

Review symposium

Yolande Jansen, *Secularism, Assimilation and the Crisis of Multiculturalism: French Modernist Legacies*. Amsterdam University Press and University of Chicago Press, 2014.

I. Multiculturalise secularism – but avoid a narrow understanding of multiculturalism and secularism

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As someone who works on multiculturalism and secularism I was excited by the arrival of this book as I believe it is the first one with both these words in the title, and especially as Yolande Jansen's goal is to multiculturalise secularism. Whilst there is a specific focus on republican assimilationism as directed at Jews in France at the end of the nineteenth century, studied partly through the novels of Proust, Jansen approaches the subject by relating it to contemporary literature on assimilationism, secularism and multiculturalism. The result is a complex, interdisciplinary engagement rich in critical insights and in dialogue with contemporary authors.

A consequence of her specific focus however is that the general terms of her title have a particular meaning. By 'Secularism', she does not mean for example 'political secularism' but 'secularisation', both in terms of social processes and pressures, and also in terms of state-led secularisation (*laïcité*) as assimilation or deracination. So, secularisation is understood in a compound way, combining wide sociological processes and formations (secularisation) with a specific political manifestation, namely an interventionist-secularist state of which France is typical. Hence there is a sense that while the secularisation she speaks of may be a widespread modern phenomenon, the institutional politics is not. Yet, there is a significant contemporary relevance. In looking at this secularism's handling of 'the Jewish question', she means to illuminate the contemporary European 'Muslim question'. For not only are European Muslims today subject to – like their co-citizens – to social secularisation, but also to targeted pressure by co-citizens to secularise, and to pressures by states to secularise, to see their religion in an appropriately 'modern' or 'secular' way. Hence states – like Britain, Germany and the Netherlands for instance – that for a long time have been relatively passive in relation to the religious beliefs and practices amongst their citizens and accommodating of organised religious authorities are beginning to sound and act like secularist-interventionist states like France and Turkey in respect of Muslims.

On the basis of her historical case study she argues that ‘the promise of assimilation, which implies full and equal citizenship for members of specific minorities on the condition of privatising their differences, is compromised, complicated and even contradicted by the structure of this condition itself’ (47). The French Republican promise to accept Jews as equal French citizens as long as they set aside any claim to be a distinct community requires, to quote Patchen Markell, that the ‘state must see at all times that each Jew has ceased to be Jewish’ (2003: 146). The argument is that the project of Jewish assimilation is not Jewish-blind or Jewish-neutral but works with a negative image of Jewishness, namely the one which it seeks to eradicate. What is this negative image of Jewishness? It is not necessarily that Jews killed Christ or that they seek to subtly control Gentiles but an image of a certain kind of community and a certain kind of religion. Namely, that Judaism is not a religion of private beliefs and individual choices but of ancestral rituals, communal bonds and positive discrimination in favour of fellow Jews. Jews may wish to give up this unmodern Judaism but cannot put it behind them as it hangs over them as a perpetual suspicion. Judging whether Jews have achieved the modern individualism of their compatriots means constantly monitoring them for premodern and anti-civic ‘Jewish’ behaviour. The policy of assimilation thus leads to highlighting Jewishness in the minds of citizens; the negative cast of this Jewishness (including in the minds of Jewish citizens) comes from the modernist binary of backward/modern religion which culturally accompanies laicism, regardless of its political definition. *Laïcité* requires the privatisation of Judaism, but as Hannah Arendt pointed out, this did not lead to its disappearance but to its racialisation, to the creation of ‘the Jew’ as an ‘other’ to *laïcité*.

Jansen argues that what needs to be criticised here is not *laïcité* per se but ‘the modern concept of religion [which] presupposes essentialised notion of belief’ (219).

It is the conception of religion as private belief that leads to the stigmatisation of those religious communities that are, say, more practice and ritual based. This is the central but not isolated case of a modernist binary that stood in the way of the acceptance of the Jews and moreover Jansen’s contention is that the same syndrome is at work today, specially in the case of Muslims, not just in France but in Europe generally. That ‘underlying the public and philosophical discourses on *laïcité* and, more generally, on liberal secularism, is a range of semi-sociological, semi-normative conceptual dichotomies related to ideas of secularisation and assimilation which merit criticism for their unreflected modernist and assimilationist heritage’ (199). So, the challenge as regards the integration of Muslims and Islam is not reforming institutions and laws but the underlying understanding of religion.

