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*Abstract* – This essay discusses the relevance of the post- and decolonial approach to the debate on post secularization and post secularism. The essay will analyze how their critique of the secularization thesis and of the secularist political project – as result of a Western-centered account of modernity – questions the validity of the category of post-secularization as a heuristic tool as well as the legitimacy of a post-secularist political project. The essay will close with a reflection on how the post- and decolonial critique may give a relevant contribution to the current debates on democratic pluralism and on the presence of religious identities in the public sphere by deconstructing some crucial underlying assumption, beginning with the very notion of religion.

The prefix «post» is indeed playing a leading role in humanities and social sciences. Many among the key scholarly debates of the last decades have originated from one «post» or another, from postmodern to posthuman. Postsecularization, postsecularism, and postcolonial also have pride of place in international Academia. Each of these terms, in turn, has been questioned, deconstructed and problematized, so as to reveal undeclared assumptions as well as to test its effectiveness and normative relevance. «Decoloniality» has recently appeared on the scene of scholarly debates as an alternative to postcoloniality. These pages will provide a skeletal account of the conversations which resulted from intersections of these two groups of paradigms. In order to do so, they will provide a short account of the main points of divergence, and will close by sketching some lines of reflection on how their encounter may sustain the quest for inclusive and pluralist public spheres.

## 1. Post or de? Coloniality and modernity

The postcolonial and decolonial paradigms often cross paths; nonetheless, a succinct summary of the main grounds of divergence is necessary to

avoid too hasty identifications. Post- and decolonial perspectives evidently share their conceptual point of departure, namely the critique to a radial view of modernity articulated around a «center» and a periphery. Consequently, they both question the dominating genealogy of modernity as a process of rationalization and progress, and denounce how such a narrative hides the colonized subjectivity from the eye of the beholder. They also share a common pantheon of reference authors, ranging from Said to Guha, from Subaltern studies to Fanon<sup>1</sup>.

As far as their ground for divergence is concerned, the geographical location is important in itself. As it is well known, postcolonial studies originated in the cultural context of the Indian sub-continent, whilst the literature that identifies itself as «decolonial» has instead its point of origin in the Latin American Studies milieu; the name's choice is meant to mark the difference. The respective geopolitical location influences how each of them assesses the impact of European colonialism respectively in the Ibero-Americas and in Asia. In the words of a founder of decolonial studies, the sociologist Annibal Quijano, the «Indians» of the Americans were «condemned to be an illiterate peasant subculture stripped of their objectified intellectual legacy» whilst in Asia «an important part of the history of the intellectual written legacy has been preserved. And it was precisely such epistemic suppression that gave origin to the category «Orient»<sup>2</sup>. Also theoretically relevant is the divergence on the periodization of history specific to either trend. Whilst converging on the subversion of the center-periphery spatial order, the decolonial authors highlight how the very notion of «post-colonial» still appears heavily indebted to an Euro-centric philosophy of history. According to Walter Mignolo, another protagonist of decolonial studies,

«Conceptually, the 'post' keeps you trapped in unipolar time conceptions. As far as for Western (since the Renaissance) cosmology «time» is one, singular and universal, you have no way out: you are trapped in a universal time that is owned by a particular civilization. Therefore, what comes after X has to be conceptualized as post-X»<sup>3</sup>.

The historical focus of decolonial authors begins with earlier eighteenth-century Enlightenment, moving from the very first steps of mo-

<sup>1</sup> See. G. Bhabra, *Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues*, in «Postcolonial Studies», 17, 2014, 2, pp. 115-121.

<sup>2</sup> A. Quijano, *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America*, in «Nepantla: Views from South», 1, 2000, 3, pp. 533-580, here p. 540.

<sup>3</sup> W. Mignolo, *Interview - Walter Mignolo/Part 2: Key Concepts*, <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/01/21/interview-walter-mignolopart-2-key-concepts/> (e-international relations, Jan 21 2017).

dernity in the sixteenth century. Decolonial studies assume coloniality, rather than colonialism, as the focus of their critique, defining coloniality as a condition rather than as an event, a specific mode of domination that persists once «colonialism», meant as a political order, has faded from the historical horizon. Coloniality outlives colonialism because it is inherently connected to modernity; as the title of a seminal work by Walter Mignolo<sup>4</sup> makes clear, it is modernity's «darker face» rather than its «consequence»<sup>5</sup>.

Modernity and colonization were born as twins; Dussel identifies the year 1492 as the moment when «Europe could constitute itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, colonizing an alterity that gave back its image of itself». So as there would not be modernity without colonization, there would be no Europe without the encounter with the «other»; however, this encounter had to be promptly removed from sight and confined into oblivion.

«This other, in other words, was not 'dis-covered' (descubierto), or admitted, as such, but concealed, or 'covered-up' (encubierto), as the same as what Europe assumed it had always been»<sup>6</sup>.

