

Article

New Frontiers and Relations between Religion, Culture and Politics in Western Europe

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Abstract: Sociology was born as a discipline that analyzed the process of modernization of Western European societies. However, in turn, this science was developing a predictive, prophetic vision of the future of human communities, assuming that they were all going to follow paths similar to those followed by Western Europeans. This prophetic dimension reduced the capacity of sociology to analyze new phenomena including, on the one hand, phenomena relating to other societies, on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, phenomena related to the transformations suffered by Western European societies after their process of modernization. This last case constitutes the objective of this work, in which I try to recover the purely analytical character of sociology. To this end, I intend to relate the general model of the political modernization of Western European societies elaborated by historical sociology to the theory of social differentiation, avoiding the evolutionary drift of this theory. From that position, I try to specify the analytical nature of some conceptual instruments of sociology, in order to make them more useful to understanding the contemporary social transformations of Western European societies. Some of these transformations have changed the tendency towards the cultural homogenization characteristic of modernization, because after the two world wars these societies began to receive strong flows of immigration.

Keywords: religion; culture; politics; differentiation; historical process; Western European countries

1. Introduction

Sociology as a science was born out of the undertaking to analyse the process of transformation that led Western European countries to become modern societies during the 19th and 20th centuries. Sociology analysed and theorised this process of transformation. The analysis of this process carried several assumptions that need to be highlighted to understand the great transformations that are taking place today. Sociology as a discipline has exceeded the limits of its analysis of specific historical realities. It became a predictive machinery of the processes that other realities would necessarily undergo in the future. It exceeded its own analytical character and contributed to forming an idea of what the world in general would come to be. Sociologists forgot the historical character of social reality and the historical character of their concepts and analytical instruments.

A sociology of sociology allows us to examine its birth and realise that this science was not only an instrument of knowledge, but also a political instrument. For [Albrow \(1997, p. 200\)](#), one of the characteristics of the project of modernity was that the state was its fundamental agency. This involved very high doses of reflexivity and a certain predictability of the process. It can be said that sociology was one of the elements that contributed to providing a reflexive¹ character to this political project:

¹ Sociology helped, no doubt, to think about the social consequences of political decisions.

the construction of the state's internal architecture and a society as a culturally homogeneous social reality within the state's territory.

We are currently living in a period in which the modernizing phase of Western Europe has ended and in which other countries have developed economically along paths very different from those followed by Western countries. In this work, I try to provide some keys to the rescue of sociology's exclusively analytical character, in order to contribute to the analysis of contemporary social reality. Within social science, two strategies have been proposed to elaborate this analytical rescue of classical concepts and theories: the genetics of concepts (Swidler 1986; Asad 2003) and historical sociology (Casanova 2006).

In a recent work (Pérez-Agote 2014), I tried to rescue the analytical potential of a part of the theory of modernization that had proved ineffective in its predictive task of the future of some non-Western countries: the theory of secularization. In the present article I want to rescue another theory, that of social differentiation, and for that I use the following strategy: historical sociology². Therefore, the fundamental content of this article is an examination of the process of separation between culture, religion, and politics that culminated in the modernity of Western European societies, and by the postmodern transformation of these differentiations.

In order to understand the processes of the more or less successful formation of the modern (democratic and national) Western European states, I propose to carry out an integration, with an analytical purpose, of the theory of social differentiation in the design of the aforementioned processes developed by historical sociology. In fact, the historical sociology of Tilly (1990) constructs a general model from which differences in concrete cases with respect to the model can be observed. Thus the differences become significant for the understanding of each concrete process.

“The most dramatic expansion of nonmilitary state activity began (. . .) after 1850 or so. In that period, which extends to the recent past, military organization moved from a dominant (. . .) segment of state structure to a more subordinated position as the largest of several differentiated departments under control of a predominantly civilian administration. (That subordination was, of course, greater in peace than in war, greater in Holland than in Spain.) (. . .)

European states began to monitor industrial conflict and working conditions, install and regulate national systems of education, organize aid to the poor and disabled, build and maintain communication lines, impose tariffs for the benefit of home industries, and the thousand other activities European now take for granted as attributes of state power. (. . .)