Jansen demonstrates the contemporary relevance of her thesis through a number of cases and I will just briefly mention a number of scholarly examples. She mentions the concept of hybridity in the work of Homi Bhabha and Paul Gilroy which celebrates certain forms of subaltern cultures and admixtures but tends to conceive of religion except the highly individualistic as ‘absolutist’ and ‘closed-minded’. It becomes specially problematic when ‘hybridity transmutes from a practice by some into a norm imposed on all, and minorities, especially religious minorities, may

have to constantly prove that they are hybrid enough to be accepted by majorities' (45). Ewa Morawska and Christian Joppke's call for a new liberal assimilationism based on equal citizenship and the confining of immigrant difference to the private sphere is another example which is likely to favour some minorities while casting others as standing in the way of progress and unity. Jansen picks up Olivier Roy's critique of *laïcité*, arguing that like *laïcité* itself it works with the binary of old/new religion, in arguing that laicists misunderstand young Muslims. What laicists take to be a political challenge to the state is actually, according to Roy, a form of 'deculturation', an expression of an individualised, de-communitarianised religious identity very much in the spirit of (post-)modernity (246–248). The (unintended) implication being that Muslims who do not favour this new tendency are perhaps problematic.

This focus on cultural secularism is interesting but she is silent on what kind of political secularism is entailed by her critique. She says that rather than be for or against *laïcité*, she would rather question the idea of 'religion' in the religion-*laïcité* couplet (283). Yet, this has rather radical implications not just at the level of pre-suppositions or attitudes but institutional arrangements. It would mean accepting religions into the public space that do not define themselves merely in terms of private belief but are practice based or have public ambitions that they will and should be allowed to act on – if that implication is accepted that would mean a fairly serious overhaul of *laïcité*.

There are also significant implications for multiculturalism from this widening of the kinds of religions to be accepted in the public space. It points to a communitarian multiculturalism which she is uncomfortable with. In talking of difference she often just focuses on ascriptions and leaves aside the sense of difference that comes from the minority struggling to be properly recognised and respected. Her justification is that 'there is a subtext of ethnic othering and xenophobia linked to Islam that is difficult to address if we stay within the discourses that focus exclusively on Islam as a religion' (p. 250). But this seems to imply a religion (as self-definition) v. ethnicity (as othering) distinction and thus narrow conceptions of religion and ethnicity. Muslims should be able to project ethnic as well as religious identities and are perhaps best understood in Western Europe as ethnoreligious groups. It is secularism or post-secularism – of the kind that Jansen objects to – that treats Muslims as one-dimensional, as merely religious and this is not what one would expect from a multiculturalism that allows groups to define themselves rather than fit prefabricated categories.

Her reservation is based on her conception of critical multiculturalism: 'transformation, *rather than* protection or recognition of given identities, is (or should be) the central concern of multiculturalism' (289; my emphases). But this is a false opposition based on a very restrictive reading of 'recognition' (and of course conservation – transformation is a modernist binary). Recognition is not only about 'given' identities but those that are important to their bearers' sense of themselves and are not perceived as externally imposed. Moreover, Jansen should be wary of simply positing minorities as objects of a political project of transformation rather

than subjects choosing if and how much transformation they wish to subscribe to. True not all members of a group will want conservation as much as some other members but equally not all want transformation or any one option, so it is important to not choose a multiculturalism in which some minorities or some sections of minorities are pitted against another.

Her preference for a critical focus on ‘Othering’ rather than recognition is because – as in her French case study – the culturalism is perceived as coming all from the majority. She thus finds herself in the same space as Anne Phillips (2007) of wanting a multiculturalism that is anti-culturalist, yet more than liberalism or cosmopolitanism in that it accommodates groups and not just individuals. But, as with Phillips, there is no concept of group within the theory to support this political aim (Modood, 2008). A multiculturalism that is politically friendly to groups must have a theory that does not reduce groups neither to individual rights and choices, nor to ‘social constructions’ by those in power. While Jansen may not fully embrace these reductions, she is largely so inclined and offers no other conception of a group.

So, despite the original and distinctive character of this book, the conceptions of multiculturalism and secularism it works with are too limited. European states are currently being pulled, or at least seem to be going, in two different directions (Modood, 2012). The distinctive feature of the dominant secularism of Western Europe is that it has been historically accommodating, usually through privileging one or some Christian churches; states are looking for new ways to sympathetically institutionalise pluralism within this moderate secularism. At the same time, they are restricting and controlling Muslims, e.g. through bans on Muslim women’s dress, the demonisation of conservative piety, especially its co-presence within civic structures and governance. The two trends are not equally represented in each European state. By focusing on France (at the previous turn of the century), Jansen marginalises or omits all together the former, positive developments, the ways in which secularism is being politically re-thought and revised today in more multiculturalist ways. Yet that is what a project of multiculturalising secularism must attend to and build on.

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2. Re-evaluating Laïcité in light of France’s historical treatment of Muslims

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In her hard-hitting book, Yolande Jansen reminds us of the difficulties to be recognised encountered by minorities in France due to the belief in the ‘myth of Republican, universal and difference-blind citizenship’ (p. 196) and of how neo-Republicans found ‘the public assertiveness and the struggle for recognition especially problematic when *religion* was involved, and Islam in particular’ (p. 196).

