some kind of categorical identity, we need to think in terms of confrontations as well as re-compositions between the two. Only such a paradigmatic shift can open the possibility of addressing normative questions of modernity from an intercultural perspective in which the notions of secular and religious distinctions are not derived exclusively from the Western experience.

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