Internally, states undertook to impose national languages, national educational systems, national military service, and much more. Externally, they began to control movement across frontiers, to use tariffs and customs as instruments of economic policy, and to treat foreigners as distinctive kinds of people deserving limited rights and close surveillance. As states invested not only in war and public services but also in economic infrastructure, their economies came to have distinctive characteristics, which once again differentiated the experiences of living in adjacent states.

To that degree, life homogenized within states and heterogenized among states.” (Tilly 1990, pp. 114–16)

The modern process of the cultural homogenization of the population takes place, firstly, with regard to the ethnic diversity of the population living within the state's territory. The national education system, the communications network, and compulsory military service became, among others, important

² In the present article, the revision based on historical sociology is more direct. If in this text I wanted to discuss central concepts, such as those of religion or culture, another strategy would have been very relevant.

mechanisms of extension of the national culture and language. Historical sociology shows us the process of construction of the European system of states (Tilly 1990, pp. 161–91). In most of them, their objective elements were formed first. Power over a physically defined territory was concentrated in a political centre, and that centre had exclusive access to the means of violence; territory and a centre of power are the state's elements that have an objective character. Having obtained this objective character, the state exists. The state's subjective dimension has to do with its legitimacy and, in the long term, its outcome through stability.

Regarding the state's subjective dimension, according to Weber (1978, p. 1057), we can say that the legitimacy of power is not an intrinsic characteristic of a power, but refers to the generalised psychological disposition of the acceptance of this power by the population; legitimacy refers to the "reasons for internal justification". The social symbolic element, according to which the population accepts power, has changed historically. Tradition, religion, the legitimate capacity of a leader to rise up against a power are seen as unfair. In the historical moments during which the state's objective elements were definitively established, religion was an essential element that legitimised power that extended to populations with different traditions and cultures. Religious homogenization thus became relevant; this is how the application of the principle *cuius regio eius religio* at a given historical moment was fundamental, as we will later see. Later, the idea of the *divine right of kings* would prevail to justify their absolute power. However, at the time that sociology began, the legitimacy of power is already changing radically; the origin of power over people does not reside in God or the king, as God's representative, but in the people themselves, the nation.

Modern nations have been constructed in a different way to that explained by their official history. Their origins are not lost in the mists of time, in the dark ages described by the first chapters of national histories. Neither is the slow constitution of territories in random conquests and alliances the genesis of nations: it is rather the boisterous histories of principalities and kingdoms. The truthful birth of a nation is when a handful of individuals declare that the nation exists and start trying to prove it. The first examples go back no earlier than the 18th Century. Before that, there is no nation in the modern meaning, that is, political. This idea falls within an ideological revolution. The nation is conceived as a broad community, bound together by ties other than being subject to the same sovereign or belonging to the same religion (...). The entire process of identity construction consists in determining the assets of each nation, in disseminating its cult. (Thiesse 1999, pp. 11–12)

Monarchies had to be overthrown or subjected to the nation's political control. Churches had to be removed from the political sphere; their monopoly over truth and the ethical evaluation of the world had to be replaced by the will of people, generally expressed in the law.

History, sociology and the arts became the creating force of the new collective culture and identity. The educational system, especially public schools, was the great disseminator. Historians carried out the task of explaining the history of the construction of the state as the history of the nation, as if the latter were previous and had finally managed at that moment in history to provide itself with a differentiated political structure. Nietzsche was well aware of the role of history in the construction of myths; for him, the purpose of knowledge resided in the destruction of such myths that feed man. As Foucault states, for Nietzsche, history is effective, that is, a destroyer of myths, as long as it introduces discontinuity inside our being; at the beginning of a history there is not an original, preserved identity, but the discord of the other things (Foucault 1992). However, a nation's history is usually taught as sacred history, and idolized to prevent the mental manipulation of our origins, which are arbitrary or, as Nietzsche would say, are the discord of the other things, namely folly and conflict. The legitimating function of history consists in affirming the existence of the nation from the beginning, although is only a product, a historical result. According to this, the nation has existed since the beginning, and through democratic modernity it manages to provide itself with a representative political structure. Nevertheless, the nation is a modern historical product. The

successful or less successful dissemination of this idea of the nation will result in the emergence or resurgence of peripheral nationalisms, of collectives that launch the idea of another nation against that state. For these reasons, Nisbet has been able to clearly state that “the nation is the offspring of the state” (Nisbet 1973, p. 164)³. This is, broadly speaking, the ideal model of state built in the modernisation of Western Europe—the democratic national State. The nation did not exist, the state had to build it through various social mechanisms, such as the national educational system that transformed illiterates in their mother tongue into persons literate in the national language, foreign wars, and compulsory military service.

