Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism
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Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism
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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter shows that one of the most significant consequences of the new global patterns of transnational migration has been a dramatic growth in religious diversity in the United States and Western Europe. The new immigrant religions, however, present significantly different challenges of integration in Christian/Secular Europe and in Judeo-Christian/Secular America due to the different histories of immigration and modes of immigrant incorporation, the different patterns of religious pluralism, and the different types of secularism in both regions. Religion in the United States constitutes a positive resource insofar as religious associations and religious collective identities constitute one of the accepted avenues for immigrant incorporation and for mutual group recognition in the public sphere of American civil society. In Europe, by contrast, secularist world views and various institutional patterns of public recognition through different forms of church-state relations make the incorporation of immigrant religions in the public sphere of European civil societies a more contentious issue.

Keywords: immigrant religiosity, secularization, United States, Western Europe, Islam, integration, church-state relations

In the last four decades the United States and Western European societies have become the main destinations of new global migration flows. In the case of the United States, the 1965 new immigration law overturned the draconian anti-immigration laws of the 1920s and brought a resumption of a long tradition of immigration. Unlike the nineteenth-century immigrants, however, who came mainly from Europe, the new immigrants originate
primarily from the Americas and Asia and increasingly from all regions of the world. In the case of Western Europe, the new immigration has meant a radical reversal of a long history of European emigration to the rest of the world.\footnote{1}

Throughout the modern era, Western European societies had been the primary source of immigration in the world. During the colonial phase, European colonists and colonizers, indentured servants and penal laborers, missionaries and entrepreneurs, settled all the corners of the globe. During the age of industrialization, from the 1800s to the 1920s, it is estimated that around 85 million Europeans emigrated to the new world and to the Southern Hemisphere, 60% of them to the United States alone. In the last decades, however, the migration flows have reversed and Western European societies have become instead centers of global immigration.

It began in the 1950s with guest worker programs attracting migrant labor from the less developed southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey). Decolonization brought former colonial subjects from North and West Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean to the colonial metropolises (France, Great Britain, and Holland). Economic disruptions, famines, political violence, wars, and global smuggling rings added refugees, asylum seekers, and illegal migrants from less privileged regions, long after the post–World War II economic boom had come to an end in the 1970s, bringing also a stop to the regulated labor migration programs. The fall of communism in 1989 opened the gates to new immigrants from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Most of the initial guest workers from poorer neighboring European countries either returned home or have been successfully integrated into the host countries. But the policies of voluntary repatriation of non-European immigrants have proved less successful, as the guest workers not only overstayed their welcome but have settled permanently with their reunited families. In 2004 Spain and Italy, which only three decades earlier had been immigrant-sending countries, received the largest number of legal immigrants in Europe, around 500,000 and 400,000 respectively, while traditional immigrant-receiving countries such as Germany, France, and Great Britain were able to reduce drastically their legal immigration to 100,000 entries or less.

Although the proportion of foreign immigrants in many European countries (United Kingdom, France, Holland, or West Germany before reunification), at approximately 10%, is similar to the proportion of foreign born in the
United States today, most European countries still have difficulty viewing themselves as permanent immigrant societies, or viewing the foreign born, and even the native second and third generation, as nationals, irrespective of their legal status. The United States, by contrast, tends to view itself as the paradigmatic immigrant society, and the distinction between native citizen, naturalized immigrant, immigrant alien, and undocumented alien, while legally clear, is not immediately evident in ordinary social encounters or relevant in most social contexts.  

The Challenge of the New Religious Diversity in Secular Europe

One of the most significant consequences of the new immigration has been a dramatic growth in religious diversity on both sides of the Atlantic. But while in the United States the new immigrant religions have mainly contributed to the further expansion of an already vibrant American religious pluralism, in the case of Europe, immigrant religions present a greater challenge to local patterns of limited religious pluralism and, even more importantly, to recent European trends of drastic secularization. It is true that European societies distinguish themselves not only from the United States but also from one another, in the different ways in which they try to accommodate and regulate immigrant religions, particularly Islam. European societies have markedly different institutional and legal structures regarding religious associations; very diverse policies of state recognition, of state regulation, and of state aid to religious groups; as well as diverse norms concerning when and where one may publicly express religious beliefs and practices. 

(p. 61 ) In their dealing with immigrant religions, European countries, like the United States, tend to replicate their particular model of separation of church and state and the patterns of regulation of their own religious minorities. 4 France’s etatist secularist model and the political culture of laïcité require the strict privatization of religion, eliminating religion from any public forum, while at the same time pressuring religious groups to organize themselves into a single centralized churchlike institutional structure that can be regulated by and can serve as interlocutor to the state, following the traditional model of the concordat with the Catholic Church. Great Britain, by contrast, while maintaining the established Church of England, has historically accommodated a much greater religious pluralism and today allows greater freedom of religious associations, which deal directly with local authorities and school boards to press for changes in religious education, diet, and so on, with little direct appeal to the central
government. Germany, following the multiestablishment model, has tried to organize a quasiofficial Islamic institution, at times in conjunction with parallel strivings on the part of the Turkish state to regulate its diaspora. But the internal divisions among immigrants from Turkey and the public expression and mobilization of competing identities (secular and Muslim, Alevi and Kurd) in the German democratic context have undermined any project of institutionalization from above. Holland, following its traditional pattern of pillarization, seemed, until very recently at least, bent on establishing a state-regulated but self-organized separate Muslim pillar. Lately, however, even liberal, tolerant Holland is expressing second thoughts and seems ready to pass more restrictive legislation, setting clear limits to the kinds of un-European, unmodern norms and habits it is ready to tolerate.

