
Socio-political and Religious Dynamics in Kosovo from the Post-Secularist Perspective

ARDIAN GOLA, GËZIM SELACI

Department of Sociology, University of Prishtina

Summary

Building on the post-secularist theory, this paper argues for a need to rethink secularism in the case of contemporary Kosovo in a context of 'return of religion'. Political secularism as an inevitable fact and political norm, in the sense of 'structural differentiation' of the religious institution from other institutions, could be upheld in Kosovo. However, social secularism concerning values, practices, social habits and everyday life, or public sphere in short, poses a problem in a global post-secular context from which Kosovo is not isolated. Moreover, rather than a principle of state's equidistance from the different worldviews competing in the public space, secularism in Kosovo is used as an identity tool or an instrument of identity politics aiming at distancing its society from religion as a way to affirm its 'western orientation' and secular tradition. This rigid stance is particularly directed at Islam and Islamic practices.

Keywords: Kosovo, Islam, Secularism, Post-Secularism, National Identity

To say we should now bring an end to the secular is to say that we should reverse the dreadful consequences of the liberal erasure of God and take myth back from out of the hands of the fascists where it has all too often fallen. If we do not, if we as an advanced culture have as our highest value only a form of self-reference, then we will only ever become more primitive as we develop. For not only will we hand over religion to the fundamentalists, we will hand over ourselves and our futurity as well.

Philip Blond (1998: 27)

Introduction

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 were two events that had a considerable influence on political and cultural currents throughout the globe. Whereas the former left an ideological and cultural vacuum in the post-communist

societies, the latter created a new tendency of larger political infiltration of religion in the geo-political relations of the globe. In addition, Muslim migration to Western countries resulting in the creation and consolidation of ethnic and religious predominantly Muslim minorities, created new problems with regard to their relation with their host state and society. The need to reconceptualise this situation became immediate, as addressing these problems within the framework of enlightenment and modernist tradition of secularism became more difficult.

Before the 1990s, during the socialist Yugoslavia in the post-Second World War, Kosovan society was generally characterized by a religious indifference, in which its relation to religion was reduced to the level of nominal identification lacking any direct systematic engagement with religious rituals and practices, apart from those related to religious festivals and burial rituals. However, since the nineties and especially after the war of 1998-1999, religion was revitalised in Kosovo. This development resulted in religion and religious groups becoming controversial topics in public discussions. The political and institutional relationship that the state of Kosovo is building with religion and the level of public debate on religion continue to be politically problematic, scientifically impoverished, and ideologically charged, characterized by rigid identity perspectives. It seems to us that the promoted secularist model in Kosovo is not satisfied with the separation of state from religion, but seeks to separate the society from religion to the point of marginalizing the latter in private sentiments.

This paper argues that, whereas political secularism in the sense of separation or independence of state from religious authority is introduced as a virtually inevitable fact and as political norm, social secularism concerning values, practices, social habits and everyday life posed a problem in a global post-secular context from which Kosovo is not isolated. To support the argument, we refer to new concepts developed by Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Brian Turner, namely the concept of post-secularism, neutrality, freedom of consciousness, moral pluralism, social secularism, and political secularism. The paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, secularism is redefined in the light of recent political experiences in the globe and the new concepts of contemporary scholars. Section two looks at the specific context of Kosovan society and the relation of the state of Kosovo to religion and the latter with the society. In section three we analyse the motive behind political use of religion, and in particular Islam, by the Kosovo political elites and its repercussions.

1. From Secularism to Post-Secularism: A Theoretical Framework

1.1. *The Weakness of Secularization Theory*

Secularization as a term was used by classical social thinkers, such as August Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud as a continuation of the dominant belief since the Enlightenment critique of religion, that in industrial societies of the modern era, religious beliefs and practices will lose significance and undergo a decline (Norris and Inglehart, 2004: 3). Although used differently by different scholars, it is usually conceptualized as a phenomenon pertaining to modern times characterized by the decline of the importance of religion in state and public affairs, as well as social institutions and even private lives.

Discussing definitions and uses of the term ‘secularization’, Peter Berger points out that the term is used differently in evaluative and ideologically charged connotations. “Anti-clerical circles” use the term to refer to the phenomenon that comes with modernization in which state politics and law are “liberated” from the authority of religion, whereas traditional church circles use the term to denote “de-Christianization”. Berger insists that the term could be used in a non-evaluative way to describe the process by which “sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols”, by which he means not only the secularization of society, such as the separation of church and state, emancipation of education from ecclesiastical authority, but also the secularization of culture and of consciousness, that is the “decline of religious content in the arts, in philosophy, in literature, and [...] in the rise of science as an autonomous, thoroughly secular perspective on the world” (Berger, 1967: 106-108).

Notwithstanding the modernization thesis, there is vast empirical evidence of religious influence on public and personal life. Given this kind of evidence, Peter Berger took issue with the secularisation thesis and argued that in contemporary societies “religious communities have survived and even flourished to the degree that they have not tried to adapt themselves to the alleged requirements of a secularized world” (Berger, 1999: 4). In other words, contemporary societies are resacralized. Accordingly, the conclusion is that although the scope of religion is limited, religious belief itself is not decreasing. Other authors have evaluated the secularization thesis from its origins as having been more of a doctrine than a theory (Hadden, 1987: 588).