The process of the historical construction of these types of states cannot be understood without a process of industrialization that involves systematically applying all the scientific and technological achievements to factory production. This implied the emergence of a new social sector, which was the first *national* class in history (Marx 1972, p. 71). From the private sphere, this new sector gradually developed a new public sphere before the king’s public political sphere. To this end, a series of specific social mechanisms were gradually established (*salons, cafés, newspapers and political parties*) through which a new way of thinking about social reality was gradually developing (Habermas 1981). This is how the idea of *society* emerges as a complementary but substantive element; the idea that politics has a social reality called society as its object. For the first time, politics is thought of as the exercise of the king’s *patrimonial* power. It is the beginning of how in this modern time we think about and try to regulate the social reality. Not all social reality constitutes a society in a strict sense. This social form has not existed forever. As Albrow (1997) realised, this implies a political project, making it necessary to conquer the state; this was the democratisation of the state.

Empirical reality shows us that the elements that conform to the ideal model are gradually achieved at different historical times and even in a different order in different States; the degree of achievement of each element may also vary. It is clear that in the prototypical model that I announced, the construction of a state’s borders was not carried out following cultural and linguistic homogeneity criteria. The borders were rather the historical result of wars, peace treaties, and marriages. This is why the accumulation of military power within the territory was a core process to reach domestic peace and prevent the penetration of a foreign power. Logically, the result of this process is a closed territory with internal cultural and language diversity. The process of democratisation of this state in subsequent moments in history required the dissemination of a common culture and a single language within its borders, that which we have come to call the national language and culture. This process of state nationalisation, of the general dissemination of the idea of the nation, of the idea of a common national history, the genesis of a sentiment of common belonging to a social entity that originally holds the power, is a process that needs the state to put into operation several of the aforementioned social mechanisms.

First, I will review the different forms of differentiation that are typical of the process of modernization of Western European societies. Then I will try to show how the strong immigration processes that took place after the two world wars have put some of these forms of differentiation into crisis.

2. Social Differentiation

In a recent work (Pérez-Agote 2016) I showed how to carry out the theoretical integration of historical sociology and social differentiation theory. For this I used several interesting proposals. One of them was “the brilliant re-examination of the theory of differentiation itself from a highly analytical and empirical approach in the compilation of Alexander and Colomy (1990). This book contains

³ The two European exceptions where the national idea was prior to their unification, Germany and Italy, would very likely not have been possible without a European context marked by the construction of the idea that a state’s population was its nation; and by the state’s dissemination of the national idea and sentiment throughout the territory.

evidence of the important influence of certain historicising chapters in Geertz's "The Interpretation of Cultures" (Geertz 1973), such as the work by Alexander (1990) on the historical ethnic formation of American society.

From my point of view, the sociological theory of social differentiation, as part of the modernisation theory, has suffered two forms of stultification. The first can be represented by Parsons' work and especially *The Social System* (Parsons 1951), an attempt to describe the set of differentiated structures integrated in a given society that define its operation. The second form of stultification would be to consider such a theory to describe the future processes of change of societies. Luhmann would be a good example of this tendency, as for him "the description of contemporary society as highly differentiated forms was the hinge that mediated past and future." (Luhmann 1990, p. 413)⁴.