Looking at Western Europe as a whole, however, there are two fundamental differences with the situation in the United States. In the first place, in continental Europe at least, immigration and Islam are almost synonymous. Except for the United Kingdom, where one finds a much greater diversity of immigrants from former colonies of the British Empire, until very recently a majority of immigrants in most European countries have been Muslims. Moreover, despite the symbolic presence of small groups of European converts to Islam, the overwhelming majority of Western European Muslims are immigrants. This identification of immigration and Islam appears even more pronounced in those cases, where the majority of Muslim immigrants tend to come predominantly from a single region of origin (e.g., Turkey in the case of Germany, the Maghreb in the case of France). This entails a superimposition of different dimensions of otherness that exacerbates issues of boundaries, accommodation, and incorporation. The immigrant, the religious, the racial, and the socioeconomic disprivileged other all tend to coincide.5

In the United States, by contrast, Muslims constitute at most 10% of all new immigrants, a figure that is likely to decrease, if the strict restrictions to Arab and Muslim immigration imposed after September 11, 2001, continue. Since the U.S. Census Bureau, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and other government agencies are not allowed to gather information on religion, there are no reliable estimates on the number of Muslims in the United States. Available (p. 62) but self-interested estimates range widely between 2.8 million and 8 million. It is safe to assume that the actual number lies somewhere in the middle—between 4 and 6 million. More reliable is the estimate that from 30% to 42% of all Muslims in the United States are African American converts to Islam, making more difficult the
characterization of Islam as a foreign, un-American religion. Furthermore, the Muslim immigrant communities in the United States are extremely diverse in terms of geographic region of origin from all over the Muslim world, in terms of discursive Islamic traditions, and in terms of socioeconomic characteristics. As a result, the dynamics of interaction with other Muslim immigrants, with African American Muslims, with non-Muslim immigrants from the same regions of origin, and with their immediate American hosts, depending upon socioeconomic characteristics and residential patterns, are much more complex and diverse than anything one finds in Europe.\textsuperscript{6}

The second main difference between Western Europe and United States has to do with the role of religion and religious group identities in public life and in the organization of civil society. Internal differences notwithstanding, Western European societies are deeply secular societies, shaped by the hegemonic knowledge regime of secularism.\textsuperscript{7} The progressive, though highly uneven, secularization of Europe is an undeniable social fact.\textsuperscript{8} It is true that the rates of religiosity vary significantly across Europe. East Germany is by far the least religious country of Europe by any measure, followed at a long distance by the Czech Republic and the Scandinavian countries. At the other extreme, Ireland and Poland are by far the most religious countries of Europe, with rates comparable to those of the United States. In general, with the significant exception of France and the Czech Republic, Catholic countries tend to be more religious than Protestant or mixed countries (West Germany, the Netherlands), although Switzerland (a mixed and traditionally pillarized country comparable to Holland) stands at the high end of the European religious scale, with rates similar to those of Catholic Austria and Spain, both of which, however, have been undergoing drastic rates of decline.

In any case, across Europe since the 1960s an increasing majority of the population has ceased participating in traditional religious practices, at least on a regular basis, while still maintaining relatively high levels of private individual religious belief. In this respect, one should perhaps talk of the unchurching of the European population and of religious individualization, rather than of secularization. Grace Davie characterizes this general European situation as “believing without belonging.”\textsuperscript{9} At the same time, however, large numbers of Europeans, even in the most secular countries, still identify themselves as Christian, pointing to an implicit, diffused, and submerged Christian cultural identity. In this sense, Danièle Hervieu-Léger is also correct, when she offers the reverse characterization of the European situation as “belonging without believing.”\textsuperscript{10} From France to
Sweden and from England to Scotland, the historical churches (Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, or Calvinist), although emptied of active membership, still function, vicariously as it were, as public carriers of the national religion. In this respect, “secular” and “Christian” cultural identities are intertwined in complex and rarely verbalized modes among most Europeans.

Indeed, the most interesting issue sociologically is not the fact of progressive religious decline among the European population since the 1950s, but the fact that this decline is interpreted through the lenses of the secularization paradigm and is therefore accompanied by a secularist self-understanding that interprets the decline as normal and progressive, that is, as a quasinormative consequence of being a modern and enlightened European. We need to entertain seriously the proposition that secularization became a self-fulfilling prophecy in Europe, once large sectors of the population of Western European societies, including the Christian churches, accepted the basic premises of the theory of secularization: that secularization is a teleological process of modern social change; that the more modern a society, the more secular it becomes; and that secularity is “a sign of the times.” If such a proposition is correct, then the secularization of Western European societies can be explained better in terms of the triumph of the knowledge regime of secularism than in terms of structural processes of socioeconomic development, such as urbanization, education, rationalization, and so on. The internal variations within Europe, moreover, can be explained better in terms of historical patterns of church-state and church-nation relations, as well as in terms of different paths of secularization among the different branches of Christianity, than in terms of levels of modernization.

It is the secular identity shared by European elites and ordinary people alike that paradoxically turns religion and the barely submerged Christian European identity into a thorny and perplexing issue, when it comes to delimiting the external geographic boundaries and to defining the internal cultural identity of a European Union in the process of being constituted. The contentious debates over the potential integration of Muslim Turkey into the European Union are superimposed on the debates over the failure to integrate second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants into Europe—all contributing to the specter of Islam as the other of the modern, liberal, secular West. Moreover, the debates over textual references to God or to the Christian heritage in the preamble to the new European constitution have shown that Europe, rather than Turkey, is actually the “torn country,” deeply divided over its cultural identity, unable to answer the question

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whether European unity, and therefore its external and internal boundaries, should be defined by the common heritage of Christianity and Western civilization or by its modern, secular values of liberalism, universal human rights, political democracy, and tolerant and inclusive multiculturalism. Publicly, of course, European liberal, secular elites could not share the pope's definition of European civilization as essentially Christian. But they also could not verbalize the unspoken cultural requirements that make the integration of Turkey into Europe such a difficult issue. The specter of millions of Turkish citizens already in Europe but not of Europe, many of them second-generation immigrants, caught between an old country they have left behind and their European host societies, unable or unwilling to fully assimilate them, makes the problem only more visible. Guest workers can be successfully incorporated economically. They may even gain voting rights, at least on the local level, and prove to be model or at least ordinary citizens. But can they pass the unwritten rules of cultural European membership or are they to remain “strangers”? Can the European Union open new conditions for the kind of multiculturalism that its constituent national societies find so difficult to accept? Contemporary debates across Europe illustrate a fundamental tension between cosmopolitan secularism and the kind of multiculturalism that could bring public recognition of the mores, customs, and lifeworlds of Muslim and other immigrant religious communities.11