French authorities are beginning to understand that tormented relations with its Muslims citizens have led to a questioning of the concept of secularism and have complicated policies related to integration and assimilation. As increasing numbers of French representatives conclude that Muslims as a group cannot be ‘integrated’ (the historical parallel with French Jews as documented by Jansen is striking), calls are increasing to define and isolate ‘French Islam’ and implement policies meant to erase Muslim visibility from public spaces. Rather than having the intended effect, these policies are causing a backlash that is leading to a significant communitarianism and a strong identity crisis, especially among second generation French immigrant youth, which has led some to join extremist religious movements who opportunistically fill this identity void. To understand this phenomenon further, a recalling of French colonial history is necessary. Indeed, the crucial role of France’s colonial past and its consequences, especially the war of independence in Algeria, has forged – or at least remodelled – the French vision of republicanism and assimilation, more specifically vis-à-vis the Muslim populations.

Islam and immigration in general cannot be separated from the colonial heritage of France (p. 223). The trauma of Algeria’s lost war still manifests itself in French society. Any political event in Algeria has implications for France not only because of the massive presence of *Pieds-Noirs*, Harkis and Algerian immigrant workers who have a direct link with Algeria, but also because of postcolonial syndrome. The history of the war in Algeria has still not been fully exposed, and thus the wound is still not healed.

Regarding the status of Islam during colonisation, with few exceptions the French Muslims were not considered to be French citizens but rather subjects (p. 251) to whom a Muslim personal status was applied. A full assimilation and an allegiance to the *laïcité*, above and beyond this status, are seen as necessary conditions to access French citizenship. On this aspect, Jansen’s theory could not be more accurate, as it strongly reflects current developments regarding secularism and *laïcité* in France in the twentieth and twenty-first century, in which it is suggested that public spaces should be religion-free zones, and that the politics of belonging imply a total submission to a strict and narrow interpretation of *laïcité*, as a *sine qua non* condition to assimilation. Jansen reminds us that the French authorities in colonial Algeria were nevertheless reluctant to implement *laïcité* in Algeria (p. 206, note 3) and the separation of church and state, while strictly applied in France, was never applied in Algeria. Seen from metropolitan France, the failure of the assimilation of Algeria to the French empire has often been attributed to its Muslim character. This failure validated in the minds of many French citizens the image of a religion that by its nature resists assimilation.

The religious practices of immigrants are always closely linked to the culture and origins of the immigrant. These practices, however, have often been a result of imported cultural tradition rather than through the vehicle of orthodox Islam. Indeed, many of these immigrants never received a proper religious education due to their modest social background. Furthermore, before family reunification, immigrant men did not immerse themselves into French society because they did not seriously consider permanent settlement. More accurately, their attitude was to remain hidden so as to not get any attention from the French authorities, for fear of being deported. Hence, the practices of Islam were often episodic rather than regular and the places of worship were often limited and unsafe. Family reunification policies caused a radical shift in relations between immigrant communities and the French state, as families were suddenly merged into the French system. When families of immigrants stayed in their homeland, the immigrant could clearly make a distinction between the secular sphere of his life, which consists of work and social life and his religious sphere, that was in his home country (Nielsen, 2004: 101). But with family reunification, religion became a full part of family life in France. Indeed, the restoration of the family unit and the birth of native-born children have returned to Islam the same central place it held in their home country. Consequently, family reunification, which is a cornerstone of the process of settlement, has led to a movement to build mosques throughout Europe. Hence the movement to increase the number of mosques and the increased visibility of Islam in the 1970s was a logical consequence of the integration of Muslim populations rather than an Islamic resurgence or a return to religion.

Thus, with the massive influx of Muslim immigrants from the 1960s, Islam was firmly established on French soil. But the demonisation of Islam and anti-Arab racism did not facilitate an already difficult understanding between the two communities. The disparity between the widespread depiction of Arabs and the reality on the ground was vast; the image of the Arab being a thief or an extremist was broadly spread at the same time that working-class immigrants lived in the shadows for fear of being sent back to their country of origin. Consequently, a strong policy against the visibility of a much feared Islam was triggered, starting with one of its most visible symbols: the Islamic headscarf. The infamous 'Headscarf Affair' of 1989 is a good indicator of the complexity of the issue. However, this event could have gone easily unnoticed if it had not been associated with the theme of *laïcité*. Jansen highlights the '...necessity of looking not only at Islam or Muslims, but also at the cultural and conceptual playing field on which Muslims have landed' (p. 45).

I would go even further and consider that the *laïcité* was just a tool used to cover deeper unresolved problems regarding the status of French public schools in regards with diversity, the problems of the *banlieues*, the future of the nation-state linked to immigration and the status of women, especially those with a Muslim background.

On the one hand, proponents of the headscarf ban in schools say their opposition is rooted in the wearing of potentially ostentatious religious symbols of any kind at school, which is the ultimate symbol of the French Republic and *laïcité*.

Indeed, in the 'Headscarf Affair', the state of French public schools was the core of the debate, not the wearing of the veil per se. Supporters of a strict *laïcité* invoked the universality of republican principles to justify the ban. The argument that unites them is the need for all to comply with the laws of the Republic without exception. We should keep in mind that the principle of *laïcité* is the cornerstone of French national identity, as it is considered a protection of the unique French identity against the threat of dilution by minority groups, especially when those groups are religious. Hence immigrants are expected to adapt and assimilate, and the veil is perceived as a threat to this assimilation and a threat to this unique identity.