However, I think that the development of Luhmann's theory is useful to construct a more analytical form of the theory of social differentiation itself. The fundamental reason behind this attempt is that both forms of stultification participate in a prophetic vision of modernity, as if a social form and the process to access it were prefixed for any future society. What I retain here is that the general theory of modernisation, and within it the theory of social differentiation, have been a valuable way of analysing historical social processes in some specific societies, rather than a way of predicting the process (one could say progress) of any society in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to recover the theory's analytical side, both to analyse what occurs in other societies and to try and find out what is happening in those societies that were analysed using the theory of modernisation after what we call the global era. At present, we find that some non-western societies have accessed forms of economic development very comparable to those of western countries without, at least yet, developing similar social and political forms (Pérez-Agote 2014, pp. 890–91). Moreover, in the new era certain aspects that used to define modern western countries have specifically disappeared; for example, in some countries, the progressive cultural homogeneity—derived from the progressive diffusion of national identities and cultures began to enter into crisis with the immigration flow after the two world wars. In addition, we can observe the increasingly extensive dissemination of modern values in societies that have not undergone similar processes to those followed by Western European countries; let us remember the interpenetration of symbolic aspects in societies with different economic levels and different types of political organisation. In a recent article about the new political trends of Spanish youth, I highlighted this phenomenon when talking about the factors that gave rise to the indignants' movement of this decade. The final factor was global and epidemic, namely "the Arab Spring, a series of movements of political protest that started in Tunis on 17 December, 2010. The events in the Arab countries, and later in other countries with different socio-political situations, contained however, a series of common features. The social sector motor of each movement consisted of young educated people with difficulties integrating into the labour market, the core objective was to obtain or to improve a representative democracy that resolved the people's problems, new communication technologies were used, a significant square was occupied in a big city, and finally, there was concern for horizontal relations, not emanating from a centre of power." (Pérez-Agote 2017, p. 106).

Luhmann alleges that four processes have proven efficient in social evolution: segmentary difference (equality of subsystems), the centre–periphery difference, stratificatory difference (rank inequality amongst subsystems) and functional difference (role inequality, rank equality). Luhmann sees segmentary difference as the first differentiation yet still egalitarian; later, social reality would evolve from equality to inequality, until reaching greater difference when the unity of the system is reached through a system of differentiation (Luhmann 1990, pp. 423–25), which is equivalent

⁴ In my view, the theory of social differentiation in general suffers from three sources of weakness. One, adopting an evolutionary dimension weakens its analytical plasticity. Two, its avoidance of the relations among the separated spheres, because these relations are very relevant for the study of the processes of change. And three, when the theory of differentiation does not appear in direct relation to the processes and levels of institutionalization of each sphere. However, these issues are too extensive to be developed in this article.

to saying, through labour division. Luhmann (1977) devoted one of his works to the theoretical integration of systems theory and the theory of evolution. This is a good example of the evolutionist and universalising character of differentiation theory. As a solid example of universalization, see number 1964 of the American Sociological Review. In it, Parsons (1964) published *Evolutionary Universals in Sociology*, and under this umbrella two articles were published, namely Bellah (1964), *Religious Evolution* and Eisenstadt (1964), *Social Change, Differentiation and Evolution*. An interesting aspect of the evolutionary view was highlighted by Voegelin (1956), as he claimed that societies evolve from compact symbolic forms into differentiated forms, a concept utilized later by Bellah in the aforementioned article. Voegelin's idea is highly interesting for the understanding of the process of modernisation of Western European countries, namely that expressing criticism of its universalising and evolutionary character by no means involves underappreciating its analytical value and capacity. Disassembling this universalising tendency started with the interesting idea that no matter how differentiated a society is, there are times where there is a re-enchantment, a religious moment of fusion or a political revolution. Edward Tiryakian (1985, 1994, 2009) is one of the great constructors of the theory of these processes of *de-differentiation*, anticipating thus the return to mechanical solidarity. Other interesting ideas to criticize the evolutionary and universalising vision of social differentiation can be found in the cited work by Alexander and Colomy, which groups together works about the de-universalization of the differentiation theory. These authors express in the preface: "Whereas the initial formulation of differentiation theory rested upon the identification of a master trend of change toward a greater institutional specialization, the current volume supplements the master trend with the backlash movements against differentiation. (. . .) The benign assessment of the consequences of differentiation, which stress adaptative upgrading and greater efficiency, is balanced by the recognition that differentiation often generates discontents." (Alexander and Colomy 1990, p. xiii)

3. The State as Differentiation

In terms of the theory of differentiation, the historical construction of the state's objective elements (centre of power with the monopoly on violence and a territory with fixed boundaries) is the process of differentiation of a social reality with respect to its social context. In the case of Western Europe, it is the clear differentiation of each state with regard to the adjacent states. This implies at the same time another process of differentiation that takes place within the state's territory, that of a centre of power on the periphery; that is, a process of power centralisation within the territory. The great transformation of the military made it possible to create an army capable of imposing the internal monopoly on violence (internal peace) and preventing external forces from taking internal action (Tilly 1990, chp. 3).