In a study of Catholicism and Protestantism in Poland, Brazil and the United States, José Casanova demonstrated that contrary to what the modernization theory predicted, considerable evidence proves that religion continues to occupy an important role in certain aspects of not only an individual’s life, but also in public domain, albeit in a much more limited and selected way than in pre-modern times (Casa-

nova, 1994). In this study, the author notes that the secularization theory consists of three propositions of secularization as elaborated in social science. According to his analysis, as a result of modernization of societies, secularization entails religious decline, i.e. the decline of religion as belief and practice; differentiation, involving a structural differentiation of the religious institution from other institutions; and privatization, in the sense that religion will be reduced to the private sphere of individuals (*ibid.*: 7). He notes that in spite of the great differentiation, religion influence does not necessarily diminish in the sphere of social policy, and family and individual life, as illustrated by the debates on abortion in the United States. Casanova argues that only the second dimension, that of the structural differentiation, is supported by empirical evidence and could be taken as the essence of secularization. Thus, the first and the third dimension should not be taken to denote the true essence of the secularization process.

1.2. Post-Secularism: Going Beyond Secularism

Post-secular is a term first used by Philip Blond in a sociological sense to refer to certain cultural changes, namely the return of theology and religion in cultural domain and the way continental scholars deal with this phenomenon (Blond, 1998: 27). The reason behind this being, amongst other, that the concept of secular has begun to be destabilized in the seventies of the last century. The Second Vatican Council was held from 1962 until 1965 with the purpose of renewing and rethinking the Catholic religious life and securing a place for its doctrine and Church in the post-war Europe milieu. The meaning of the term 'secular' was complicated more with the politicization of Islam following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in the late seventies. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 left behind a vacuum in the value system and created an ideological and political crisis for some of the former communist states. This new historical circumstance together with a series of other socio-political developments created precondition for the return of religion in identity, ideological and political matters, a phenomenon culminating in a dramatic and infamous form with the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. These and the subsequent attacks with similar intensity are clear indicators of the political use of religion by groups labelled as terrorist to legitimize their political causes.

Under the effect of globalization, these events and the wars in the Middle East, represented as religious wars by the media, constitute one of the three grounds influencing the emergence of the new post-secular consciousness (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006). For Habermas this destabilizes the secular conviction about the disappearing of religion. The other ground is the significance that religion is acquiring more and more in the public opinion. This relevance is articulated in the form of interpreting communities wherein religious communities seek to influence public opinion on different matters, such as abortion, euthanasia, biotic issues concerning

reproduction, issues concerning animal protection and climate change. The third ground is migration for economic and political reasons, as migrants usually come from traditional cultures. These are the three grounds that have transformed secularisation from a self-evident status into a reflective one. Europeans were unaware that they were secular. They became self-reflective regarding their own secularity only after the representation of the wars in the Middle East as religious wars by the media, and above all as a result of the need to rethink their secularity in relation to religious communities of immigrants. For Habermas, this is the reason why only the European societies could be considered post-secular societies, not in the sense of societies becoming religious, but societies becoming aware of their secularisation and the need to rethink it in a context of plurality of cultures and worldviews.

In an interview, Habermas clarifies his position in the following way:

the expression 'postsecular' is not a genealogical but a sociological predicate. I use this expression to describe modern societies that have to reckon with the continuing existence of religious groups and the continuing relevance of the different religious traditions, even if the societies themselves are largely secularized (Mendieta, n.d.: 3).

Habermas remains unique in the conceptualization of today's European situation as a post-secular state. For him, European societies will have to face and consider the continued presence of religious groups and the importance of different religious traditions, no matter how secularized they are (*ibid.*). Therefore, post-secularism is a re-factorization of religion in the public space and an acceptance of the cultural fact of the inevitable presence of religion in the public space. Since secularism as a concept relates above all to European societies and their relationship to Christianity, and how these societies have distanced themselves from Christian foundations, the need to rethink this tradition in new socio-political circumstances is altogether evident.

In addition to the concept of post-secularism, we think that two other concepts would be of great use in understanding and explaining the global socio-cultural and political transformations of the last two decades. We refer to Bryan Turner's two types of secularization: political, and social or cultural secularization (Turner, 2010: 651). The former denotes the foundation of the liberal concept of tolerance, referring, above all, to formal public institutions and political regulation with the well-known history of separation or independence of state from religious authority. This form of secularization privatizes religion in the sphere of individual experience. This liberal solution has had a local character and was intended to overcome the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the 17th century Europe. The latter type of secularization concerns values, practices, social habits and everyday life, or public sphere in short. This sphere can be measured through conventional

sociological measurements, such as attendance of religious temples, membership in formal religious communities, belief in God, religious experiences, prayers, and the like (*ibid.*: 651-653). Whereas political secularization emerges as a necessity and a politically normative fact for the purpose of institutional arrangement of society, the social or cultural one constitutes an attempt to expand the secularization process into the social domain of daily life, namely the ‘lifeworld’ in Habermas’s terms. It turns secularism against itself by transforming it into an ideology risking precisely what it ought to protect, namely the freedom of conscience and the moral equality of individuals, as argued by Maclure and Taylor (2011: 4). This would then necessitate the need for ‘secularization of secularism’, as Swatos and Christiano put it (1999: 225). Maclure and Taylor argue that the issue of secularism should be discussed from a broader view of the indispensable neutrality of the state in relation to the values, beliefs and life plans of citizens in modern societies (2011: 11), and “rather than dictate to individuals a conception of the good, the secular state respects their freedom of conscience or moral autonomy, that is, their right to conduct their lives in light of their own choices of conscience” (*ibid.*: 21). Thus, “the state acts as [a neutral] arbiter between the different convictions”¹ as stipulated by Jean Baubérot (*Entretien avec Jean Baubérot*, 2015).

