

SECULAR AND POSTSECULAR

How the concepts of “postsecularity”, “spirituality” and “gender” challenge secularization

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Abstract

The present article proposes an analysis of the theory of secularization in connection to the claim that modernity’s technological advancement, scientific progress and pluralism result in religious disenchantment and disaffiliation, as well as in connection to the more recent theories that contemporary society is, in fact, postsecular. This discussion highlights some of the most prominent reasons for the critique of secularization as an encompassing explanatory theory, such as the adoption of the concept of spirituality which challenges the limitations that the term “religion” entails. Also, in line with feminist critique, secularization is exposed as gender biased, making room for an analysis of the way in which women approach religion, spirituality, religious belonging and disaffiliation through the exploration of the concept of “thirdspace”.

Keywords

Secularization, religion, critique, modernity, feminism, spirituality, postsecular, Christianity, gender equality, thirdspace

For a long time, philosophers, scholars and social thinkers such as Spencer, Durkheim, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, etc. believed that religion would fade away from the political and social scene; these “leading figures in philosophy, anthropology, and psychology have postulated that theological superstitions, symbolic liturgical rituals, and sacred practices are the product of the past that will be outgrown in the modern era” (Norris and Inglehart 2008). In Bryan Wilson’s view, secularization is the process whereby religious thinking, practices and institutions “lose social significance” (Furseth and Repstad 2006) in the transition to industrial modernity (Aune 2008b). It was therefore believed that, as soon as states become modernized, secularization constitutes a natural response to the de-mystification of the world that technology, scientific progress and pluralism entail.

What's more, this phenomenon of outgrowing religion as a result of modernity became anchored as an empirically quantifiable reality in Western Europe, mainly due to a steep tendency of religious disaffiliation through de-churchification (Pollack et al. 2012) or unchurched (Casanova 2007). Secularization was used very frequently in past decades in connection to people's growing unrest and ambivalence about belonging to religious institutions, a rejection of religion from the public scene as an echo of prior personal abandonment of belief.

Statistical evidence enabled the theory of secularization to account for the significant drop in the number of attending believers in Western Europe predominantly (Greeley 2003), leading to the expectation that, as soon as developing countries were set on the firm track of modernization, they would follow suit in respect to secularization. Yet, clashes with religious fundamentalism, rumours of faith revivals and the increasing number of spiritual practices flooding the religious market, both in the West and elsewhere, placed secularization in a somewhat less than confident position, to say the least. Religion, it might seem, is not as feeble as the expansion of modernization would have many conclude. Therefore, the concepts of "de-secularization" and "postsecularity" strive to paint a more nuanced picture of contemporary world.

Traditionally, religious belonging was considered more prevalent in the female population, even when the choices of the males went the opposite way. For decades, women continued to attend the religious services and be involved in the religious community, much more so than men. Centuries old explanations about the sentimental nature of the "weaker vessel", a term that the Saint Peter used for women (1 Peter 3:7), and about the "natural differences" (Long Marler 2008) long held the need for further investigation at bay, the focus falling mainly on the reasons why people in general disregarded church participation and faith practices. The fact that this "general population" was predominantly male, and thus, that the theory of secularization had a hint of gender bias, was generally ignored or disregarded. With the advent of feminism, particularly second wave feminism (Villanueva Gardner 2006), the gentle revolution (Woodhead 2001) expanded to the field of social sciences as well, exposing biases in a poignant manner. This change and the ensuing conclusions about secularization in the female mode will also be developed in this present paper.

The aim of this article, therefore, is to explore the very transition from the claims of secularization to those of postsecularity, highlighting some of its

triggering factors and essential steps. For this, a preliminary review of the connection between modernity and the concept of secularization is called for, followed by several aspects that belong to the critique of the theory of secularization. This general outlook will be followed by a discussion of the way in which women experience secularization and the loss of religious significance, following the ground breaking changes that second wave feminism sought to advocate in the direction of women empowerment and gender equality.