Historically, the Christian religion had totally spread among the Western European population. The ultimate foundation of the legitimacy of the general state of affairs and power in particular was still in God, within the religious symbolic universe controlled by the church, until the Reformation. In the 16th century, with the "doctrine of free examination" (*God speaks directly to the people*) the Protestant Reformation marked the beginning of the legitimate possibility for each person to think, although still within a religious symbolic universe. It also involved the inversion of the existing hierarchy between the sacred and the profane reality. All of this was a necessary condition for the free development of reason and science that would be a core element of the future European modernity.

However, this religious subversion produced by the church from within gave rise to a deep internal division of the political landscape from a religious point of view. The different dynasties, noble houses and religious affirmations produced very dramatic consequences due to the maladjustment between religion and politics in the different European territories. Thus, the old principle *cuius regio eius religio* had to be applied after the Reformation in order to produce the religious unification of the population under the sovereign's religion. The law of internal cultural homogenization of Western European states (Tilly 1990) was thus being fulfilled within the religious arena, although in some states more deeply than in others.

The Peace of Westphalia (1648) was a key moment in the foundational process of the European system of states. In terms of differentiation, each state was established in its objective elements, that is each state was differentiated from the other states around it. This foundational moment took place because there was military power accumulated by a king who could thus maintain internal peace (defeating other possible military powers) and defend the borders. Tilly (1990, pp. 103–7) explains very well the importance of the changes in the military sphere for the king to accumulate power within the territory. At these early stages, the state was essentially the army. With the separation between state and the surroundings, there was also been in internal differentiation, namely the clear separation between the king and the rest of the population inhabiting the state's closed territory.

In this process of concentration of military–political power in the king, the court's genesis has a central position as a concentration mechanism. In *The Court Society*, Norbert Elias (1982) perfectly describes the mechanisms by which European monarchs took the power of the nobles. Nobles gradually lost power in terms of territorial possessions and gradually acquire power in terms of their degree of closeness to the king and the court. The king was the political public sphere and his dominion over the kingdom was patrimonial. The subjects existed but nobody saw them as a political unit.

4. The Differentiation of the Civil Society from the State

In the process of democratization and nationalization following the creation of the state, the idea of the nation as the collective identity where power resides was needed to replace the idea of the kings' divine right. This is the stage when the state needed to become autonomous from religion and the church, as the fundamental idea was now that power does not come from God, it belongs in the community, the people and the nation. The idea of secularism was at the core of this question.

In the second half of the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century, the world sees what Tiryakian (1989, pp. 143–49) came to call the first wave of nationalism, which took place in nation-states in Europe and in the United States of America⁵. A process started where the national history, culture and language were constructed and spread based on some existing cultural elements. This meant implementing several standardising mechanisms within the State, that is, the new national culture.

Habermas (1981) showed the historical emergence of the possibility of a thinking society. From a private sphere of life, a series of social groups progressively think about the public and society and about the progressive replacement of an absolute order, where the public sphere was the court, by a bourgeois order in which society conveys itself and criticizes the politics of power.

Thus, the public sphere ceases to be something simple and becomes something complex, formed by the public sphere of political power, and the public sphere generated by the civil society from the private sphere. For this to happen, a series of social mechanisms emerged through which certain social sectors conceived this idea of society as the target of politics. After that, the hierarchical order of the two spheres would gradually reverse until reaching the idea that the power resides in the people, or national sovereignty. Following differentiation theory, the totalization of society is a political operation. When society is thought of as a totality, the object of politics, the political sphere is thought of as representing society. Voegelin (1968) is right, politics generates this totality that sociologists have come to name society.

Habermas describes very well how the mechanisms that gave rise to a structure of communication between the public sphere and civil society, between representatives and the represented, emerged from the private sphere. First, there were the *salons*, which were generally managed by women from high society and frequented by certain cultured sectors of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, where

⁵ Tiryakian includes within this first wave the late European cases, in which the nationalist dimension precedes the unification of the state territory. These late cases constitute what Habermas calls the second European generation of nations, as we shall see shortly. The second wave defined by Tiryakian refers to the third world nationalisms that emerged in the old colonial empires; and the third is the one that refers to the peripheral nationalisms that have arisen in the interior of the western states of the first wave: Basque Country, Scotland, Catalonia, Québec, etc.

literary criticism was frequently changed into political criticism. Then the *cafés* experienced a similar transition from literary to political matters. Not forgetting *secret societies*, later the *periodical press* and finally the *political parties* became core social channels of communication. (Habermas 1981, chp. 2).