The enlightened faith in the inseparability of modernization and secularization, considering the latter as an inevitable consequence of the former, has begun to fade over the last century. Modernization was associated, amongst other, with scientific progress enabling the epistemic triumph of science over religion. The unknown, clothed with the veil of mystery by religion, assured for the latter the epistemic supremacy and monopoly. However, when the unknown came to be known more and more as a result of scientific progress, the science rendered religious explanations untrue. Consequently, the epistemic foundations of religion were undermined, in spite of the apologetic efforts to read the holy scripts utilizing the positivist tutelage of science and to interpret them in the light of symbolism and metaphor, a continuous trend to date.² Appreciating the religious sanctity only as a yet-unknown, it was believed that religion will belong to the past as human life will be organized based on the secular principles of science rather than the sacrality of religion. According to this enlightenment prophecy, society was expected to become increasingly less religious and more rational, as people will lose faith in supernatural forces and religious leaders. This was also the positivist dream of the man honoured as the founder of Sociology, August Comte, and of the many other positivist optimists of the 19th and 20th centuries. Therein lays the fallacy of the reductionist perspective of modernity,

¹ Our translation.

² Protestant and Islamic movements are specifically characterized with such apologetic propositions.

which sought to extrapolate the epistemic stigma of religion into its psychological, spiritual and social dimensions, the contemporary comfortable zone of religion. Its frantic return since the end of the last century up to now is an empirical evidence proving to the contrary of modernist projections for the secularization of the world. Nevertheless, what could not be denied is secularization occurring at the formal level of public institutions, a fact already transformed into a norm of political regulation of society with the purpose of guaranteeing the plurality of the public sphere.

2. Rethinking Secularism in Kosovo in the Context of Return of Religion

This section looks at the place of religion in earlier Kosovo cultural and political social contexts and how it changed over time. Secularism is generally accepted as a norm in Kosovo's contemporary social and political context. This is a result of both the political orientation of the newly created states in the post-Ottoman period, as well as the peculiar Marxist-Leninist official ideology of the communist Yugoslavia and its modernizing policies (Iseni, 2009: 1). The programme of the ruling Communist Party in Yugoslavia, as well as court and educational systems of the new state did not take religion as a reference point. As a result of these policies and approach to politics, religious authority was marginalized and new political and intellectual elites were upholding a strict form of social and political secularism that marginalized religion in the private life of the population, religious temples, religious practices of worship, rituals of feasts, and weddings and burial rituals. Religious authorities played their part in the construction of a form of secularism as part of the modernizing project that aimed at constructing a political imaginary above religious identification of communities. Furthermore, an atheist culture was promoted in state educational institutions and directed the cultural and intellectual production.

Under the Yugoslav communist regime, religious life was organized by official religious organizations. By way of illustration, Islamic Community (*Islamska Zajednica*) with its seat in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a branch in Prishtina, capital of Kosovo (*Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës*), was created in 1960 (Blumi, 2005: 8). These religious official authorities retained monopoly over the religious life of Muslim communities (Iseni, 2009: 8) and uphold an official doctrine of Islam (Blumi, 2005: 3). This official religious authority aimed at unification of Islamic community and homogenizing Islam throughout Yugoslavia at the expense of non-orthodox theologies and religious practices, namely Sufi orders (Dervishes) (Duijzings, 2000: 111-113; Blumi, 2005: 3-5), despite their claim to be recognized as a "denomination" within the tradition of Islam, and others. From the ban in 1952, it is only in 1974, when the new constitutional phase began in Yugoslavia, that Sufis created the association of Sufi orders (*Bashkësia e Rradhëve Dervise Islame Alije*) (Duijzings, 2000: 112-113). Recent establishment of the Union of Tariqats

of Kosovo (*Bashkësia e Tarikateve të Kosovës*), i.e. Sufi orders organization, points to this claim (Tarikatet zyrtarizojnë bashkësinë e tyre të pavarur nga BIK, 2017).

Although political secularization was successful, after the fall of the communist regime in Yugoslavia, the emerging religious revival in the early nineties of the last century, in some cases (Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian) was accompanied by the nationalist revival. In the case of Albanian and other Muslim communities in Kosovo, this has meant a reorganization of religious life, as the head of Islamic religious authority (the office of *Reis-ul-Ulema*) with its headquarters in Sarajevo was no longer the central organization for all Muslims in Yugoslavia. This enabled the Kosovo Muslims to organize religious matters independently. The newly established Islamic Community of Kosovo, as well as the Catholic Church in Kosovo, both organizations dominated by ethnic Albanians, took indisputable stance towards Albanian resistance movements against Serbian occupation of Kosovo and played an active role in the Kosovo Albanian peaceful resistance movement lead by the Democratic League of Kosovo, thus leaving aside the religious differences, promoting political cohesion among Albanians and integrating and subordinating these organizations to the Albanian national resistance against Milošević rule in Kosovo. The existing Sufi orders, now liberated from the discriminatory authorities of the office of *Reis-ul-Ulema*, witnessed resurgence.