As liberal, democratic polities, all European societies respect and protect constitutionally the private exercise of religion, including Islam, as an individual human right. It is the public and collective free exercise of Islam as an immigrant religion that most European societies find difficult to tolerate, precisely on the grounds that Islam is perceived as an essentially un-European religion. The stated rationales for considering Islam un-European vary significantly across Europe and among social and political groups. For the anti-immigrant, xenophobic, nationalist right, represented by Jean-Marie Le Pen's discourse in France and by Jörg Haider in Austria, the message is straightforward. Islam is unwelcome and unassimilable simply because it is a “foreign” immigrant religion. Such a nativist and usually racist attitude can be differentiated clearly from the conservative Catholic position, paradigmatically expressed by the Cardinal of Bologna, when he declared that Italy should welcome immigrants of all races and regions of the world, but should particularly select Catholic immigrants in order to preserve the Catholic identity of the country. Christian democratic parties have in fact become the cultural defenders of a narrow, nativist, and territorial definition of European Christianity, at a time when the millennial identification of
Christianity and European civilization has come to an end, due to a dual process of advanced secularization in post-Christian Europe and increasing globalization of a deterritorialized and decentered non-European Christianity.

Liberal, secular Europeans tend to look askance at such blatant expressions of racist bigotry and religious intolerance coming from nationalists and religious conservatives. But when it comes to Islam, secular Europeans also tend to reveal the limits and prejudices of modern, secularist toleration. One is not likely to hear among liberal politicians and secular intellectuals explicitly xenophobic or antireligious statements. The politically correct formulation tends to run along such lines as “we welcome each and all immigrants irrespective of race or religion as long as they are willing to respect and accept our modern, liberal, secular European norms.” The explicit articulation of those norms may vary from country to country. The controversies over the Muslim veil in so many European societies and the overwhelming support among the French citizenry, including apparently among a majority of French Muslims, for the restrictive legislation prohibiting the wearing of Muslim veils and other ostensibly religious symbols in public schools, as “a threat to national cohesion,” may be an extreme example of illiberal secularism. But in fact one sees similar trends of restrictive legislation directed at immigrant Muslims in liberal Holland, precisely in the name of protecting its liberal, tolerant traditions from the threat of illiberal, fundamentalist, patriarchal customs, reproduced and transmitted to the younger generation by Muslim immigrants.

(p. 65) Revealingly enough, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, in his address to the French legislature, defending the banning of ostensibly religious symbols in public schools, made reference in the same breath to France as “the old land of Christianity” and to the inviolable principle of laïcité, exhorting Islam to adapt itself to the principle of secularism as all other religions of France have done before: “For the most recently arrived, I'm speaking here of Islam, secularism is a chance, the chance to be a religion of France.” The Islamic veil and other religious signs are justifiably banned from public schools, he added, because “they are taking on a political meaning,” while according to the secularist principle of privatization of religion, “religion cannot be a political project.” Time will tell whether the restrictive legislation will have the intended effect of stopping the spread of “radical Islam,” or whether it is likely to bring forth the opposite result of radicalizing further an already alienated and maladjusted immigrant community.
The positive rationale one hears among liberals, in support of such illiberal restriction of the free exercise of religion, is usually put in terms of the desirable enforced emancipation of young girls, if necessary against their expressed will, from gender discrimination and from patriarchal control. This was the discourse on which the assassinated Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn built his electorally successful anti-immigrant platform in liberal Holland, a campaign that is now bearing fruit in new restrictive legislation and in further violence. While conservative religious people are expected to tolerate behavior they may consider morally abhorrent, such as homosexuality, liberal, secular Europeans are openly stating that European societies ought not to tolerate religious behavior or cultural customs that are morally abhorrent, insofar as they are contrary to modern, liberal, secular European norms. What makes the intolerant tyranny of the secular, liberal majority justifiable in principle is not just the democratic principle of majority rule, but rather the secularist teleological assumption built into theories of modernization that one set of norms is reactionary, fundamentalist, and antimodern, while the other set is progressive, liberal, and modern.

Anti-immigrant xenophobic nativism, secularist antireligious prejudices, liberal-feminist critiques of Muslim patriarchal fundamentalism, and the fear of Islamist terrorist networks are being fused indiscriminately throughout Europe into a uniform anti-Muslim discourse, which practically precludes the kind of mutual accommodation between immigrant groups and host societies that is necessary for successful immigrant incorporation. The parallels with Protestant-republican anti-Catholic nativism in mid-nineteenth-century America are indeed striking. Today’s totalizing discourse on Islam as an essentially antimodern, fundamentalist, illiberal, and undemocratic religion and culture echoes the nineteenth-century discourse on Catholicism.

European societies tend to tolerate and respect individual religious freedom. But due to the pressure toward the privatization of religion, which among European societies has become a taken-for-granted characteristic of the self-definition of a modern, secular society, those societies have a much greater difficulty in recognizing some legitimate role for religion in public life and (p. 66) in the organization and mobilization of collective group identities. Muslim-organized collective identities and their public representations become a source of anxiety, not only because of their religious otherness as a non-Christian and non-European religion, but more importantly because of their religiousness itself as the other of European secularity. In this context, the temptation to identify Islam and fundamentalism becomes the more pronounced. Islam, by definition, becomes the other of Western secular...
modernity, an identification that becomes superimposed upon the older image of Islam as the other of European Christianity. Therefore, the problems posed by the incorporation of Muslim immigrants become consciously or unconsciously associated with seemingly related and vexatious issues concerning the role of religion in the public sphere, which European societies assumed they had already solved according to the liberal, secular norm of privatization of religion.\textsuperscript{16}