Furthermore, the veil is not only considered as a sign of religious absolutism and the submission of women, but also as a Trojan horse for 'fanaticism' (because of the 'security' dimension). It is noteworthy that Jansen makes a parallel between the wearing of the headscarf and the wearing of the *haïk* (the long white veil traditionally worn by women in Algiers), used 'to carry guns of the Algerian underground', which is seen as a painful reminder of the war of Algeria (p. 223). Such a garment is seen as a threat against French values, and a threat against peace as well. Another interesting parallel can be made with the recent adoption of the ban of the full-face covering in 2010. Indeed the *burqa* hysteria was raised in a context of controversial debates on a very instrumentalised *laïcité* and especially regarding the 'place of Islam in France'. Former President Sarkozy and his government, supported by politicians both from the right and the left wing and also by women's rights groups, considered the *burqa* and *niqab* as a symbol of an archaic vision of the role of women and a sign of their oppression (p. 250), and as a threat of the spread of wahhabism, which is widely seen as incompatible with France's official Republican values of liberty and gender equality (Alouane, 2014: 195). Eventually, the Act on the prohibition of the concealment of the face in public elevated discussion regarding the social and public visibility of religion, particularly the public visibility of Islam.

When both the rise of the visibility of Islam and lingering wounds of war are combined, a very negative image of French Muslims is spread, threatening their peaceful integration. Thus, certain segments of the French population become virulently anti-Arab or anti-immigrant due to a perceived clash of culture and religion and influenced by alarmist media. Within Muslim populations, feeling the weight of a growing and semi-permanent suspicion, has led many to withdraw from the public sphere or put themselves on the defensive (Gastaud, 2000).

The unity of France has been achieved at the expense of the affirmation of differences. On the religious level, the French *laïc* state promotes freedom of religion, but tends to limit religious practice in private and does not tolerate obvious manifestations of religion in public, which are seen as existential threats to French culture. The institutionalisation of difference was outlawed in the name of the founding principles of the French state, namely equality of society and national unity based on the fiction of 'People = Nation = State'.

Finally, the relationship between immigrants and the host society is a relationship of power and domination (Nielsen, 2004: 156). This relationship of domination is often coupled with the historical residue of colonisation and perhaps even constitutes a natural and unconscious continuation of the colonization process, particularly with respect to the colonial subjugation of populations to the economic, social and political needs of greater European society.

Jansen adamantly concludes:

The progressive multicultural way is to focus on ‘us’ and ‘them’ together and to pinpoint our intricacies, conflicts and relationships, always with an eye to the equal access of all the rules of the game, including the game of critique of self and other. (p. 295)

I will add to this insightful conclusion that as long as France does not solve its larger identity crisis, religious minorities – especially Muslims – will always be seen as a threat to French unity, and as long as this situation lasts, the future of *laïcité* will be at stake due to this perpetual malicious manipulation. Perhaps it is time for France to turn the page of decolonisation and finally rethink the concept of *laïcité* so as to include diversity instead of erasing it.

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3. Secularism: The genealogy of *laïcité* in France. Assimilation: from the 19th to the 21st century. Multiculturalism: a hopeful plea for Europe

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Much like the title of Yolande Jansen’s book, *Secularism, Assimilation and the Crisis of Multiculturalism: French Modernist Legacies*, its content is an intellectual mouthful. Jansen has demonstrated that it is still possible – in a time when universities are more and more regulated by the rules of neo-liberalism – for an academic to be a true scholar. She does not allow herself to be restricted by languages, national borders, disciplines or centuries but instead puts forward the best of what critical theory has to offer in her analysis of the concepts of secularism, assimilation and multiculturalism – considering both their genealogy in the 19th century, by

way of the work of Marcel Proust, and their present meaning for Europe. In order to attempt to do justice to the wide range of questions – both scholarly and political – raised in this book, I will interweave a summary of the topics explored with an assessment of the answers provided.

Let me however begin with a cautionary note. This is certainly a book worth reading, studying and reflecting upon (personally as well as in courses on these topics) – but be prepared to struggle with the text. Its richness is like a fine wine that requires patience and a skilled pallet to be fully appreciated. This book covers a great deal of terrain and does not do so superficially. It calls for a committed reader who is willing to go beyond his or her disciplinary boundaries, to spend time exploring topics that are both historical and literary as well as contemporary and actual. This book calls for a close reading that sadly less and less academics are able to afford. Its central argument, which is at the same time a plea for a renewed European multiculturalism (in the spirit of a project of hope or sensibility, etc.), develops slowly by way of an analysis of the crisis of its alternatives: assimilation, secularism and (civic) integration as well as a consideration of the lessons to be learned from the 19th century with regard to the ‘Muslim Question’ in Europe today. Jansen relies on a series of intertwined and complex reasons (some sociological and political and others historical, etc.) to justify her conclusion that all these alternatives are highly problematic, a conclusion that partially grounds her attempt to save multiculturalism, in some form or another, in Europe.