Habermas, outlines two generations of nations within Western Europe. The first generation, corresponding to Northern and Western Europe, consists of the nations that emerged within previously established territorial states. The nation in this case would be, in Nisbet's words "the state's offspring" (Nisbet 1973, p. 164). The second generation would consist of Germany and Italy; these were nations in search of a state (Habermas 1999, p. 81). In the more general case, where the state existed prior to the national community (the pattern I utilised to talk about the process of modernisation), one of the basic tasks was the cultural homogenization of all the ethnic groups within the state territory; this is state nationalization and the constitution of a nation (Pérez-Agote 2006, chp. 2).

5. The Differentiation of Church and State

The separation between the national state as an institution and the predominant church within the state's territory was carried out in the different countries following different strategies, resulting in very diverse forms of differentiation. Let us think about France, England, Spain⁶, etc. Different models, different speeds, absolute radicality in the fight among institutions or a total lack of it, but always leading to the secularisation of the legitimacy of political power, so that power came to reside in the national community.

The separation between church and state was central from the first moment of the secularization process. It was a difficult and long process, and it can be said that in general it was more dramatic in Catholic countries, since where the Protestant Reformation triumphed, the church started to have less direct control over social life, largely due to the doctrine of *free examination* having reduced the role of this institution as the administrator of the truth. This played an important role in the free development of science, but it also meant the loss of social and political power for the reformed churches; in comparison, the Catholic Church held more power in the countries where it was the dominant religion (Merton 1968, pp. 591–603, 628–60).

6. The Differentiation between Religion and Culture

In addition, during the construction and, above all, the democratization and nationalization of the Western European states, another less dramatic and less politically transcendent process of differentiation was taking place in the Western world. This was the process of differentiation between religion and culture. This was a slow, complicated and less visible and less relevant process from the political point of view than the separation between the church and the state. It was not so much about a differentiation between institutions, as a differentiation between spheres; a differentiation between a deeply institutionalized symbolic sphere in the Western countries, the religious sphere, and culture, which was then, as now, a very weakly institutionalised sphere. When culture detaches itself from religion, no specific institution emerges for its maintenance and control. I am not going to delve into a definition of culture, doubtlessly one of the most discussed issues in the social sciences. Using the term culture in a flat sense, with the meaning shared by the population, I just want to

⁶ The case of Spain, for instance, exemplifies how the described model is ideal. Well into the 20th century, the Spanish state has a monarchy that still thinks of itself as absolute, and is seen as such by a strong landowning aristocracy and a high Catholic hierarchy of pseudo-civil servants at the service of the monarchy. The industrial and financial bourgeoisies emerge in two peripheral areas with regard to that central state. The left-wing forces and the new modernising bourgeoisie achieve the democratic establishment of a republic; however, the forces that held the old core of power rose militarily against it in the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War. After the war, General Franco's dictatorship was installed, which came to be defined by historians as *Nationalcatholicism*. Spanish bishops talked about the war as a *crusade*. Franco died in 1975 and the 1978 democratic regime was established. In spite of happening so late (starting in the 1960s) the process of subjective secularisation of the population has been the hastiest and deepest in the whole of Europe (Pérez-Agote 2014). However, Spanish democracy still vastly funds private religious education (Pérez-Agote 2012a, 2012b; Dobbelaere and Pérez-Agote 2015).

point out the fact that there is no specific institution for the general control of culture, in charge of appointing what is orthodox and which sanctions heterodoxy in a negative way (like the church does in the religious field) or a positive way (as sometimes, not always, happens in the field of science). Culture in general is maintained by its use by actors and changes because other cultural forms gain prestige and normality. Of course there are many types of controls and negative or positive sanctions on repetition and innovation, but it is also clear that these sanctions are not in the hands of a unique differentiated institution.