Immigrant Religions and the Expansion of American Denominationalism

The structural conditions that immigrants encounter in the United States are substantially different.\textsuperscript{17} It is not only that Americans are demonstrably more religious than the Europeans and therefore there is a certain pressure for immigrants to conform to American religious norms. Even more significantly, today, as in the past, religion and public religious denominational identities play an important role in the process of incorporation of the new immigrants. Thus, the paradox observed again and again by students of immigrant communities that, in the words of Raymond Williams, “immigrants are religious—by all counts more religious than they were before they left home.”\textsuperscript{18}

It is important to realize, therefore, that immigrant religiosity is not simply a traditional residue, an old world survival likely to disappear with adaptation to the new context, but rather an adaptive response to the new world. I find unconvincing, however, Timothy Smith’s explanation that it is the immigration experience per se that calls forth such a religious response, because immigration itself is a “theologizing” experience, because the uprootedness it entails from traditional ways, the uncertainty of the journey, and the anomic experience of being strangers in a new land calls forth a religious response.\textsuperscript{19}

It is often the case that phenomenologically many immigrant groups, in trying to express and verbalize the experience of the immigrant journey, resort to religious language and draw upon available discursive archetypes from various religious traditions, framing it in terms of a pilgrimage (Christians and Hindus), an exodus to a promised land (Puritans, Jews, and African Americans), or a new hegira (Muslims). The problem begins when this particular phenomenological observation is turned into a neo-Durkheimian general explanation, in terms of reactive responses to the cultural strains and anomic disintegration associated with the uprooting
experience of immigration. Such a general explanation is not convincing, because one actually finds an enormous range in the religious responses of contemporary immigrant groups in America, from Korean Americans, who are arguably more religious than any other ethnic group in America, immigrant or native, to Soviet Jews, who are as little religious as they were in the old country. But more importantly, it is not plausible as a general explanation, because it is not confirmed by the comparative evidence from other immigrant societies, today or in the past.20

It is not the general context of immigration but the particular context of immigration to America and the structural and institutional context of American society that provokes this particular religious response. The thesis of Will Herberg concerning the old European immigrant, that “not only was he expected to retain his old religion, as he was not expected to retain his old language or nationality, but such was the shape of America that it was largely in and through religion that he, or rather his children and grandchildren, found an identifiable place in American life,” is still operative with the new immigrants.21 The thesis implies not only that immigrants tend to be religious because of a certain social pressure to conform to American religious norms. More importantly, the thesis implies that collective religious identities have been one of the primary ways of structuring internal societal pluralism in American history.

Since Americans in general tend to be religious, more religious probably than most people in other modern societies, immigrants in America will tend to conform to the American norm. “When in Rome do as the Romans.” About the pressure to conform to American standards of religiosity, there can be little doubt. Ask any political candidate whether they can afford to confess that they have “no religion.” What is relevant is the “definition of the situation.” Since Americans define themselves as a religious people, they think and act accordingly. Even more striking is the fact that they tend to lie to the pollsters and to inflate their rates of church attendance and to exaggerate the depth and seriousness of their religious beliefs.22 Indeed, the very tendency of the Americans to exaggerate their religiousness, in contrast to the opposite tendency of the Europeans to discount and undercount their own persistent religiosity—tendencies which are evident among ordinary people, as well as among scholars on both sides of the Atlantic—are themselves part of the very different and consequential definitions of the situation in both places. Obviously, Americans think that they are supposed to be religious, while Europeans think that they are supposed to be irreligious. This would explain, at least in part, the reason why the same
groups of immigrants tend to be more religious and to carry their religious identity more openly in public in the United States than in most European countries.

But more important than the diffuse social pressure to conform to American religious norms are, in my view, the structural conditions shaping American religious pluralism. The fact that religion, religious institutions, and religious identities played a central role in the process of incorporation of the old European immigrants has been amply documented. Rather than decreasing, as one would expect from conventional theories of modernization and secularization, religious identities tended to gain salience in the particular context of immigration to America. Herberg's thesis implied that collective religious identities have been one of the primary ways of structuring internal societal (p. 68) pluralism in American history, the reason being that “almost from the beginning, the structure of American society presupposed diversity and substantial equality of religious associations.”

The particular pattern of separation of church and state codified in the dual clause of the First Amendment, “free exercise of religion” and “no establishment,” served to structure this diversity and substantial equality. After independence, the establishment of any particular church at the federal/national level was probably precluded by the territorial distribution and the relative equal strength of the three colonial churches: Congregational, Presbyterian, and Anglican. However, either multiple establishment or the establishment of a generalized Christian (i.e., Protestant) religion could have been likely outcomes, had it not been for the active coalition of Jefferson, Madison, and dissenting Baptists in Virginia.

The American constitutional formula challenged the notion, taken for granted and shared at the time by religionists and secularists (deists) alike, that the state or the political community of citizens needed a religion, ecclesiastical or civil, as the base of its normative integration and that, moreover, it was the business of the sovereign to regulate the religious sphere. The First Amendment raised not only a “wall of separation” protecting the state from religion (no establishment) and religion from the state (free exercise), but actually established a principle of differentiation between the political community of citizens and any and all religious communities. Eventually, all religions in America, churches as well as sects, irrespective of their origins, doctrinal claims, and ecclesiastical identities, would turn into “denominations,” formally equal under the Constitution and competing in a relatively free, pluralistic, and voluntaristic religious
market. As the organizational form and principle of such a religious system, denominationalism constitutes the great American religious invention.24