Analytically, Jansen structures her investigation along two intersecting axes – each of which could be a complete volume in its own right. The first axis, which is commonly associated with authors such as Taylor (Taylor and Gutmann, 1994), Joppke (Joppke, 2010) and Kymlicka (Kymlicka, 2000), is the discussions of multiculturalism, assimilation and integration. The second axis, which includes philosophers, political theorists, theologians and social scientists, is that with regard to the relationship between religion and secularism, commonly associated with thinkers like Asad (Asad, 2003), Bader (Bader, 2008) and Habermas (Habermas, 2010). This intersectional examination is one of Jansen’s strengths in that it brings together two academic discussions all too often kept apart. The tendency to separate these two frameworks, most often justified in the name of clarity, leads to several problems Jansen highlights in later chapters (e.g. a failure to understand the history of secularism in relation to assimilation policies). However in order to tackle these two axes, Jansen must spend a considerable amount of time defining these highly contested terms as well as sketching their rise and fall in European politics. While she does not venture across the Atlantic, the discussion of the relationship between multiculturalism and assimilation is very important in understanding the different histories in Europe and North America (Banting et al., 2007) as well as the importance of the religion-secularism framework for the former context. The latter investigation would be relevant if Jansen were to further pursue the question of what kind of multiculturalism is possible in Europe.

Chapters 2 and 3 are explorations of different sociological approaches to the concepts of multiculturalism and assimilation (integration fades into the

background after the first chapter). The first is an evaluation of the work done by Gérard Noiriel on assimilation from the perspective of a non-liberal reading of multiculturalism. What becomes clear in this chapter is that Jansen wishes to save a non-liberal kind of multiculturalism in Europe that does not limit its understanding of multiculturalism to a purely 'cultural' question (Jansen, 2014: 61). The issue this raises is whether this is possible – has Europe ever really been multicultural, and can it given its history and the power inequalities between majorities and minorities? While Noiriel's work does attempt to take into consideration this power play, specifically in terms of the racialisation of assimilated youth in France, it is insufficient according to Jansen because of Noiriel's misunderstanding and subsequent rejection of multiculturalism.

The following chapter asks similar questions but within the field of a 'liberal sociology of assimilation' (e.g. migration studies). The authors engaged here are Joppke and Morawska (2003) on the one hand, and Brubaker (1998) on the other – all of whom are read through the frame of liberal theories of assimilation. The liberal perspective reintroduces fundamental political questions such as the space for difference in relation to the private and public spheres, a question that is essential to understanding how the privatisation of religion can actually lead to its radicalisation as well as the importance of not interpreting all 'religions' in the same manner with respect to the importance of publicity, collectiveness, rituals, etc. (Masuzawa, 2005). These authors propose stronger notions of citizenship and assimilation, with a new definition, as a positive alternative to the conception of multiculturalism in crisis in Europe. Jansen's analysis and criticism of these authors is worth reading (and can be read independently of the rest of the book) as is her conclusion that what is needed is a critical concept of assimilation 'to analyse those forms of assimilationism that cannot so easily be uncovered as such precisely because they are called liberal' (Jansen, 2014: 112).

In Transit 1, Jansen takes us back to the 19th century as narrated by Marcel Proust in *In Search of Lost Time*. Inspired by Hannah Arendt for whom the novel 'acts as a primary witness of the emergence of a specifically modern type of racism in the dynamics of assimilation' (Jansen, 2014: 13); Jansen turns to this novel – following a tradition of renowned critical theorists such as Adorno and Benjamin, to re-read Proust in terms of the dynamic highlighted by Arendt. While these parts of her book (transit 1, chapter 4 and chapter 8) may sadly be lost on readers unfamiliar with Proust, they set Jansen's book apart by including the literary as a window into both the past and future. The claim she sets forward to defend is that assimilation in the 19th century (assumingly in France) is 'more like assimilationism today than we might initially think, and *this* might be precisely why it is useful to look at that experience again' (Jansen, 2014: 133). Following upon the previous chapter, Jansen returns to the complex reality described eloquently by Proust with regard to the paradox, or catch-22, of assimilation, that is how assimilation leads to changing practices of Judaism and how its privatisation can lead to its radicalisation (Arendt, 1973). She also uses Proust's account of Alfred Bloch, who had to undergo a series of personal integration tests to be socially 'accepted', to illustrate

her own criticism of the two sociological understandings of assimilation investigated in the previous chapters.

Jansen then traces Proust's criticism of the gap between public-private in the France of the Third Republic, which in the case of the 19th century was between politics and society. The paradox of assimilation is exposed as one in which there appears to be more space for social mobility but is in fact rife with distinctions and non-'erasable' differences tied to a semi-public memory – a memory of 'othering' hidden in secrecy and shame. This question of cultural memory is here intertwined with the two frameworks that provide the girder for Jansen's book: the practices of assimilation in the 19th century as well as the discourse of secularism. For the latter she turns to the writings of Arendt, Bauman and Benbessa through whom she explores the Jewish experience of being 'stuck in a revolving door'. With Bauman she considers his analysis of being 'without control over the rules [of acceptance by the majority], [making it] impossible to win' (Bauman, 1998: 56) by framing it in relation to Benbessa's broader historical account of how 'religions' were brought under control of the state and institutionalised.