The period during the nineties of the last century was characterized by a re-emergence of Islamic religiosity and, although in smaller proportions but perhaps with the same intensity, also of Christian religiosity. The reasons for this religious revival might be many. However, we elucidate briefly only some explanations appearing to be more plausible than others. Although Milošević's dictatorial regime was a sufficient source to produce domestic social cohesion through nationalist identification, it was a period of multiple crises, anxiety, insecurity and mass depression. In those circumstances, religion offered a psychological comfort and confrontation with the situation. In addition, the post 1989 political orientation was developed in the framework of the pluralistic paradigm, as the triumphalist of the Cold War. The Albanian peaceful resistance to Milošević's regime, committed to increasing political and cultural identification with the West, created the need to break decisively from the period of Yugoslav monism. Because the communist idea lost its hegemonic power and was stigmatized, emerging political elites needed to differentiate themselves from it. It was an ideology from which the new imagined society should be differentiated definitely. This separation called for a new beginning and a new chapter in the history. However, this resulted in a gap. In addition to the potential of dealing with the depressive situation of the 1990s, religion stood ready to fill the gap resulting from the ideological detachment with the monist past. Such circumstances created an opportunity for various religious preachers and mis-

sionaries to propagate their visions and ideas for the emerging society. However, this also opened the way for the emergence of different approaches and orientations of Islamic theologies (Krasniqi, 2011: 195).

After the war of 1998-1999, numerous religious humanitarian organizations were deployed and operated in Kosovo. These realities, and other processes related to the intensification of communication of Kosovo religious communities with their counterparts globally, have resulted in a religious revival. However, alternative interpretations of theologies were spread and adopted by Kosovo communities of believers. This meant introducing new interpretations to the local communities, values and practices that were new to the existing ones held up traditionally by the religious communities. This phenomenon is more noticeable in the case of different interpretations and practices of Islamic theology, especially in certain religious movements supported financially and ideologically by the Gulf States upholding a more conservative and fundamentalist attitude. This has sparked a debate within society about the role and version of Islam in Kosovan society. At one side of this debate are those intellectuals, politicians and journalists that uphold a rejectionist position towards certain Islamic values and practices regarding them as obstacles to the claimed aspiration of cultural westernization and Europeanization of the state and society and to the Euro-Atlantic integration into political and military organizations of the EU and NATO. This is especially evident among a number of Kosovo Albanian political and cultural elites who in addition consider the revived Islamic values and practices as challenging to the Albanian national identity. An illustration of this attitude is seen in the occurrence of some Muslim students performing a religious ritual in the basement of a Public Library in the capital city Prishtina to which the head of the library reacted by saying to the press that performing religious rituals in public institutions, and in this case a library, is not allowed (Namaz në bodrumin e bibliotekës “Hivzi Sulejmani”, 2017). Also, according to the same media source, a request by Muslim visitors to provide for a space to perform religious rituals in the National Library was rejected by the administration of the Library (*ibid.*).

The opposite position in the debate is that Islam is an integral part of Kosovan society and Albanian national identity and that it should not and cannot hinder political aspirations of the state. This position holds that in an open democratic society, religion is to be accepted as a legitimate presence and should be debated openly without excluding religious authorities and activists taking into consideration their presence as part of the civil society. Efforts of this kind are made by Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, a local NGO that organizes round tables and conferences throughout Kosovo engaging stakeholders, including religious leaders, to discuss matters relating to the violent extremism phenomenon among Muslims in Kosovo. This stance has been adopted by Kosovo authorities, including the Government

and Police who participate in a wider debate for discussing relevant issues and encourage a “moderate” brand of Islam (Closing event of the project “Countering violent extremism”, n.d.). Referring to the abovementioned request for performing religious rituals in a designated place in the National Library, officials of the Municipality of Prishtina reacted/responded by referring to the Law on Freedom of Religion in Kosovo (see Article 1) which guarantees the freedom ‘to manifest one’s religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance’ (Namaz në bodrumin e bibliotekës “Hivzi Sulejmani”, 2017).

As far as the constitutional regulations of religion is concerned, secularism is confirmed in Kosovo’s Constitution, thus establishing the state’s political system as secular, sanctioning freedom of belief, conscience and religion, and autonomy of religious denominations (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008, Articles 8, 38 and 39) in accordance with the international standards of religious freedoms. The law sanctions neutrality toward religion and recognizes the following religious organizations: The Islamic Community of Kosovo, Serbian Orthodox Church (as part of the Serbian Orthodox Church seated in Belgrade),³ Catholic Church, Hebrew Belief Community, and Evangelist Church (Law on Freedom of Religion in Kosovo, 2007, Article 5.4). In addition, there are numerous other religious organizations, Islamic, Christian and other, established mainly in the post-1999 period. All of these operate as non-governmental or humanitarian organizations. Recently, active Dervish orders (excluding the Bektashi order⁴) announced the establishment of their separate organization independent of the Islamic Community in Kosovo. However, to this date, the status of these religious organizations is undefined by law. The draft law for amending the abovementioned Law on Freedom of Religion which stipulates that religious communities – the ones already recognized by the Law and others that wish to register and enjoy the rights guaranteed by the Law – be recognized as ‘juridical persons’⁵ and adopted by the Kosovo Government (Draft law on amendment and supplementation of Law no. 02/L-31 on Freedom of Religion in

³ According to the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (2007) (a.k.a. the ‘Ahtisari Plan’), Annex V, Article 1.2. The Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo enjoys guarantees in accordance with the Law on Special Protective Zones, Article 1, adopted as part of the Laws of the ‘Ahtisari Plan’.

⁴ Bektashi order designates itself as part of the Shia tradition. Since 1932 it is recognized as a separate religious community in Albania.

⁵ According to the draft-law, religious organizations will enjoy rights and responsibilities as legal entities, such as “the right of property ownership or leasing property, bank account maintenance, employing officers, providing legal protection to the community, its members and its assets, the right of establishment of various institutions whether they are humanitarian, religious, educational or similar” (Article 1.3).