At first, this diversity and substantial equality was institutionalized only as internal denominational religious pluralism within American Protestantism. America was defined as a “Christian” nation and Christian meant solely “Protestant.” But eventually, after prolonged outbursts of Protestant nativism, directed primarily at Catholic immigrants, the pattern allowed for the incorporation of the religious others, Catholics and Jews, into the system of American religious pluralism.25 A process of dual accommodation took place, whereby Catholicism and Judaism became American religions, while American religion and the nation were equally transformed in the process. America became a “Judeo-Christian” nation, and Protestant, Catholic, and Jew became the three denominations of the American civil religion. It is this final outcome—the assimilation of immigrant European Catholics and Jews into the American mainstream—that Herberg's book celebrates.26 And it is worth remembering that it is this same self-congratulatory context and the inaugural speech of the first Catholic president that serve as the background for Robert Bellah’s thesis of civil religion in America a decade later.27

Herberg's thesis of American ethnoreligious pluralism has serious shortcomings. The most blatant is the fact that Herberg is absolutely blind to (p. 69) issues of race, and thus Protestant-Catholic-Jew examines only the process of incorporation of European immigrants, while being absolutely silent about non-European immigrants. The crucial problem is not that Herberg ignores other non-European immigrant minorities and their non-Judeo-Christian religions, such as Japanese Buddhists or Chinese Daoists or Arab Muslims—groups that were already part of the old immigration. Though a serious oversight, one could still argue defensively that those were at the time relatively small minorities. The real problem is that Herberg ignores the truly relevant racial minorities among the religious groups he is studying, the Christian others: black Protestants and Hispanic Catholics. After all, Herberg wrote his study in the 1950s, at the high point of the great internal migration of African Americans from the rural South to the Northern urban industrial centers and of the Puerto Rican migration to New York, leaving aside for the moment the other relevant Hispanic Catholics, the “Chicanos” from the Southwest, who were themselves mostly, with the exception of the braceros, not migrants.28 As in the case of Puerto Rico, it was the U.S. borders that had migrated to their ancestral territories. Strictly speaking, of course, African Americans and Hispanics were not immigrant aliens. But it is the fact that Herberg constructs Protestant, Catholic, and Jew as the three
imagined religious communities making up the imagined community of the American nation that makes the omission of African Americans and Hispanics the more problematic and revealing. What the omission of black Protestants and Hispanic Catholics reveals is that in the 1950s those groups remained the invisible racial alien at a time when European immigrants, Catholics and Jews, had been incorporated into the imagined community of the American nation.

Rightly, the new immigration studies literature has placed issues of race, racialization, and racial identities at the very center of the analysis of processes of immigrant incorporation. Blacks and Hispanics have become, indeed, the truly relevant tertium comparationis in all comparative studies of the old and the new immigration. At least implicitly, the three terms of comparison in all contemporary debates are (a) European white ethnics (the old immigrants), (b) American racial minorities (African American and Hispanic), and (c) the new immigrants from all over the world (Asian, Caribbean, Latin American, African, etc.). Once the comparative framework is constructed in such a way, it becomes immediately obvious that race matters and that matters of race are crucial in the process of immigrant incorporation. But what Herberg's study shows is that religion matters also and that matters of religion may be equally relevant in processes of immigrant incorporation in America. Not religion alone, as Herberg's study would seem to imply, and not race alone, as contemporary immigration studies would seem to imply, but religion and race and their complex entanglements have served to structure the American experience of immigrant incorporation and indeed are the keys to “American exceptionalism.”

Simplifying a complex story, one could say that assimilation into the American mainstream meant at first becoming WASP or WASP-like. Of the four markers of American identity—White, Anglo, Saxon, Protestant—the truly relevant ones, however, were the first and the last, race and religion. One could be as white as it gets, but if one was not Protestant, it was hard to pass as an American. Irish Protestants (and do not forget that the majority of Americans of Irish descent are of Protestant origin, descendants of the Scottish-Irish) never had a problem passing as white. It was the Irish Catholics and other Catholics (Italian, Slavs, etc.) that were racialized as the other. Becoming as devoutly Protestant as most African Americans did was also not enough. If one was not white, one could not be fully American. Today, religion and race are becoming, once again, the two critical markers identifying the new immigrants either as assimilable or as
suspiciously alien. In this respect, religious and racial self-identifications and ascriptions represent parallel and at times alternative ways of organizing American multiculturalism.32

Immigration as a Context for United States Religious Pluralism

The United States has become an immigrant society again. During the past decade alone, approximately one million immigrants annually entered the United States, the largest wave in the nation’s history, even outnumbering the nine million immigrants who came during the first decade of the twentieth century. Moreover, the trend may have slowed down slightly after 9/11, but there are no clear indications that it is likely to be reversed in the near future. More important than the increase in numbers, however, are the changes in the regions of origin and in the characteristics of the new immigrants. In comparison with the old immigrants, two characteristics of the new immigrants are most relevant: (a) they are primarily non-European, increasingly from all regions of the world, but predominantly from Asia and the Americas, and (b) in addition to the tremendous range in all forms of human diversity (racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic) which they bring, the new immigrants are also extremely diverse, almost bifurcated, in the levels of human and social capital, skills, and resources which they bring.33

From the particular perspective of this essay, the most important characteristic is the extraordinary religious pluralism and diversity that they bring to a country that was already the most religiously diverse and pluralistic in the world.34 Since U.S. government agencies cannot gather information on the religious makeup of the population, we do not have reliable data even on the denominational religious affiliation of the new immigrants.35 Attempts to extrapolate from the religious composition of the country of origin have to be sensitive to the fact that today, as always, religious minorities tend to immigrate to America in disproportionate numbers. Arab Christians and Russian Jews in the past, Korean Christians and Latino Protestants today, would be obvious examples. Moreover, one has to be aware of the intrinsic difficulties in applying Western categories of religious affiliation to non-Western religions. Nominal affiliation is in any case problematic as a measure of individual religiosity, since it does not tell how truly religious the nominally affiliated are, that is, whether, how, and how often they practice their religion. Much less, of course, can denominational affiliation categories, or “religious preference,” measure the
religion of the unaffiliated, namely those religious practices and forms of
religion which are not defined by membership or affiliation in an organized
religious institution, congregation, or community.