From here – via Transit II – we return to the 21st century and specifically the notion of *laïcité* in France today. Jansen criticises the *laïcité*-religion framework because of its inability to free itself from the paradox of assimilation outlined in the previous chapters. In the following chapter, she demonstrates how this framework sustains an unreflected assimilationist heritage and produces a 'semi-public' *culture of laicism*, which while unjust to all religions, specifically targets Islam. In order to develop this argument, we are first offered the philosophical background necessary to understand the 19th century roots of French laicism in thinkers such as Kant and Durkheim. Jansen also connects this to Asad's contemporary analysis of secularism, once again providing a fruitful intellectual bridge between these two centuries. The question being developed here is what work does secularism do when understood as a specific framework for Muslims and minorities today. However, a problem that begins to arise in this, and subsequent, chapters is the slippage between *laïcité* and secularism. While Jansen's claim is that the latter traces its roots to the former, this clear genealogy is often obscured. In addition, the role played by the Republican tradition in France also puts into question the ability to draw conclusions for Europe, or other nation-states, based on whether one takes the French case to be unique or exemplary.

Jansen's addition to Asad's thesis, which calls for a reading of the headscarf not only as a sign of a religious way of being, is to read the headscarf as a 'communication about identity'. In order to develop this complementary thesis, she focuses on the Stasi Report bringing to light the role of power and minority-majority relations in terms of the paradox of assimilation and the religion-secularism framework. She thereby develops her reading of this report, framed in terms of a wider criticism of liberal democracies' reliance on the paradox of assimilation inherent in secularist discourses, by turning to an array of policy makers and thinkers from different disciplines such as: Gilles Kepel, Alain Touraine, Marcel Gauchet, Oliver Roy, etc. While in other parts of the book, this diversity of sources is a strength of

her analysis; it sadly proves here to be a weakness as parts of the argument are lost in translation making it difficult to appreciate her conclusion that based on this analysis of the Stasi Report it is necessary to return to Proust ‘to increase our understanding of the relationship between modernist categories and dichotomies on the one hand, and the emergence of what we might call, ironically, “multicultural conflict after assimilation”, on the other’ (Jansen, 2014: 251).

Chapter 8 combines several different strands of thought by bringing together Proust’s analysis of cultural memory, several critical theorists reading of this analysis (such as the exchange between Adorno and Benjamin), and contemporary perspectives on the relationship between forgetting and memory by theorists such as Deleuze, Bader and Connolly. It adds yet another perspective to the list already amassed in the previous seven chapters with regard to the intra and inter-subjective role of memory as well as the complexities of culture, religious practice and belief, in the face of assimilationist projects. From this highly layered reading of Proust, Jansen extracts the notion of democratic memory that ‘includes reflection on the past [that] should enable minorities, complex as they can be, to remember and thematise exclusions and to take critical distance from the stories of majorities’ (Jansen, 2014: 274). The final chapter crosses several themes already spelled out in previous chapters, while at the same time permitting a brief appearance of insight from political theology as well as from other European national contexts into the questions raised concerning the relationship between assimilation and multiculturalism. The final, far too few, pages are a plea to not reject the notion of multiculturalism but to revive it in an alternative form which calls for an ability to question the rules of the hegemonic game itself and a fundamental turning of the gaze towards the power that structures this unjust game of exclusion.

While on the one hand this book is saturated with scholarly analysis, leaving no space for any other perspectives, it seems to me that the analysis provided does not suffice to draw some of the broader promised conclusions.

Although the argument will pass through an analysis of these discourses in France, I will try to make it plausible that these cultural and conceptual layers in laicism also form a relatively unquestioned discursive framework for debates about secularism, and religion more broadly, in contemporary political theory. (Jansen, 2014: 199)

What this leaves the reader with is a string of questions concerning the application of this analysis beyond the rather unique context of France. In this vein, a closer foray into broader questions of political theology, as recently offered by Gil Anidjar’s book (Anidjar, 2014), or a consideration of the non-Republican non-19th century notions of secularism, such as those from the period of the Reformation, could have strengthened this latter argument. Another angle, briefly considered in Chapter 3, which many would argue makes the comparison to the 19th century inapplicable is the question of neo-liberal economics and how this affects the crisis of multiculturalism. Yet perhaps the argument that most deserves to have been

further developed is that which scatters the final pages. Why is multiculturalism worth saving in Europe when the previous nine chapters demonstrate that Europe, or at least France, has never really shown any desire to be hospitable to such a multicultural sensitivity.