Although we make reference to survey results, our analysis relies quite heavily on the work of well-known sociologists and political researchers whose contribution will be acknowledged throughout the paper and who often opted for a mixture between quantitative and qualitative approaches to social investigation¹. Our choice is due to various reasons, among which we count the general, explanatory ethos of the article and the cultural, theological or sociological panoply of elements that are not easily translated into quantifiable parameters. Therefore, we strive not so much to present the mathematical “effects-of-causes” as to understand the “causes-of-effects” (Mahoney and Goertz 2006), following in the footsteps of a lot of the recent studies concerning the issue of women and secularization². An understanding of the religious dimension of the contemporary society is a worthy topic in itself, as it constitutes a much needed barometer for the degree to which people allow religion to shape their personal, ethnic or gender identity. In the case of women’s religious choices, such a study is but the beginning of a series of more detailed analyses on a previously downplayed matter.

Introduction

The terms “secular”, “secularization”, “postsecular” and “de-secularization” are often employed in order to describe the sensitive issue of religion in the contemporary world: its role, its importance, its tenacity and, to a lesser degree, the extent to which it enables or disables democratic

¹We note a predilection for the interview and case study format, which help provide essential information for the direction in which people can direct further empirical enquiries.

²Quite often, studies incorporate not only statistical data, but also a number of interview excerpts and fragments of people’s testimonies or experiences. See Sonya Sharma “When Young Women Say ‘Yes’: Exploring the Sexual Selves of Young Canadian Women in Protestant Churches” (Sharma 2008); The Soul of Soulless Conditions; Siân Reid “Paganism, Goddess Religion and Witchcraft in Canada” (Reid 2008); Marta Trzebiatowska “Vocational Habit(u)s: Catholic Nuns in Contemporary Poland” (Trzebiatowska 2008), etc.

attitudes in amazingly varied political circumstances. There used to be quite a specific geographical position where this secularization could be witnessed, starting with the nineteenth century, namely Western Europe almost exclusively. The advent of Marxism and the formation of large communist blocks, which opposed religion and its institutions, helped the phenomenon expand, though through different means and for very different purposes. The 1950s knew a period of religious revival that was quantified through a higher church attendance. Starting with the 1960s, however, instances of secularization became more striking not only in Europe but also in North America (both in the U.S. and Canada), as well as among the intellectual elite of various countries that are not found in Western Europe (Berger 2007, 20).

A survey after another highlight the fact that the number of people who profess their belief in God has dropped significantly in the past decades in Europe, thus bringing a decline in the number of Christian believers, a statistical decline that is “symptomatic of the fact that Christian religion³ has been suffering from a profound decline in social and religious significance” (Warner 2010, 13). This process was not done homogeneously and at a similar rhythm, as it is only in recent years that a country such as Ireland, which was regarded as one of the last bastions of Catholic stronghold in Europe, has known a dramatic shift towards secularization, with latest data indicating a drop of over 21% in the number of believers⁴.

It is no wonder then that the theory of secularization was almost incontestable, as empirical data seemed to strongly support it and give it credibility. Yet, the recent work of political researchers and sociologists such as Linda Woodhead, Paul Heelas, Kirsten Aune, David Martin, Peter Berger argues that we are, in fact, living in a profoundly religious world (with the West being still somewhat of an exception) and that, even on the

³This free transition from the concept of religion in general to that of Christianity in particular might be considered an instance of reductionism, but for the obvious historical arguments for Christianity’s widespread presence on the Old Continent.

⁴The figure is taken from the WIN - Gallup 2012 Religion and Atheism Survey. The question asked in the survey was the following: ‘Irrespective of whether you attend a place of worship or not, would you say you are a religious person, not a religious person or a convinced atheist?’ Whereas this particular question helps gather vital data, it leaves out the important element of personal involvement. Religious belief is not necessarily indicative of any “belonging” (Dogana1998) per se, but more of a disembodied spirituality that can stretch from belief in one of the monotheistic representations of divinity (Jewish, Muslim, Christian) to any form of spirituality, however non-organized, hybridised or ultimately, depending on the working definitions, a-religious.

Old Continent, we are not moving towards secularization but instead, we are living in a post-secular society, saturated with religious and spiritual elements.

One of the most famous supporters of the theory of secularization, Peter Berger, has reconsidered his position, acknowledging the nature of global resurgence of religions as “the two most dynamic religious movements in the contemporary world are resurgent Islam and popular Protestantism, the latter principally in the form of the Pentecostal movement. Both are truly global phenomena.” (Berger 2007, 19-20). In fact, he states that “contrary to the theory, the contemporary world, far from being secularized, is characterized by a veritable explosion of passionate religion.” (Berger 2007, 21). Other scholars, such as Rob Warner, suggest that, although secularization might have been a theory that used to describe reality accurately, social changes and the return of religion to the public square might indicate that “exclusivist secularity was itself time-bound and unsustainable, indicating possibilities of a multi-faith or post-secular future” (Warner 2010, 5). As an addition to this debate, Linda Woodhead would argue that the term “secularization” is gender sensitive, and it should not be applied to women in the same way that it is to men.