Kosovo) was turned back for review by the Kosovo Assembly (Bashkësia Islame e pakënaqur me ligjin e ri për bashkësitë fetare, October 2016).

In terms of theological interpretations, speaking in general, all communities subscribe to a moderate brand of religious beliefs and practices. Religious commitment differs slightly among communities, but in general, communities are not so concerned with religious matters. A study on the importance of religion among the Muslim community in Kosovo⁶ shows that less than half of Kosovo's Muslim population say that religion is very important in their lives (The PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012: 8), only 20% of Muslims in Kosovo support Sharia Law (The PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2013: 15), and only 27% say that religious leaders should have political influence (*ibid.*: 64). As far as the Albanian community of believers in Kosovo is concerned, their articulation of religious experience is done within the narrative of pan-Albanian politics of national identity which stipulates that national identity prevails over all other identifications and dominates by subjugating Albanians' religious identities and loyalties to the nationalist Albanian identity that took the form of 'Albanianism' as a civil religion.⁷ The Serbian community in Kosovo, however, perceive and experience their religious identity by a very strong correlation between national identity and religious identity, as being a Serb involves being a member of the Serbian Orthodox Church, thus Orthodoxy becomes a marker of ethnic identity for Serbs (Duijzings, 2000: 176).

However, religious movements have very limited activity in the political sphere and are rethinking their political and ideological positions as they go through a process of learning. Since, arguably, they are accepting the pluralist and democratic values, albeit for pragmatic reasons, the need for rethinking secularism is even greater, especially in a context in which these movements are conforming to the values of democracy and tolerance and gradually developing theological justifications for these new positions (Elbasani, 2016). Pluralism of political and cultural life, as well as religious revival, not necessarily of political and radical religion, as a sociological fact in the period following the 1998-1999 war in Kosovo, calls for the need to adapt and rethink the form of organization of religious life towards a more liberal approach of the state to religions and their diverging interpretations. This is espe-

⁶ As we could not find reliable data on religiosity among other religious communities in Kosovo, we were limited to refer to the data related to the Muslim community as the largest religious community in Kosovo whose members belong to a religion considered by many commentators to be a challenge to democracy and liberal values, and associated with fundamentalism and radicalism.

⁷ This is not to say that the degree of tolerance among Albanian religious communities is not in threat by certain religious activities that pursue political agendas that endanger the existing national unity, as argued in Endresen (2013).

cially justifiable given that none of the present religions in Kosovo is politicized to the degree that religious ideology is taken as a basis for political programme of any party. There are two parties holding seat in the Kosovo Assembly that have a conservative ideological orientation adapting, combining and reconciling religious conservative values with democratic ones, namely the Albanian Christian Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Shqiptare Demokristiane e Kosovës), and the Party of Justice (Partia e Drejtësisë). The Albanian Christian Democratic Party of Kosovo defines itself as a centre right party, confirming its “Western European orientation” and “the preservation of tradition and cultural heritage values of the Albanian people” (Statute of the Albanian Demochristian Party of Kosovo, Article 3). There are concerns that the Party of Justice is oriented to Islamic ideology as the party leaders are known as practicing Muslims, and its public discourse was designed to appeal to the Muslim conservative part of the electorate. However, the party defines its ideological and political orientation based on the principles of “conservative democracy⁸ [...] founded on the values of national and religious identity of the citizens” (The Political Programme of the Party of Justice, Chapter I, Article 3).⁹ The Islamic Movement Unite (Lëvizja Islamike Bashkohu) is a party with a clearly Islamic character. Nevertheless, the party decided not to run in general elections and currently does not participate in any of the instances of state political bodies. Anyhow, all these are minor parties with limited electoral supports.

3. Political Use of Islam and Its Implication for Secularism

In spite of its diversity and intensification during the 1990s and especially in the post-war period (post-1999),¹⁰ religious preaching was nevertheless dominated by the Sunni Islam as a more appealing tradition to the larger number of people due to them having at least a nominal identification with it.¹¹ This was not the case with the preaching of various Christian evangelical associations, for instance, which were perceived as foreign to religious tradition. We consider this to be the main reason

⁸ ‘Conservative democracy’ emerged as a notion of Christian Democratic Tradition and is also used by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) in Turkey to designate its ideological orientation (Alpan, 2016: 24-25).

⁹ However, since the party promotes closer ties with the incumbent Justice and Development Party in Turkey, the authoritarian tendencies of the party in Turkey could be seen as worrying for the future orientation of the Party of Justice in Kosovo.

¹⁰ The post-war situation in Kosovo is new at least in two respects. First, the deployment and impact of Islamic and Arab humanitarian organizations and proselytizing activities. Second, ideological and moral pluralism corresponding to opening to ideas and contacts globally, including the Islamic World.

¹¹ This is not to deny Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Sufi orders as integral parts of the collective identity of Kosovo Albanians and other ethnic communities in Kosovo.

why the evangelical proselytizing activities had less success and, arguably, a smaller presence in recent years.