In any case, it is safe to assume that the immense majority of all new
immigrants are Christian, Protestant, and Catholic in various proportions,
with small numbers of Eastern Orthodox, depending upon the port of
entry. In the case of New York, our own very rough estimate from the RIINY
(Religion and Immigrant Incorporation in New York) project, is that close to
50% of all new immigrants are nominally Catholic, while approximately 25%
of the new immigrants are nominally Protestant. Protestants and Catholics
together, therefore, constitute around 75% of all new immigrants to New
York. For the United States as a whole the proportion of Christians among
the new immigrants is likely to be slightly lower, somewhere between two‐
thirds and three‐fourths.36 In this respect, the most significant religious
impact of the new immigrants is likely to be the replenishing and renovation
of American Christianity. But since they bring non‐European versions of
Christianity, the new immigrants are also going to contribute to the de‐
Europeanization of American Protestantism and American Catholicism.
The Hispanization or Latin Americanization of American Catholicism is one
of the most obvious and relevant trends. But it is accompanied by the no
less significant trend of Protestantification of Latin America and of Latino
Americans.37

But the most striking new development with extraordinary potential
repercussions, both national and global, is the arrival of increasing numbers
of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, indeed of representatives of all world
religions. The numbers may not yet be as large as the exaggerated
estimates of 6–7 million Muslims, 2.8–4 million Buddhists, and 1.2–2 million
Hindus that one sees floating around. But the battle over numbers and the
attempts by the National Opinion Research Center and the American Jewish
Committee to deflate those exaggerated estimates in order to prove that, as
a Chicago Tribune headline put it, “Christians, Jews still predominate” misses
the point.38

In terms of numbers, American Jews never presented a real challenge to
Christian predominance, but the incorporation of Judaism as an American
religion radically transformed the American religious landscape and the
self‐definition of the American nation. It is true that unlike the deeply
seated Protestant anti‐Catholic nativism, Judaism in America did not
encounter similarly religiously based anti‐Semitism, and in general American
Protestantism has tended to maintain a philo-Hebraic attitude. But the addition of Catholicism and Judaism as American denominations altered the very system of American denominationalism. The perceived threat posed by immigrant Catholicism was not primarily due to its size, but rather to the fact that it was viewed as an un-American religion, insofar as Republicanism and Romanism were defined as being incompatible.

American religious pluralism is expanding and incorporating all the world religions in the same way as it previously incorporated the religions of the old immigrants. A complex process of mutual accommodation is taking place. (p. 72) Like Catholicism and Judaism before, other world religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism) are being Americanized, and in the process they are transforming American religion, while the religious diasporas in America are simultaneously serving as catalysts for the transformation of the old religions in their civilizational homes, in the same way as American Catholicism had an impact upon the transformation of world Catholicism and as American Judaism had transformed world Judaism.

A similar story and similar patterns of conflictive incorporation and mutual accommodation are being repeated today. It is true that the models of immigrant incorporation have been radically altered by the expanding multiculturalism at home and by the proliferation of global transnational networks. The increasing global migration in turn leads to a spiraling acceleration of multiculturalism and religious pluralism, now encompassing all world religions. We have entered a new phase in the American experiment. The United States is called to become not just “the first new nation,” made up primarily of all the European nations. The traditional model of assimilation, turning European nationals into American “ethnics,” can no longer serve as a model of incorporation now that immigration is literally worldwide. America is bound to become “the first new global society,” made up of all world religions and civilizations, at a time when religious civilizational identities are regaining prominence in the global stage.

It is due to the corrosive logic of racialization, so prominent and pervasive in American society, that the dynamics of religious identity formation assume a double positive form in the process of immigrant incorporation. Due to the institutionalized acceptance of religious pluralism and religious identities, for the structural reasons mentioned above, it is not surprising that the affirmation of religious identities is enhanced among the new immigrants. This positive affirmation of religious identities is reinforced further by what appears to be a common defensive reaction by most immigrant groups.
against ascribed racialization, particularly against the stigma of racial
darkness. If anything, the new patterns of global migration are turning our
absurd binary racial categories ever more confusing and untenable. In this
context, the positive affirmation of religious identities by Hindus from India
and the Caribbean, by Muslims from West Africa, or by Creole Catholics from
Haiti is adding a dimension of resistance to the dynamics of racialization. In
this respect, religious and racial self-identifications and ascriptions represent
alternative ways of organizing American (and global) multiculturalism. One
of the obvious advantages of religious pluralism over racial pluralism is that
under proper constitutional institutionalization it is more reconcilable with
principled equality and nonhierarchic diversity and therefore with genuine
multiculturalism.

American denominationalism functions at three different levels, each
affecting diversely the transformation of immigrant religions in America.
The first is the basic “congregational” level of the local religious community.
This is the most important level in which the fundamental process of
Americanization (p. 73) takes place. As Stephen Warner rightly points
out, all immigrant religions in America, irrespective of their institutional
form in their traditional civilizational settings, tend to adopt a typically
Protestant congregational form. It happened to the old immigrants,
Catholics and Jews, and it is happening to the new immigrants, irrespective
of whether they already had a quasicongregational form, like the Muslims,
or have no congregational tradition, like Buddhists or Hindus. All religious
communities in America tend to assume a voluntary associational form and
become incorporated as a nonprofit organization, led by the laity. Churches,
synagogues, temples, masjids, and so on tend to become more than
houses of worship or prayer and become authentic community centers with
different kinds of educational and social services, fellowship and recreational
activities, and task-specific associational networks. Indeed, they become,
as Tocqueville already pointed out, schools of democracy and the centers of
associational life of the immigrant communities.

This is the fundamental difference between the American denominations
and the European churches, which never made the full transition to
congregational voluntary associations and remained anchored in the
territorially based national church and local parish. Structurally significant
is the fact that at least for some groups the American experience of
immigration seems to call forth the reflexive affirmation of religious
identities. The key is the reflexive affirmation of a religious identity, that
is to say, naming oneself and being named by others according to some
This active, achieved, and reflexive denomination, moreover, is very different from the passive, ascribed, and nominal affiliation to a religion into which one is born. This was, of course, the experience of immigrant Catholic and Jew in America. They could not simply maintain the nominal affiliation, at least not if they wanted to pass on the same affiliation to their children. They had to become voluntary members of an association and actively maintain and pass on their family traditions.