Secularization and modernity

There were cases when churches experienced a large number of people leaving the congregation even before the advent of modernity. These proto incidences, essentially different from secularization, were in fact due to significant shifts in doctrine, in search of that ideal orthodoxy. Thus, the various schisms, doctrinal separations and fragmentations sometimes resulted in a significant drop in the number of attending believers in one particular church (usually, this form of religious “migration” was aided by religious conflicts combined with political elements of domination which made it compulsory for the inhabitants of a region to renounce their current Christian denomination and adopt another as soon as the political leader changed: “Le Roi est mort! Vive le Roi!”). Yet, the change was from one publicly confessed religious allegiance or belonging to another religious structure or hierarchy. Religious taboos seldom made life easy for those professing no faith, generously bestowing culturally loaded terms such as heathen, pagan, apostate, etc. on those before-their-time “free thinkers.”

It took a combination of social, political and historical circumstances to directly and indirectly challenge the religious stronghold and the dominion

of the mysterious, of the sacred; among them we count the transition from a predominantly agrarian societal landscape to an industrial one, the predilection for urbanization, the revolutionizing discoveries that sped up production, transportation and delivery of goods time, and other inventions that allowed humanity to dig deeper, travel faster, explore more accurately and exploit more efficiently. These allowed humanity not only to understand the world that we inhabit in a more comprehensive way, to strive for a more secure future, but also to explain away the mysterious, the sacred and to propose new outlooks on age-old questions concerning the origin, purpose and meaning of life. To these, however, it is imperious that we add the profound change in what constituted the acknowledged political authority, as the French example, bloody and incoherent as it may have seemed during and immediately after the 1789 Revolution, echoed throughout Europe. What had been thought before as a God-given monarchical regime came at an end abruptly, thus enabling the creation of a secular Republic (Haynes 2002, 371), one where religion was a sort of second class citizen, relegated to the private space.

Historically, all these ground shaking changes were attributed to modernity, which rendered the terms modernity and modernization ambiguous, befuddled with layer upon layer of meaning and references. Therefore, even attempts at rendering the explanation of the causal relation between them and religion more precise often slip into generalizations and academic quid pro quos. Suffice it to say that many firmly believed in an acute disenchantment with religion (Gauchet 2006) as a result of technological and scientific advancement, an attitude that morphed into what today is popularized as the conflict between science and religion, the unbridgeable separation between the book of faith and the book of nature, as each upholds its own values and pillars. While science claimed objectivity and reason, religion became predominantly associated with the realm of subjectivity and irrationality or feeling, which did not constitute an incentive for religious belonging in a scientifically informed society.

Not only does modernity demystify reality, but it “[...] pluralizes the life-worlds of individuals and consequently undermines all taken-for-granted certainties,” (Berger 2002, 342), reducing claims of absolute truth to the status of inherently subjectively-objective. As a consequence, strands of religious belief that insist on monopolizing salvation, redemption or divine blessing and healing become a priori counter-cultural. Even a furtive look at Christianity is sufficient to observe how centuries-old exclusivist doctrines clash with pluralistic tendencies of the modern world.

Secularization and its critique

Is technological progress, scientific savvy and strive for pluralism sufficient direct and indirect factors to bring about de-sacralisation and to lead to secularization? The traditional secularization theory would argue for it being the case, citing empirical proof – the self-evident phenomenon of de-churchification or unchurched of the European population. Yet, the daunting question would be: “how would one account for the persistence of religion, despite modernization?” With new surveys exploring the religious dimension of various nations or regions, “the theory seemed less and less capable of making sense of the empirical evidence from different parts of the world” (Berger 2002, 337).

Secularization as a biased narrative: The tale of the Euro-secular white male

The theory of secularization begun to be questioned, analysed and challenged, due to a growing suspicion of incompleteness. A question that helped start the debate about the accuracy of this theory addressed the issue of *who* was becoming increasingly secularized? The answer pinpointed Western indigenous white men whose religious preferences were not necessarily a true portrayal of the religious choices of immigrants, non-Western, non-white, non-men.