3.1. Use of Islam in Political Engineering and Identity Politics

Religion of Islam in Kosovo continues to be a part of multiple uses through political engineering in state-building strategies and, perhaps most importantly, in identity politics. It is about the political use of Islam by political elite as a way of constituting the 'other' in relation to which the construction of identity and state subjectivity of Kosovan society is aimed. A pretext for this approach is the 'war on terror', which is in fact more of a political need to align Kosovo with the West than a genuine venture to fight the roots of radicalisation and terrorism. The 'Western orientation' in the political discourse of Kosovo has been so rooted since the peaceful resistance movement of Kosovo Albanians against the Milošević regime, that new theological interpretations and religious practices brought in from Middle Eastern cultures are rejected as alien to and incompatible with domestic culture and political aspirations; a reasonable attitude for a society which has known Islam for centuries and defined its political orientation towards Western values and integration. It is obvious that the predominant post-war Islamic discourse is fuelled with Middle Eastern cultural traits that are considered as threat to the local Muslim and Albanian identity built through centuries.¹²

Nevertheless, the public discourse takes the form of an extreme attitude towards the Islamic identity and certain practices which are insisted to be suppressed from public appearances. An illustrative example of this is the Governmental Administrative Instruction banning 'religious uniform' in pre-university educational institutions which was in practice applied to Islamic headscarf for women (Administrative instruction no. 6/2010 for code of good conduct and disciplinary measures for students of the higher secondary schools, 2009, Article 4.1.13). This governmental decision was followed by two antidiscrimination protests. The decision and the protests against it are indicators of the tension between the increased role of Islam in Kosovan society and the harsh attitude of political authorities towards certain Islamic practices in public. A more recent incident involves a teacher in a small town of Kosovo, against whom students and their parents protested due to her wearing the Islamic headscarf, and consequently she was banned from teaching in that school (Mbulesa i nxjerr probleme mësimdhënëses në Malishevë, 2016). At the state level, it seems that the problematization of secularism, as illustrated in this paper, is more because of Islam than of religion *per se*. The orientalist discourse of parting from the Orient dominates at the identity level. Islam is considered a back-

¹² The issue here is an identity clash in Kosovo between local Islamic tradition and Middle Eastern ones, which could not be elaborated further in this paper.

ward religion, the leftover of the Ottoman Empire, which hinders Kosovo's Western cultural and political orientation (Endresen, 2013). As Elbasani and Roy argue, "Balkan polities, at least at the macro-political level, continue to see Islam as a disputed 'other' amidst their 'European' states in the making. Accordingly, Islam requires state control and conjectural reformation in order to 'fit' the ethno-religious structure of respective nation-states" (Elbasani and Roy, 2015: 465).

This may explain why the state of Kosovo is indifferent, and sometimes even supportive of proselytizing activities by Christian missionaries,¹³ which is not the case with the proselytizing activities of Islamic missionaries. There are instances of Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries freely conducting proselytizing activities near the public university campus in the capital city Prishtina, in which the state refrains from intervening, and it does so rightly, as proselytizing is their guaranteed right. The issue is that the same approach does not apply when it comes to proselytizing activities of Islamic groups as in the case of an Islamic organization. Its activists were forced to halt their proselytizing activity and leave the main square in the capital (Muhaxheri, 2015). On the other hand, police authorities and municipal representatives have participated in a traditional event organized by a Christian missionary organization (TvSyriVision, 2014) known for utilizing the same event for proselytizing before (St. Louis Family Church, 2012). Another Christian humanitarian organization reports to have sent Christmas gifts to students in Kosovo's public schools (The Evangel, n.d., para 1). The reason why they are tolerated is obvious; Protestant activities do not conflict identity politics supported by elites, collective self-perception, and self-image that aim at reorienting society's values and country's political alignment. However, this approach not only contradicts the principles of secular state, but in the long run also damages secularism as a principle of political regulation of the society by allowing the state to align itself to particular values.

In addition, Albanian nationalism developed a peculiar discourse during the rule of the dictator Enver Hoxha in the communist Albania, which has also impacted Albanian nationalism among Kosovo Albanians. The nationalist culture propagated and spread through the education system has taken a suppressive and marginalizing approach to religions and religious identities for the sake of preserving the idea of an above-religious "Albanianism" (*shqiptaria*) or Albanian national identity (Krasniqi, 2011: 192). During the 1990s and after the 1998-1999 war in Kosovo, there was a discriminatory tendency towards Islam expressed in a kind of 'self-negating' of the Islamic identity with the assumed aim of getting closer to Europe. However, as the evidence shows, Islam has gained a growing role in Kosovan society (*ibid.*: 199).

¹³ We refer here to proselytizing activities of Protestant and Jehovah's Witnesses in specific, as the Catholic Church is not particularly active in proselytizing in public spaces.

3.2. Backlash of the 'War on Terror'

The use of Islam and the Muslim community sentiments and needs by the political elites among incumbent and opposition politicians alike, contributed to the intensification of religious sentiments among the population. Raising religious issues in a politically problematic situation enabled their exploitation as an effective strategy for shifting public attention and orienting public debate away from the immediate concerns of the public. A significant role in this regard was played by the 'war on terror', which, as a governmental agenda, originated from the pretence to Western political alignment and cultural orientation of the political elites and the state, rather than from any genuine commitment to address any real problem, as the statement by the former Foreign Minister of Kosovo (now holding the position of the President) indicates: "Kosovars wholly reject the religious dogma proposed by radical strains of political Islam, and we shall not allow it to endanger our path towards eventual NATO and EU membership" (Thaçi, 2014). The Kosovo 'war on terror' resulted in the arrests of a number of imams charged with "incitement to commit terrorist offence" and "inciting national, racial, religious or ethnic hatred, discord or intolerance" based on Articles 141 and 147 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo (Nga 30 ditë paraburgim për të gjithë imamët, 2014), and another similar charge raised against other imams (Këta janë pesë të akuzuarit për terrorizëm, 2016).