The second level is the denominational proper, in the sense in which it originally emerged as doctrinally, organizationally, or ethnoracially differentiated plural denominations within American Protestantism. While the hierarchically organized Roman Catholic Church was able to incorporate all Catholics immigrants (with the exception of the Polish National Church) into a single American Catholic Church through the ethnic parish system, American Judaism also became differentiated into three main denominations (Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox). It is still unclear whether various branches or traditions of the other world religions (Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism) will become institutionalized as separate denominations in America, or whether other denominational divisions will emerge.

Finally, there is the national level of “imagined community” in the sense in which Herberg talks of Protestant, Catholic, and Jew as the three denominational forms of the American civil religion. This is also the level at which the immigrant religions gain symbolic recognition and are thus incorporated into the nation as “American,” irrespective of whether they also develop unified national organizations.

(p. 74 ) The Particular Challenge of American Islam

Of all the new immigrant religions, Islam represents the most interesting testing ground and challenge to the pattern of immigrant incorporation. Due to geopolitical rationales and the common portrayal of Islam as fundamentalist, Islam today, as Catholicism before, is often represented as the other and therefore as un-American. Tragically, these debates have only exacerbated in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks by Muslim militants and the U.S. military response. Paradoxically, however, these developments are forcing not only a debate about the alleged civilizational clash between Islam and the West, but also a recognition that Islam has taken roots in America and is becoming a major American religion.44

Certainly, one can observe striking similarities between today's discourse on Islam as a fundamentalist, antimodern religion incompatible with democracy
and yesterday's discourse on Catholicism. From the 1830s to the 1950s anti-Catholic Protestant nativism in America was based on the alleged incompatibility between Republicanism and Romanism. In his portrayal of Catholics in America, Tocqueville had already tried to refute this thesis, as well as the widely held perception on both sides of the French Republican-laicist and monarchist-Catholic divide that Catholicism was incompatible with modern democracy and with individual freedoms.

As in the case of Catholicism before, the internal and external debates over the compatibility between Islam and democracy and modern individual freedoms is taking place at three separate yet interrelated levels: debates over the proper articulation of a Muslim umma in diasporic contexts outside of Dar al-Islam; debates over the democratic legitimacy of Muslim political parties in Turkey and elsewhere, which like their, at first equally suspect, Catholic counterparts may establish new forms of Muslim democracy, akin to Christian democracy; and debates over the alleged clash of civilizations between Islam and the West at the geopolitical level, with clear parallels with earlier debates on the clash between Republicanism and Romanism. Under conditions of globalization, all three issues become ever more entangled.45

One can also witness, however, an ambiguous and tortuous process of public symbolic recognition of Islam as an American religion that resembles the processes of incorporation of Catholicism and Judaism. The self-defining discourse of America that had changed from that of a “Christian” to a “Judeo-Christian” nation was lately assuming the new denominational characterization of “Abrahamic,” symbolically incorporating all three monotheistic religions claiming descent from the first covenant between God and Abraham. The presence of a Muslim imam along with a Protestant minister, a Catholic priest, and a Jewish rabbi in public ceremonies in Washington, in state capitals, and in large urban centers has become routine. Among symbolic milestones in the process of public recognition one could mention the following: the first commissioned Islamic chaplain in the U.S. Army was established in 1993 and in the U.S. Navy in 1996; a Muslim symbol was displayed on the White House (p. 75) Ellipse in 1997; the Pentagon hosted its first Ramadan meal for Muslims in 1998; on the first day of Ramadan in November 2000 the New Jersey legislature opened with a reading of the Qur'an by an imam. The Muslim public presence in official ceremonies and in interfaith encounters has become even more prominent after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.46 But simultaneously, one can also witness a mainly Protestant nativist backlash against Islam, which had actually begun before 9/11, but became exacerbated thereafter.47
The new anti-Muslim evangelical discourse has three main sources: (1) the militant premillennial Zionism among American evangelicals, who after the fall of the Soviet Union transferred the role, which the communist “hordes” of the north and their Arab secular nationalist allies in the Middle East were supposed to play in their apocalyptic visions of the impending Armageddon, to all Muslim countries as enemies of Israel; (2) the missionary competition between Muslims and Christians (evangelicals and Pentecostals) throughout sub-Saharan Africa and in other parts of the world where one finds ethnoreligious conflicts between Muslims and Christians, which adds to the evangelical frustration of being unable to preach openly the gospel of Jesus Christ in Muslim countries, and (3) the global “war on terror” after 9/11, which, notwithstanding the carefully phrased official disclaimers coming from the White House, prominent evangelical leaders such as Pat Robertson, Franklin Graham, and Jerry Falwell have not hesitated to characterize openly as a “crusade” and as an inevitable conflict between an essentially “violent” Islam and the Christian West.48

The most alarming manifestation of the emerging nativist Protestant anti-Muslim discourse is the series of blasphemous, defamatory tracts one finds in Christian bookstores, often written by Muslim converts to Christianity and resembling the old antipopish tracts, which slander the Prophet Muhammad as a depraved sinner and discredit Islam as a false monotheistic and Abrahamic religion which has pagan roots in the pre-Islamic worship of Kaaba.