There were many factors that contributed to the redefining of the subject of study, one of them being the feminist scholars’ claims to be heard and taken seriously (Woodhead 2008). Amongst others, the need to rethink the hitherto biased *his*-tory of humanity, which, as feminists’ allegations went, had been focusing almost exclusively on the fate of males, made scholars enquire about how accurate secularization theory really was in respect to women and whether the picture that was presented was in fact gendered-based and not gender-indifferent. This is an aspect that we will return to in subsequent sections of the article.

Another factor was the growing mistrust in the white male’s supremacy metanarrative which was enhanced by the shift towards a postcolonial mentality. Although the bulk of the African and Asian colonies had gained their independence by the late 1970s, the postcolonial reality took a while to sink in, not just economically and politically, but socially as well. As predominantly white European countries (France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Great Britain, etc.) lost their foothold for entitlement and exploitation, the politically dominant narrative of Caucasian superiority crumbled, making

room for different, contrasting voices that spoke of an ontological otherness yearning for recognition and acceptance. The historically “other” could claim their “native” culture and religion more freely in the context of state autonomy and sovereignty and global research could no longer ignore the new realities at hand.

At the same time, back on the Old Continent, the rights of immigrants gained in importance, drawing attention on matters of ethnic and religious discrimination, disturbing the secular, religion-in-the-private-space, European slumber. Secularization theory was thus challenged by the presence of immigrant communities which, although situated in a scientifically informed, technologically advanced modernity, did not automatically become skeptical about religion. Some of the most notable theories about why this did not come to pass regarded the role and the functionality that religious belonging acquires in the shaping of the immigrant identity, a role that morphs considerably for second and third generation immigrants but which often proves resilient due to its protective dimension.

Kristin Aune (Aune 2008, 8) discusses this phenomenon, arguing that while adherents of religions that are “connected with immigration into predominantly Christian countries remain religious, they appear to be so in part because of secularization. David Martin [...] has suggested that high levels of religiosity amongst such communities reflect their desire to differentiate themselves from their (nominally) Christian neighbours by building strong religious communities.” In any case, secularization among immigrants, although part of some people’s integration and adaptation to the dominant culture, proved difficult to estimate. Rather, the pressures of maintaining and belonging to an often religion-influenced group led in some cases to a radicalization of faith practices amongst those who perceived integration as an act of violence.

Observation such as this, coupled with conclusions that grounded the vitality and dynamism of religious belonging and commitment in countries that undergo technological, industrial and scientific modernization, placed the classical theory of secularization under close scrutiny. As Peter Berger (Berger 2002, 342) observed, although modernity brings about a pluralisation of perspectives, this “pluralisation may or may not be secularizing, depending on other factors in a given situation.”

Secularization between religion and spirituality

The theory was challenged again from a different angle, by reframing the very use of the term “religion” through an analysis of the attributes and functions that a religious belief system enables in society. The core of the matter revolved around whether or not it was incumbent to have established systems, institutions, dogmas, hierarchies or pre-established, coherent, organizational arrangements in order to grant an official dimension to a particular belief system. The paradox of having people profess believing in God without belonging to a religious system exposed how limited the term “religion” had become.

Thus, the adoption of a more encompassing word was *de rigueur* and “spirituality” fitted the bill comfortably enough, with religion reckoned as an element but not as the sum total of spiritual features. Spirituality confers flexibility and a wide array of possibilities of inclusion of hitherto debatable religious options; it accounts for patch-work religions, products of religious bricolage, holistic wellbeing spirituality, neo-pagan religions, New Age, cults of the goddess, etc.

Spirituality accommodates religious diversity and steers clear from rigid definitions of God by conferring equal status to a plurality of understandings of divinity: God as a Person, God as a Force, God as Fate, God as a Goddess, etc. Further flexibility is available if spirituality is defined as the turn to the spirit, not one that is out there, detachable post-mortem, reclaimable by God or prone to reincarnation, but the life of the self that each human possesses. This is an embodied spirituality, connected to the realization of the self, to the search for identity that humans (and animals, to a lesser degree) form in the intricate chain of connectivity, shared understanding and meaningful relationships, be they with fellow humans, empowered super humans or any being situated at various levels on the spectra of consciousness and awareness.