It could be argued that the reaction of state authorities is motivated by the expectations of the 'global war on terror'. The arrests happened only a few months after the publication of a report on religious freedom in Kosovo by the US Department of State (2013). Among the arrested were two imams mentioned by their name in the report. The arrests were commended by US Ambassador to Kosovo (Bytyci, 2014). A few days following the arrests, Kosovo President reported on the meeting of the UN General Assembly about the legal measures Kosovo has taken to combat 'international radicalism and terrorism' by 'arresting radical imams' (Snyder, 2014). It is indicative of the political purpose of the arrests that after only two days, two of the imams suspected with no less a crime than terrorism were released from detention (Imams Ekrem Avdiu and Enis Rama released from detention centre, 2014).

As a contra-effect, the initial charges against the imams and, what appears to be, the release of some of the accused due to the lack of evidence to confirm the initial charges (Leposhtica, 2016) as well as doubts raised about the accusations, only strengthened their positions by increasing their authority and adding to their legitimacy in the eyes of their followers while reinforcing their victim image, which imams elaborated ideologically to exploit it in their preaching. This posed an opportunity for religious leaders, in particular Muslim ones, to impose themselves as legitimate representatives of religious communities, and more often than not created grounds for Muslim religious leaders and imams to represent the Muslim communi-

ty and Islam itself as targets of the hostile campaign run by the state (Argument plus – Shefqet Krasniqi, *arrestimet e fundit per terrorizem*, 2014). This was followed with a solidarity campaign in social networks with a dedicated hashtag in Facebook and Twitter, and a call for protest against the arrests of imams which didn't take place nevertheless (S'ka protestë kundër arrestimit të imamëve, 2014). Doubtful of the 'war on terror', various media commentators consider it as a 'fabrication' and a 'propaganda war', i.e. an unfounded campaign waged by "a part of political elites, and almost all media and security mechanisms" (Matoshi, 2015; Surroi, 2017).

Apparently, in these arrests, the state did not seem cautious to distinguish ultra-conservative theology from militant extremism (Esposito, 2002: 52). Ultraconservative attitudes, characteristic to some Islamic preachers, should be tolerated as part of the common religious market open to competing religious discourses (MacLure and Taylor, 2011: 9). Besides allowing for religious pluralism, this tolerating approach gives opportunity to competing religious interpretations to develop their rejecting interpretations that denounce violent militant extremism justified theologically. This inevitably produces the market of religious truths where theologians and preachers engage in a reasoned struggle to defend their truths. This might raise expectations from the clergy to base their teachings in some form of reasoning. Consequently, doubts arise about absolute truths that do not derive from reasoned struggles, an idea articulated in the following expression: "When several prophets preach at the same time, and each one claims to represent the truth, doubts arise as to the truthfulness of all of them" (Furseth and Repstad, 2006: 89).

3.3. The Case for State Neutrality Towards Religion(s)

The peculiar way that the term secularism is used in Kosovo's contemporary political context indicates that the concept is loaded with a particular identity orientation that constantly accompanies its use. As argued above, secularism is not, or at least should not be, an identity tool or an instrument of identity politics, but a principle of state's equidistance from the different worldviews competing in the public space. In the public debates on religious affairs and secularism in general, the distinction between secularism as a principle of institutional and political regulation of the state on the one hand, and as a facilitator of the plurality of public space on the other hand, remains largely neglected. This is especially evident in the way criticism of religion is addressed, exemplified in the phrases repeated in public discourse, such as 'the neutrality of public space should be preserved', 'religion should be a private matter', 'religion should be taught only in churches and mosques', 'religion should be reduced to private matters', and the like. Such an approach dominates not only the discourse of 'opinion makers' or media commentators, but also the political discourse. By way of illustration, in a parliamentary debate, a deputy of a centre-right political party of Kosovo, then the fourth largest party in the Parliament of Kosovo,

stated: “Let them learn religion as much as they will in mosques, and Orthodox and Catholics churches; religion should not be taught in Kosovo’s public schools [...] *they* have locations in which they can teach [religious dogma], no one is preventing them, no one is violating their rights, but they should not use *our* public schools” (Transkript i mbledhjes plenare të Kuvendit të Republikës së Kosovës, të mbajtur më 29 gusht 2011: 40, emphasis ours).

According to this dominant discourse in the Kosovan public debate, religion must be entirely private. Because of this, the holders of this position call on the state to maintain the secularity of public space. The problem with this view is that, as Jean Baubérot suggests, we may fall into a state atheism (Entretien avec Jean Baubérot, 2015), in which, as Jacques Rancière would have put it, the alleged universality would be “appropriated and manipulated” (Watson, 2015). The public space should not be secular. Nor should it be religious. The question that arises in relation to these two suggestions is why should public space be secular or why should it be religious? So it is a polarized opposition that produces a tense public space instead of a peaceful one. The public space simply *is*. Or, to put this in a more normative parlance, it should be! Because its content is empty, it gets its meaning and vitality only through confrontation, discussion, negotiation, competition between different individuals and social groups, which hold and develop different, or completely opposing worldviews.