The challenge confronting Islam in America is how to transform diverse immigrants from South Asia, which today constitute the largest and fastest growing group of Muslim immigrants, from Arab countries, and from West Africa into a single American Muslim umma. In this respect, the process of incorporation is not unlike that of different Catholic national groups into a single American Catholic church. The two options being debated today within Islamic communities across America, often put in terms of the Nation of Islam model versus the model of an assertive and powerful Jewish minority, reiterate some of the debates in nineteenth-century American Catholicism. At issue is whether Islam in America should be constructed as a segregated defensive subculture, protecting itself from corrosive Americanization, or whether it should organize itself as a public self-assertive cultural option within American competitive multiculturalism. The threat of the Americanization of Islam this would entail would be balanced by the opportunity of the Islamization of America, which many Muslims view as an actualization of Islam’s universalism.
Due to the still-growing Islamization of the African American community, in a process which African American Muslims often depict not as conversion, but (p. 76) rather as reversion to a preslavery African Islam, the often contentious dialogue and dynamic interaction between African American and immigrant Muslims is bound to have a dramatic impact upon the transformation of American culture. It is still an open question which kind of internal denominational structure Islam in America is going to assume: whether it will succumb to what H. Richard Niebuhr called “the evil of denominationalism,” which he saw grounded in socioeconomic and ethnoracial divisions, or if it will organize itself into a national churchlike umma, able to bridge its internal ethnolinguistic and juridical-doctrinal divisions. American Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism represent in this respect alternative denominational models. American Islam is likely to develop its own distinct denominational pattern, while sharing some elements with all three. But if it is able to overcome in any way the pattern of congregational racial segregation which has plagued American Christianity and to bridge the divide between immigrant and African American Muslims, it will have a significant impact upon American race relations.

The process of the Americanization of Islam is already taking place, despite all the difficulties presented by internal debates, nativist resistance, and geopolitical conflicts. Islam is becoming not just a fast growing religion in America, but an American religion, one of the denominational alternatives of being religiously American. Moreover, Islam is destined to become, like Catholicism, an important public religion, which is likely to play a relevant role in American public debates in the future.

Conclusion

This essay has tried to show that one of the most significant consequences of the new global patterns of transnational migration has been a dramatic growth in religious diversity on both sides of the Atlantic. The new immigrant religions, however, present significantly different challenges of integration in Christian/Secular Europe and in Judeo-Christian/Secular America due to the different histories of immigration and modes of immigrant incorporation, the different patterns of religious pluralism and the different types of secularism in both regions. Ultimately, religion in the United States constitutes a positive resource insofar as today as in the past religious associations and religious collective identities constitute one of the accepted avenues for immigrant incorporation and for mutual group recognition in the public sphere of American civil society. In Europe, by contrast, secularist world views and very
different institutional patterns of public recognition through different forms of church-state relations make the incorporation of immigrant religions in the public sphere of European civil societies a more contentious issue.

Bibliography

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Notes:

(1.) Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh de Wind, eds., *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation,


(7.) The following section draws upon an argument developed more extensively in José Casanova, “Religion, Secular Identities, and European Integration,” in *Religion and European Integration*, ed. Timothy Byrnes and Peter Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).


(17.) The following section draws substantially upon the still-unpublished findings of the RIINY research project, “Religion and Immigrant Incorporation in New York,” led by José Casanova and Aristide Zolberg at the International Center for Migration, Ethnicity, and Citizenship at the New School for Social Research in New York. RIINY (1999–2002) was one of seven “Gateway Cities” projects financed by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

(18.) Raymond Brady Williams, *Religion of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 29. The claim that immigrants become more religious as they become more American was central to Will Herberg's thesis in his classic study *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday,
The same claim has been restated by most contemporary studies of immigrant religions in America. See, for example, R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner, eds., *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); and Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, eds., *Religion and the New Immigrants* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2000).


(20.) Rural Italian immigrants from the south at the turn of the twentieth century, for instance, tended to adopt anticlerical socialist and anarchist identities when they migrated to urban industrial centers in northern Italy or to Catholic Argentina, while they tended to become “better” practicing Catholics when they migrated to urban industrial centers in the United States. One could make similar comparisons in the present between Hindu immigrants in London and New York or between francophone West African Muslims in Paris and New York.


(24.) Sydney E. Mead, “Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America,” in *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); and Andrew M. Greeley, *The Denominational Society: A Sociological Approach to Religion in America* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1972). In Western Europe, by contrast, the model has remained that of one single church which claims to be coextensive with the nation or that of two (Catholic and Protestant) competing but territorially based national churches along with an indefinite number of religious minorities, which tend to assume the structural position of sects vis-à-vis the national church or churches. Postindependence Ukraine may be the only European society that resembles the denominational model. See José Casanova, “Between Nation and Civil Society: Ethno-Linguistic and Religious Pluralism in Ukraine,” in *Democratic Civility*, ed. Robert Heffner (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1998).

(26.) Actually, on theological monotheistic grounds, Herberg himself was personally highly critical of the idolatrous immanent character of the American or any national civil religion.


(30.) For a prominent voice of Anglo-Protestant nativism directed at the threat of Hispanic Catholics, see Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).


(35.) The New Immigrant Survey is fortunately going to remedy this situation. See [http://nis.princeton.edu](http://nis.princeton.edu) and note 36 below.

(36.) According to the New Immigrant Survey Pilot (NIS-P 1996), almost two-thirds of new immigrants are nominally Christian (Catholic 41.9%; Protestant 18.6%; Orthodox 4.2%), 2.6% denominated themselves Jewish, while close to 17% chose non-Judeo-Christian religions as their denomination (Muslim 8%; Buddhist 4%; Hindu 3.4%; other 1.4%), and 15% chose “no religion” as their “religious preference.” One has to treat these data with some caution given the very small sample (976) of respondents. The adult sample of the new NIS-2003 (to be released in early 2006) is much larger (8,573), and therefore its data on the religious preference or nominal affiliation of the new immigrants will be more conclusive. See Guillermina Jasso, Douglas S. Massey, Mark R. Rosenzweig, and James P. Smith, “Exploring the Religious Preferences of Recent Immigrants to the United States: Evidence from the New Immigrant Survey Pilot,” in *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and John L. Esposito (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003).


(44.) See John Esposito's essay in this volume.


(47.) Richard Cimino, “Evangelical Discourse on Islam after 9/11,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, Atlanta, Aug. 15–17, 2003. Beyond this paper, the following material draws heavily and freely upon personal conversations with Richard Cimino at the New School for Social Research.