The turn to self and the search for its actualization through embodied experiences encourage people’s interest in holistic spiritual practices that range from exotic, meditation techniques to small group religious gatherings (Heelas 2002, 425), from to the wellbeing centres that cater for any imaginable spiritual or skin deep need to the metaphysical, New Age, disembodied “trips”. There are a lot of options that target the self and the marketing industry exploits and enhances this obsession by fervently tantalizing consumers with the promise of attaining superhuman perfection through the use of this product or the other.

The turn to a subjective approach to life, religion and spirituality is thought to account for one of the greatest global revitalizations (Haynes 2002, 366) within Protestant Christianity, more notable so far than the Catholic *aggiornamento*, namely the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement, which is making its way towards the Old Continent from Latin America and Africa. The profoundly subjective dimension of these faith practices, based on personal interpretation of the Holy Writings and on unmediated guidance from divinity itself, is often associated with supernatural manifestation of power. Thus, the Holy Spirit is thought to equip, or empower, ordinary people with extraordinary spiritual gifts (foreseeing and foretelling the future, *glossolalia* (Haynes 2002, 374), bringing about miraculous healings, having authority to perform exorcisms – the list is by no means complete) according to a combination of their level of faith, their involvement in the ongoing spiritual warfare against Satan’s malignant influence and their purity and steady commitment status – faithfulness being the old term for it⁵. To an insider, the focus on spiritual gifts might seem in perfect concordance with Scriptural references⁶ and he or she would resist making comparisons with contemporary tendency to seek self-realization and subjectivity. Yet, an outsider might be struck by how much emphasis there is on human empowerment and access to authority over the supernatural.

Given all these factors, it became natural for some scholars to conclude that we are living in fact in a post-secular society, where the longing to transcend our finite condition and limitedness has lost some of its church-going habits, but not its vehemence.

Women and secularization

When we turn to the issue of women and secularization, one of the initial observations is that, up until quite recently, it eluded detailed analysis. For many years, women continued to attend, making it seem as though traditional faiths had a greater attraction for the female than for the male, because they targeted the sentiment, the irrational, rather than the intellect, the rational. This fell in perfect concordance with the “law of the natural order” which both the Christian tradition and many of the great thinkers of

⁵ The different conceptualizations of the Triune God, his attributes and his character in the Pentecostal and Charismatic perspective would make a fascinating study. This is due particularly to the need to portray God both as All Powerful, Transcendent: King, Warrior, Master, Creator and as All Caring, Immanent, Personal: Friend, Mother, Lover.

⁶ See 1st Corinthians 14.

the past upheld as being either God-bestowed or simply a self-obvious, necessary human condition.

The reasons for this association are historically vast and complex and they seem to have more to do with the relegation of both women and religion to the private, domestic sphere: "Religion in the nineteenth century was itself pushed into the private realm, and tended to reinforce women's domesticization by becoming the guardian of private life and family values." (Woodhead 2002, 385). Thus, women found that the Church in general supported family values and upheld the dignity of women in terms of their equality of status and not necessarily that of function. Also, if society generally "encourages women to love, serve, obey, and even worship men, then it is not difficult to transfer such attitudes to a male God - or for devotion to a male God to reinforce such behaviours" (Woodhead 2004, 136).

The turning point came in the beginning of the 1960s, when women rekindled the stalled gender revolution; this became known as the second wave of feminism. A long, drawn out first wave had earned women a number of limited but indispensable rights in at least in some regions and countries in the world: the right to preserve property after marriage and administer it as one pleased, without the express permission of the spouse, the right to vote, the right to participate in the industrial workforce, etc. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan exposed a society where female baby boomers nominally possessed the right to education and career but did not find solid incentives to pursue them (Friedan 1963), since the ideal femininity revolved exclusively around the confined homely hearth. Women often found societal stereotypes claustrophobic as the acceptable and respectable female identity was other-referential and many women defined themselves in relation to an independent man and dependent children. Woman became synonymous with wife and mother (Friedan 1963), which would not be a problematic aspect in itself, but for the hidden implications of financial dependency upon a male provider.

However, as second wave feminists advocated for equality of chances between sexes in the professional realm (Villanueva Gardner 2006), women were granted more rights and more access to careers other than being homemakers and housewives. As a consequence, the traditional role assigned to women came to be seen as burdensome, backward or oppressive. Such words might be deemed too strong for postmodern

sensitivities, and it is true that not everybody shared that view and joined in the cause. Yet, the definition of oppression as given by Iris Marion Young can easily depict the condition of women in those days: “[o]ppression consists in systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings” (Young 1990, 38).