In the different European countries, a separation between religion and culture has taken place historically, in which culture first detached itself from the church's tutorship, and then from its conformation. Religion is gradually losing influence in different social spheres, namely the political and cultural spheres in which we are interested. Since the main support of culture, in the sense I am using here, is its use by social actors, the process of individual secularization has been a central dimension of this process of the separation of spheres. Danièle Hervieu-Léger mentions an initial period of "*décatholicisation*" of the French population, in which France changed from being a religiously Catholic country to being a culturally Catholic country, through the continued decrease of religious practice and belief. The church's capacity to control the behaviour of actors is equally decreasing. However, for a long time religion has played an important role with regard to culture, becoming one of its fundamental roots. Later, however, in a process that has come to be called "exculturation"⁷, culture is losing its religious roots and is incorporating other sources like science and politics. (Hervieu-Léger 2003, pp. 90–98).

Nevertheless, this long historical process of Western European societies, in which there has been a separation of culture and religion, with the latter withdrawing from the private and even intimate sphere, has been deeply altered today. The separation between culture, religion and politics is being deeply revised.

7. The Contemporary Crisis of Cultural and Religious Homogeneity

It is logical to think of a certain internal religious homogenization before Westphalia, especially in those states whose objective elements were well defined much earlier, like Spain⁸. However, in general, the establishment of a clear centre of power over a territory involves a relative cultural homogenization. However, the historical period when this cultural homogeneity clearly becomes the stated political goal is during the state nationalization period. The form of power legitimacy changes and people are no longer subjects, but have become citizens.

A new stage of homogenization has begun as a function of the immigration flows that some European societies started to receive after the First World War and especially after the Second World War. This massive process began with emigration from the poor and overpopulated European countries towards the industrialized countries of the Western European zone⁹; and then these western countries began to receive migrants from their old colonies. After the wars, the industrialised countries needed a larger workforce, so accommodating the immigrant population was relatively easy from an economic labour point of view. For a long time, the social situation of the immigrant population was not envisaged with the same acrimony as after the 1970s crisis, the so-called oil crisis, and the disturbance it caused in the labour market. In the 1990s, the fall of the Iron Curtain opened up another strong migration flow from Eastern to Western Europe.

⁷ I have used this concept to define the current third wave of secularization of the Spanish population (Pérez-Agote 2012a, chp. 4).

⁸ Spain unified its territory in 1492, with the conquest of Granada, under a unique centre of power, that of the Catholic Monarchs. Moreover, the unification under this centre of power implied the religious homogenization of the population. The decrees of expulsion for Jews and Moslems, on the one hand, and the concession of a special tribunal of the Inquisition on the other, were the fundamental instruments to this end. However, the later national political homogenization was so inefficient that in our days the acceptance of Spanish identity is still a problem among the population in various parts of the state.

⁹ Spain: At the beginning of this century, several countries that, like Spain, had traditionally seen emigration until the 1970s start to receive large-scale immigration from African, Latin American, and Eastern European countries.

The attempts towards the absolute or relative homogenisation of immigrant populations made by the different political models in different European countries have been a complete failure. This became apparent towards the end of the 1970s and especially the 1980s. Second generation migrants, after having passed through the national education system, try to enter the labor market and encounter insurmountable difficulties that, in many cases, end in exclusion. The social conflicts of this young generation did not take long to develop.

Since the 1970s crisis, a contrast has emerged between the weaknesses of the European labour markets on the one hand, and the maintenance of structural conditions in countries with a tendency to emigration, together with largely settled social networks to that end, on the other. This contrast has led to two fundamental consequences in the field of international migration. The first is the restrictive measures of the European governments, which has resulted in increased risks being undertaken by people willing to emigrate and the growth of illegal immigration in receiving countries. The second consequence is taking place within the new generations of immigrant populations settled in the developed countries. The second generation are confronting a different situation from that of their parents in relation to the main mechanisms of social integration. The public integration mechanisms are the education system and the closely related labour market. No great general assumptions can be made about the situation of the education system, but unless the labour market is in very good health, these new generations will face problems integrating into society, acquiring a social identity and developing positive self-esteem. Moreover, the quintessentially private social mechanism, the family, is also in a problematic situation.