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Response to the reviewers

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I would like to thank my reviewers for their careful readings of my book. I have identified two key issues they would like me to explain further. Modood, Alouane and Topolski want me to clarify my views on the relation between France and Europe, and, partly analogously, between cultural laicism and moderate secularism. Topolski wants me to explain why multiculturalism should be saved in Europe at all, when Europe has traditionally been more inclined towards integration and assimilation.

France within Europe; cultural laicism and moderate secularism

Modood agrees with me that the ‘culture of laicism/secularism’ is widespread, not only in France but in Europe generally, and that it is intimately linked to discriminatory processes and to Islamophobia. However, he says, we must view secularism in its contrasting meanings to get the full picture: historically, there have been moderate secularisms in Europe which have accommodated religion, and which today ‘sympathetically institutionalize pluralism’.

I agree with Modood that it is more useful to compare cultural secularism and moderate secularism than to compare a French Republican model to more liberal models in other European countries. *Laïcité* as a legal–political doctrine is comparable to moderate secularism in many respects, and the culture of laicism is not dependent on French Republican traditions, but forms part of the wider intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment and European modernity. But then why do I not differentiate between ‘bad’, culturalist secularism and ‘good’, pluralising, moderate secularism; instead criticizing the entire secular-religious framework?

My study of the French case highlights the ways in which a framing of the position of ethno-religious minorities in Europe today in terms of a ‘secular-religious’ problematic, reinvents assimilationism and its paradoxes. This is the case, irrespective of whether we are talking about moderate secularism, liberal secularism, religious pluralism, die-hard republican secularism, theological secularism, etc. (I discuss several varieties in my book). For historical reasons, this is a problematic which particularly affects Jews and Muslims.

The paradoxes of assimilation are the result of societal relationships in which there is a more or less unquestioned majority which can ‘recognize’, ‘integrate’ and ‘assimilate’ minorities on specific conditions, usually to do with the privatisation of their differences. The result is not only the structural inequality of minorities and majorities, but also a focus on differences – even their ‘detection’ and construction as a societal game – and these can be *ephemeral* differences, consisting of loosely connected ethnic, racial, religious, memorial and imaginative threads (Proust’s contribution).

The kernel of my argument is that we encounter the paradoxes of assimilation as soon as a secular-religious framing supersedes a more open and ramified framing of the position of minorities today. I don’t think secularisms necessarily depend on privatised or interiorised conceptions of religion as belief, as many critics of Protestant and Enlightenment traces in secularism suggest. What we may call ‘moderately secularist’ liberal traditions today tend to involve very broad, practice based concepts of religion, in which all kinds of elements can be accommodated which would have been filtered out as ‘cultural’ in older traditions (Bader, 2007).

Still, the secular-religious framework in general inevitably gives religion a special political position, requiring a special political principle, namely secularism. Secularism then becomes the default position, and religion the more problematic double on which we tend to focus. The idea that this is necessary has its origins in the tradition of liberal thinking which views the nature of religion as tending to dogmatism and competitive, comprehensive universalism. Liberalism’s way of dealing with such potentially dangerous religion is that it must remain politically

insignificant. Hence, liberalism has difficulties conceiving of religion as a complex and variable social phenomenon in which ethnic, intercultural, social, linguistic, political–historical, ritual, liturgic and theological dimensions may all be relevant. It tends to make invisible how religious persons and groups intermingle varying degrees of piety, belief, scepticism, (self-)irony, fanaticism; political critique of majorities, oppression and poverty; traces of colonial oppression; anti-Constantinian and Constantian, worldly and non-worldly drives. Instead, liberal secularism tends to imagine a fundamental difference between religion and secularity, and, moreover, it neglects that secular persons, groups (and states) can have their own dogmatic beliefs, fears and prejudices.

Taking religion as a complex social phenomenon neither implies a communitarian understanding of religion, nor one in terms of a (pious) ‘way of being’ that Talal Asad and others seem to pursue (Asad, 2006). Neither does it imply that religion, once it goes public, will necessarily be fanatical: this depends on historical circumstances. It rather brings religion closer to culture, and to complex and open everydayness (Schielke, 2010).

Increasingly, the secular-religious framework is more or less taken for granted when dealing with ethno-religious minorities in Europe – and with Jews and Muslims in particular. This presents us with a limited perspective: Jewishness and Muslimness today have to do with more or less privatisable beliefs and practices, but also with a very complex historical interaction of these minorities in the context of the relations between Europe, the U.S. and the Middle East, for which neither the concept of religion, nor any kind of secularism, seems adequate.

So even if moderate secularism can accommodate religion, including its practices, more successfully than cultural laicism, it remains wedded to the idea that we should treat ‘religion’ as a separate category in need of a special principle, while at the same time pre-framing the position of complex minorities such as Jews and Muslims as ‘religious’. Doing so tends to hide majority–minority relations, power inequalities, colonial history, everydayness, migration histories, histories of imaginaries and stereotypes in intercultural memory from view. The paradoxes into which the secular-religious paradigm drives us, both of privileging religion and of demanding a privatisation which it cannot fulfil, risks keeping those rubriqued under the secular-religious framework in a place that they would be better off leaving. As I explain in my book, I agree with Veit that a framing in terms of liberal democracy which concentrates on liberal democratic practice is preferable (Bader, 2007; Chapters 6 and 7).