The need for gender equality exercised pressure not only in respect to obtaining and maintaining jobs for and by women, for the purpose of building secure careers and thus becoming less dependent on the socially endorsed “breadwinner”, though that was an important step for second wave feminist militants. The patriarchal structure of faith systems was challenged as well, in order to upset the established hierarchy that allowed only men to function as acknowledged interpreters of the Holy Writs and as official figures who were entrusted with the authority of performing rites that held legal status in the eyes of the community (like the marriage sacrament).

Attempts for a more active participation of women in leading positions within religious communities were undertaken both from outside and from within, which resulted in hermeneutical redefinitions of the role of women from a theological standpoint. Feminist theologians believed they had a “mandate to develop doctrine that affirmed their current experience as an oppressed class and that pointed toward their own liberation. In doing so, they systematically examined all doctrine and theology of the past,” seeking a “life-shaping faith” (Kassian 2005, 112-113). Although some progress has been made in terms of official (especially in Anglican churches) and unofficial positions of authority held by women, the explicit verses that command submission still create debate and contradictions.

The millennia old inflexibility hardly gave in to claims of gender equality, thus proving particularly tension-filled for women who inhabit both the professional, public space and the domestic, private one. What’s more, women who “refuse to submit to male authority may struggle with a religion that has male clergy, a male God, and a male saviour; and women who want a career on equal terms with men may be alienated by churches that privilege women’s domestic roles. They may abandon Christianity altogether, try to reform it, or find themselves attracted to the new holistic forms of spirituality that tend to be run by women for women and which offer direct benefit in terms of personal empowerment” (Woodhead 2004, 141). Considering the gender differentiation that already exists within

traditional Christianity, why is it that a lot more women are attracted to religion than men are? A possible explanation could reside in the profound echoes of centuries of androcentrism that define and confine a woman's identity as often caught between the public and the private space.

Secularization and the thirdspace

Another way of looking at the relationship between religion, spirituality, secularization and women is to employ a conceptual frame centred on the notion of a thirdspace that bypasses the divide between the public and the private sphere. The term "thirdspace", first employed in geography, refers to "those spaces (physical, mental, social) which may be described as both/neither spaces; that is, spaces which are not easily categorisable as, for example, entirely public or private spaces" (Aune 2008b, 9). Women can find themselves on different levels of public/private commitment, but where they are attracted to religion, it is generally because it reinforces or helps them cope with their negotiation of this daily dichotomy through the creation of a thirdspace.

Linda Woodhead makes a simplified typology of women into housewives/mothers, jugglers or profession-oriented. The first category, the housewives and mothers, is most often found in traditional religion, especially Christianity; they are re-affirmed in their belief by the accent placed on home. They are the most likely to see religion as a thirdspace. They are least likely to abandon traditional religion because it validates and reinforces their position. This does not mean that they fully accept male authority or the semi-confinement to the private space. Instead, there is a hint of magical thinking at hand, which brings about the blurring of the line between private and public, albeit in a very subjective way. What we understand by "magical thinking" in this case is the tendency to consider the private space as a converging point of the public: "Women who are full-time wives and mothers may not perceive their position as 'private' in the way some have viewed it. For them, it is a locus of both public and private: where friends and relations meet, where tradespeople visit, children constantly cross boundaries, and where they move around in 'public' spaces of their community such as school, shops, etc." (Aune 2008b)

The second category, the jugglers, who both work and manage a family tend to be more prone to re-fashioning religion in their own mind and attitude in order to reflect their experience of intersecting boundaries. The jugglers are thought to be the ones that "most challenge secularization

theories in that they are not doing the expected either when they leave the church or when they stay – that is, they are blurring boundaries between what have been treated as fixed categories: religion/spirituality, public/private, religious/secular.” (Aune 2008b). The jugglers are more likely to turn to “[...] alternative spirituality [which] seems to offer more creative solutions to the problem. For those who wish to abandon male-dominated forms of identity more whole-heartedly, but without abandoning the sacred, contemporary forms of spirituality may offer an attractive alternative.” (Woodhead 2008, 156)