The French case, for example, is interesting. The first generation had an instrumental adaptive behaviour, and therefore its members designed an adaptive strategy for the education of their children. With the “oil crisis” of the 1970s, public integration mechanisms deteriorated. This had very strong effects on some young sectors of the immigrant population, namely the appearance of conflicts between young people and the receiving society, the search for a social identity and of new sources of self-esteem given the difficulties encountered in joining the labour market, and the resulting reevaluation of their original language and culture. Sometimes, this last effect may in turn result in making intergenerational relations ambivalent within the family. Their parents had given priority to the language and culture of the receiving society and the younger generation turns their gaze to their original society. The relationship between them becomes ambivalent as, on the one hand, they hold a grudge towards their parents for having relegated their original language and culture, and on the other hand they feel connected to them through ties of affection and because their parents represent precisely their original language and culture. This type of phenomena makes us understand that, in general, intrafamilial intergenerational relationships are very important to understanding the attitudes of young people with respect to the receiving society. The difficulties in the labour integration of young people cause them to look for other sources of social identity, self and social esteem, such as the original culture and religion. Religion becomes an option rather than an inheritance.

For immigrants in general, religion offers a social benefit in terms of social refuge and a source of identity, self-esteem and pragmatic solidarity. The less effective the public social mechanisms of integration (education system, labour market and a good connection between them) the greater the need to gain self and social esteem through their own resources. As Olivier Roy (2005) reminds us, Islam is today a European religion. This in turn raises the problem evoked by Roy, namely the return of these young people in France to an Islamic religion by choice (Tietze 2002), after having been previously de-Arabized and de-Islamized by the republican school system, prior to their rejection by the labour market. This return to a religion after being devoid of the general cultural coating it had for previous generations, this de-cultured religion, is more prone to the letter than the spirit, and more prone, therefore, to lead to fundamentalist proposals (Khosrokhavar 1994, pp. 130–31). It would thus need to undergo a drastic, dramatic and traumatic process of functional differentiation, of separation between the Islamic culture and religion.

New migratory flows have led to the religious heterogenisation of our societies. Immigrant populations have not—at least not to the same extent as in Europe—undergone a process of differentiation of religion in relation to other spheres such as culture and politics. This difference in the level of differentiation of religion has on many occasions been, and continues to be, a source of socio-cultural conflict. We can recall the controversy over the Islamic veil in France and the Stasi report of 2003, which recommends the prohibition in schools of “tenues et signes religieux” (Stasi 2003, p. 68). The report’s only mention of the significance of the veil is that it may conceal “différentes significations. Ce peut être un choix personnel ou au contraire une contrainte . . .” (Stasi 2003, p. 57). It is evident that the Stasi Commission reached its conclusions from a single viewpoint, that of the autochthonous French population, which holds the veil to be a religious symbol. From a different cultural perspective, according to which there is no clear separation between culture and religion, and where there is no differentiated religion, the veil is a religious–cultural–family symbol, and on certain occasions can also even be said to be political. The commission took an ethnocentric stance based on the belief that France was a culturally homogeneous society, and by 2003 it clearly was not.

European democratic societies are no longer culturally homogeneous, yet they maintain a dominant religious tradition, and the separation between Church and state can be approached differently¹⁰. At the end of a recent work I concluded: “European societies have been relatively¹¹ homogeneous from the religious point of view. Today however a sector of their population, with immigrant origins but by now largely national, professes religious confessions other than the historically dominant ones. For this segment religion plays an important role in the social integration of the community (. . .); these religious groups also clearly need economic and political support to conduct their religious activities. This is even more so when the labour market—a fundamental mechanism for social integration—is becoming ever more disengaged from state control due to the globalisation of the economy. Attention is beginning to focus on the issue of the separation of Church and state, although still timidly in Europe for the time being” (Pérez-Agote 2016, p. 111).

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¹⁰ There are other ways to approach this question. Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor promoted a new idea of “open secularity” in a report commissioned by the Prime Minister of Québec. These two authors consider the most fundamental of the four principles of secularity to be the moral equality of people and the freedom of conscience and religion. The other two have become open to interpretation: the principle of separation of Church and state and the neutrality of the state in relation to religions and deeply-held secular beliefs (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, pp. 135–36).

¹¹ Relatively, because there are non-religious and anti-religious forms; although we also need to consider the transformation of a country with a Catholic religion into one with a Catholic culture (such as France and Spain). This is equivalent to saying that religious pluralism does not predominate historically.

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