Public space is, or should be, a space where social agents compete with the worldviews that they hold. For Maclure and Taylor, religious tolerance, which developed in parallel with the political secularization of the separation of the state from religion, resulted in the increasingly severe exclusion and marginalization of religion. This has caused secularism being understood as anti-religious, which makes it problematic as a concept for contemporary pluralism, and therefore it is in need of a redefinition. Hence, today it needs to be understood within a broader framework of diversity of beliefs and values that citizens hold. For the authors, it is a very recent fact that political society has a double foundation: reconciliation of basic political principles and respect for the plurality of philosophical, religious and moral perspectives. It is only later that we begin to realize that this model can lead to fairly harmonious coexistence and justice (Maclure and Taylor, 2011: 4-5). As Taylor states himself: “We think that secularism (or *laïcité*) has to do with the relation of the state and religion; whereas in fact it has to do with the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity” (Taylor, 2011: 36), and:

The democratic state must therefore be neutral or impartial in its relations with the different faiths. It must also treat equally citizens who act on religious beliefs and those who do not; it must, in other words, be neutral in relation to the different worldviews and conceptions of the good – secular, spiritual, and religious – with which citizens identify. Religious diversity must be seen as an aspect of the

phenomenon of “moral pluralism” with which contemporary democracies have to come to terms. “Moral pluralism” refers to the phenomenon of individuals adopting different and sometimes incompatible value systems and conceptions of the good (Maclure and Taylor, 2011: 9-10).

In this sense, secularism, as Maclure and Taylor point (2011), is supposed to allow for the coexistence of completely different, and even opposite, worldviews, not only religious but also metaphysical, ideological, and the like. Thus, the secular state is not an owner of truths, beliefs or different moral concepts. It rather enables them. In this context, it is evident that religion, according to Taylor, is only one of the many dimensions of social diversity or moral pluralism of society. Accordingly, we need not treat religion in a special way. Obsessed with religion, and treating it as a special case, belongs to the past as most Western countries, including Kosovo during the secularization process in communist Yugoslavia for that matter, have moved from the initial phase of a laborious victory of secularism that averted some forms of religious domination to another stage of the rapid diversification of social beliefs, whether religious or non-religious (Taylor, 2011: 37).

Should Kosovo aspire to legitimize itself as a liberal and democratic state, it is imperative upon it to uphold its neutrality, i.e. its indifferent position to all competing worldviews, including religious worldviews. What threatens the democratic and the liberal principle of the state of Kosovo are not religions, as there seems to be no religion with absolutist and totalitarian claims in its society. Freedom of political communication, where people are free to argue on all matters, must be guaranteed. Hindering the debate and free communication in the name of a misunderstood and misinterpreted principle of secularism is not the way forward to such guarantees. Separating politics from religion makes sense only if the former is desacralized by removing from it not only the religion but also other sanctities. Since secularism implies rational and democratic politics, then a secular polity should be ready for a culture that subjects every value to rationalism and human validation, and for a regime that subjects every law, decree, and rule to public deliberation and scrutiny.

4. Conclusion

Secularization theory anticipates a decline in the importance of religion in state and public affairs, as well as social institutions and even private lives in the modern era. However, the theory turned out not to be fully proved by evidence. Various studies show that the influence of religion is not necessarily diminishing in the sphere of social policy, and family and individual life.

The secular state is non-religious, but not anti-religious. The expectation that in modernity the importance of religion in social institutions, culture, and individuals would be greatly diminished did not prove to be fully accurate. True, the role of reli-

gion faded in public life, especially in politics, but there was a religious rebirth in its fundamental or reformed forms, and religious social movements were seen across the globe, in the United States, Ireland, Iran, and other societies. Secularism today needs to be understood by taking into account this empirical evidence that proves the continuation of the importance of religion in the public sphere, albeit slightly faded and in modified forms. One can argue, for example, that compared to religion in the pre-modern period, present-day followers of religions are secular in the political sense (i.e. religious belief does not determine their political preferences), but not necessarily in the moral and theological senses of the word. In this way, we will not fall into the trap of dogmatism where ideas and ideals do not take into account the factual state of reality...

Many constitutions of democratic states contain articles that point to their commitment to secular principles, namely their neutrality towards religious beliefs. Secularity as a state principle is explicitly sanctioned in the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, and the state is defined as 'neutral in matters of religious beliefs' (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008, Article 8). The fundamental principle of secularism means that religion and religious loyalty should be kept out of political life with no role to play in state-controlled institutions. The issue that distinguishes these democratic states among themselves is their attitude on how far the state should go to determine the place of religion in public institutions. Thus, the state has no official religion, but religious practices and the inclusion of religious tradition in public life are controversial issues concerning the extent of toleration of various religious beliefs and practices in public and political institutions. Political and cultural pluralism in Kosovo, especially in the period following the 1998-1999 war, was accompanied by religious revival, not necessarily in the form of radical and political religious revival. This necessitates the need to rethink secularism, i.e. the relationship between religion and the public sphere, namely its place in the public sphere.

The examples discussed in this paper and others not mentioned here,¹⁴ in the context of the late secular experience of Kosovo, point to the problematic way of applying secularism. In order to conceptualize as accurately as possible the ever more complex relations of the trinomial: state – religion – society, we have provided a brief description of some of the key concepts developed by Jürgen Habermas (2006a; 2006b), Charles Taylor (2007; 2011) and Bryan S. Turner (2010). Their theoretical frameworks and many other authors who were not discussed at length in this work, such as José Casanova (1994), Peter Berger (1999), and others, are indispensable for a more comprehensive conceptualization of secularism in Kosovo.

¹⁴ In public schools throughout Kosovo run by the Serb community, there is a noticeable selective toleration of religious education which is in conflict with the national curriculum of Kosovo.

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Mailing Addresses:

Ardian Gola, Department of Sociology, University of Prishtina, Fakulteti Filozofik, Mother Theresa Str., 10000 Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo.

E-mail: ardian.gola@uni-pr.edu

Gëzim Selaci (Corresponding Author), Department of Sociology, University of Prishtina, Fakulteti Filozofik, Mother Theresa Str., 10000 Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo. *E-mail*: gezim.selaci@uni-pr.edu