The projection of the secular-religious dichotomy onto contemporary society stimulates a securitising perspective: today, especially Islam fits the liberal interpretation of religion as dangerous by nature; this forms the background for the appeal of cultural laicism (Chapters 6 and 7). This dichotomy forms part of a range of oppositions inherited from conceptual modernism, between autonomy and heteronomy, religion and culture, liberalism and nationalism. Traces of this conceptual tradition exist in the broader European contemporary discourses on liberal assimilation, which much too easily suggest that a contemporary, ‘liberal’

assimilationism (or integration) can be distinguished from a 19th century nationalist, homogenising assimilationism (my Chapters 2 and 3), and in discourses on political Islam, which tend to pre-construct a ‘good’ apolitical religion and a ‘bad’ political religion (Islamism), or a ‘good’ religion which can translate itself into secular norms, and a ‘bad’ orthodoxy which cannot, without looking into historical and sociological detail.

Why multiculturalism and what kind?

This brings me to the question raised by Anya Topolski: ‘Why is multiculturalism worth saving in Europe when the previous nine chapters demonstrate that Europe, or at least France, has never really shown any desire to be hospitable to a multicultural sensitivity’.

I am not arguing for specific kinds of multicultural policies, although I do think, with more institutionally oriented scholars (Bader, Modood, Malik, Alouane, Kymlicka), and in contrast to scholars such as Paul Gilroy, that institutional religious and cultural pluralism is indispensable for the protection and empowerment of minorities today, especially in the context of cultural laicism – despite the problematic sketched earlier. The relative inertia of institutions, and the relatively well-established protection of religious minorities within European constitutional democracies, is necessary today, even if these protections inevitably also play a role in the reification of group identities and stimulate moral conservatism. The available plausible alternatives underestimate the culturalism, moralism and majoritarianism in today’s European public cultures (Chapters 2 and 3 of my book).

By my focus on transformation instead of recognition of identities, I was not suggesting that transformationist pressures on minorities are a good alternative to recognition, as Modood reads me. I put forward transformation when I criticise the taken for grantedness that the focus should be on minorities at all, instead of on the interrelations between minorities and majorities. My proposal here is more or less in line with Patchen Markell’s (2003) plea for what he calls a ‘politics of acknowledgement’, in which majorities turn the focus on themselves and the histories of their privileges.

I try to develop a historicising multiculturalism which is one ‘of fear’, namely ‘fear of assimilationism’. Assimilationism legitimises majority attitudes that tend to focus on the often highly stereotyped shortcomings of minorities, and therefore it implies the continuation of serious forms of othering and discrimination, but also the turning sour and pain of daily interaction and experience (Proust’s contribution). We cannot just ascribe such tendencies to extremism, populism or securitisation, but have to recognise that liberal assimilationism, secularism and anti-multiculturalism also play their part. We face those tendencies in Europe today towards Muslims, but also increasingly towards Jews, Roma, irregular migrants, etc. To give a too brief answer to Topolski’s query about how I see the role of neoliberalism here: a focus on minorities while remaining out of focus oneself, ideally ties in with neoliberal discourses focusing on how the ‘entrepreneurial self’ can ‘participate’, while not taking into account the role of the structural inequalities that people have to deal with – which reiterates, by the way,

post-Revolutionary discourses on Jews ascribing their poverty to their character, and their character to their poverty.

One critical standard for equality that I elaborate on in my book is to know whether all have equal access to defining the rules of the game (with Zygmunt Bauman and James Tully; I would have added Luc Boltanski if I were to rewrite the book; during a recent lecture in Amsterdam, he emphasised how important it is that those with less power have the same space to *interpret* rules that the more powerful have). Not only are multicultural rights necessary then, but also political participation and the full freedoms of political communication, as is something too often left out of the picture – a critical humanities culture which can dig up stereotypes and conceptual complications, for example, between religion, race, ethnicity and culture (Anidjar, 2008; Meer, 2012). My reason for calling all of this multiculturalism is that multicultural discourses have developed the most radical critique of assimilationism to date. I am also wary of introducing another neologism when there is no way to understand the position of minorities in Europe today other than by meticulous study of its historical complexity, and when multiculturalism is precisely the target that large parts of European majorities today know how to identify and reject. Perhaps I should have tried to invent an alternative term.

I simply do not trust a reading of the death of multiculturalism as the leaving behind of a flawed policy option, nor do I have hope that this loss could be remedied by a more traditionally liberal ‘religious pluralism’ or a moderate secularism. The central problem today is the implicit, and often also explicit, privileging of European majorities, and in which Christianity in its various forms, the Enlightenment, and the histories of race, colonialism and minority formation are all intertwined. This problem has been identified as today’s ‘European question’ (Anidjar, 2012), and it stands in the way of liberty and equality for ethno-religious-cultural minorities in systematic ways in many European countries.

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