A very interesting example of insidious alternative spirituality was that of Princess Diana (Woodhead 1999). Although not a juggler in the strict sense of the word as defined above, Lady Diana Spencer was often caught between the pressure of intense scrutiny in the public place concerning the rigours of behaving royally and that of raising children in the context of a marriage that was falling apart. Many saw the Princess as a religious person and her charity and humanitarian work⁷ certainly did not go unnoticed, gaining her the title of “the Princess of the Heart.” Yet, Linda Woodhead would argue that Diana’s religious choice was in fact very different from traditional Christianity, a religious alternative that sublimated compassion and erotic love, which Woodhead called the Religion of the Heart: “For the Religion of the Heart, there is only one form of love: the affective, engaged, reciprocal love outlined above. It is this same love which is displayed in friendship, in romance, in parenthood, in compassionate care, in religious devotion. Love is one, though it may have different objects. Since its touchstone is intensity of feeling, its most sublime form is generally taken to be romantic and erotic love. This was certainly true for Diana, but what is equally true is that she drew no hard and fast distinction between such love and the love she felt for those outside her intimate circle. The effect, of course, was not only to universalise the ideal of intimate love, but to domesticate the ideal of benevolent love.” (Woodhead 1999, 131) Though certainly resembling Christian charity in many ways, the Religion of the Heart was essentially different as it relied on the sacralisation of the human being, instead of appealing to divine intervention, a difference that becomes visible if we compared Diana and Mother Theresa: “Whereas Diana’s vision [...] was focused firmly on the sacredness of the human, Mother Theresa’s vision was centred on a transcendent God incarnate in Jesus Christ. In this sense,

⁷Lady Diana’s compassion and humanitarian mindset was often compared to that of Mother Theresa. (Woodhead 1999)

Mother Teresa's religion was (as Diana's was not) a 'religion of difference', a religion which stressed not the continuity, but the distance between the human and the divine - between creator and created, infinite and finite, perfect God and sinful humanity. Where Diana looked within to find God, Mother Teresa looked up; where Diana saw human loveliness, Mother Teresa saw sinful humanity; and where Diana saw uniquely valuable human beings, Mother Teresa saw Christ." (Woodhead 1999, 122)

The third category of women, those who are career oriented, are the least likely to desire to inhabit the thirdspace. Instead, their options vary from either more impersonal, minimal involvement religious belonging or no belonging at all. As visible efforts for gender equality and equity are made in the public space, religious patriarchy is seen as no longer compatible with the emancipated woman's mentality: "To put it bluntly, the reason why so many rejected the 'traditional' 'primary' institutions may not simply have been that the 'hard' world of the iron cage no longer suited their 'soft' 'baby boomer' natures, but that they were rebelling against a white, male, middle-aged (and older) 'establishment' which had been in power for too long. From this point of view, the iron cage did not just crumble or melt, it was pulled down." (Woodhead 2001, 72)

Therefore, we are spectators of a reversal of values, depending on the angle: someone's loss looks like gain to others," what from some standpoints looks like decline, from others looks like growth; and what from some angles looks like homelessness, from others looks more like a homecoming." (Woodhead 2001)

Conclusion

Secularization, as a theory, has done its fair share of explaining social events for the past decades. It observed that the established Christian churches of Western Europe and North America were gradually being emptied of devoted believers and thus it hurriedly announced that religion was slowly nearing its curtain call for its final act, as it had been predicted. Despite its strong grip, however, two queries helped challenge the very foundations of its claims: first of all, *who* was it that was becoming secularized and, second of all, *what* was the working definition of religion? The first question brought to light the not so surprising fact that the research was based predominantly on the conduct of Western white males, downplaying female religious constancy or the choices of the immigrant

communities, not to mention the strength of religious belonging in other parts of the world.

The second one helped broaden the spectrum by adopting spirituality as a flexible concept, encompassing a variety of religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, thus facilitating the transition towards redefining our contemporary society as postsecular. This change is sustained by an increase in interest manifested towards holistic spirituality in the West, as well as by the Charismatic and the Pentecostal faith revivals.

The need to make a more detailed analysis of secularization among women has led to a new understanding of the role that religion plays in the way in which women negotiate the separation public/ private space. Thus, the creation of the religious thirdspace and the turn to alternative spirituality help establish a meaningful, accepting space, flexible and accommodating. The wide offer of marketable spirituality out there is indicative of the fact that the religious needs of both women and men should not be shunned aside as non-existing. On the contrary, as a social phenomenon in a postsecular context, they are fascinating and worthy of study.

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