The option for a «de-colonial» glance affirms the quest for an alternative temporality, which does not assume the European narrative of history as its point of reference. Rather, it affirms the need to open up

«to the multiple times of cultures and civilizations upon which Western Civilization impose its conceptualization of time. The 'de-' indicates above all the need and the goal of the re: epistemic reconstitutions, re-emergence, resurgence, re-existence. That is, neither new nor post»<sup>7</sup>.

The refusal to conceive of coloniality as a «post» in European history necessarily leads the decolonial paradigm to be quite alien from showing the same elective affinity with the vocabulary of postmodernism common to many postcolonial writers<sup>8</sup>. However harsh the critique to

<sup>4</sup> W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity, Global Futures and Decolonial Options*, Durham - London, Duke University Press, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> G. Bhabra, *Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues*, p. 115.

<sup>6</sup> E. Dussel, *Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)*, in «Boundary 2», 20, 1993, 3: *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*, pp. 65-76, here p. 75. See also *1492: El encubrimiento del Otro. Hacia el origen del «mito de la Modernidad»*, La Paz, Plural Ediciones - UMSA, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> W. Mignolo, *Interview - Walter Mignolo/Part 2*.

<sup>8</sup> A. Acheraïou, *Questioning Hybridity, Post Modernism and Globalization*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p. 144.

an exclusively Eurocentric view of modernity might be, not all decolonial authors automatically and entirely reject the whole of modernity's heritage, including the most controversial notion of «reason». To make one significant example, Enrique Dussel moves from the critique of Hegelian philosophy of history – that sees Europe as a center that irradiated progress on the periphery – in his exploration of modernity. These quests lead him to identify the need for sacrificial violence that punishes whoever resists to progress as a core aspect of the project of modernity, which he denounces as a «myth». Nonetheless, the Argentinian philosopher reaffirms the specificity of his thesis in opposition to a generic postmodern perspective, as his critique aims to salvage modern rationality by bringing to light and solving its contradictions rather than discarding it altogether. Whilst investigating the nucleus of genocidal violence hidden in the «myth of modernity», Dussel does not deny «the rational kernel of the universalist rationalism of the Enlightenment; only its irrational moment as a sacrificial myth»<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, «The postmodernists criticize modern reason as a reason of terror; we criticize modern reason because of the irrational myth that it conceals»<sup>10</sup>.

This explains, at least in part, the significant ouvertures towards normativity as well as towards alternative forms of moral universalism and cosmopolitanism made by some of its most important representatives such as Dussel and Mignolo. The critique of modernity provides Dussel with elements to elaborate his ambitious philosophical proposal of «transmodernity»<sup>11</sup>. By this term, Dussel means a fully fledged normative proposal of a discursive liberation ethics, evidently reminiscing of Ricoeur's and Lévinas vocabulary of intersubjectivity. At the origin of transmodernity lies a transformative re-encounter between modernity and its «Other», which permits to move forward «from the imposition of the dominating ego on the 'Other' to the intersubjective construction of the reasons of everyone»<sup>12</sup>. Dussel's transmodern intersubjectivity provides Walter Mignolo with the necessary ethical and philosophical

<sup>9</sup> E. Dussel, *Eurocentrism and Modernity*, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66. On this point, see D. Branca *Colonialità, modernità e identità sociali in alcune categorie di Quijano e Dussel*, in «Visioni LatinoAmericane», 10, 2014, pp. 84-101, here p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> Dussel's transmodernity can be considered as the philosophical integration to Quijano's notion of coloniality, although neither of them actually acknowledged this connection.

<sup>12</sup> E. Dussel - E. Ibarra-Colado, *Globalization, Organization and the Ethics of Liberation*, in «Organization Articles», 13, 2006, 4, pp. 489-508, here p. 501. The quoted article reflects the main thesis articulated in *Filosofía de la Liberación*, Bogotá, Nueva America, 1996 (english translation *Philosophy of Liberation*, New York, Orbis books, 1985).

background to elaborate a political proposal of «critical and dialogical cosmopolitanism»<sup>13</sup> which, instead of attempting to suffocate diversity, assumes it as a constitutive principle. «Pluriversality» and «diversality» thus become alternative roads to universalism, grounded in a «diversal rationality».

Whilst openly privileging a South-South dimension of dialogue, decolonial philosophical explorations are conducted in dialogue with many other interlocutors, beginning with Habermas and Apel<sup>14</sup>; in fact, Dussel's commitment to a discursive project of liberation presents many points of similarity with Habermas' unfinished project of modernity, as they are both «emancipatory processes still in progress». As pointed out by Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Dussel's liberation ethics is to the project of decolonization what discourse ethics is to the Enlightenment project of modernity

«in the sense that it encapsulates normative principles the application of which furthers the project of decolonization. Transmodernity can be seen as the application of liberation ethics to history, and to the ethical recognition of the other as a subject of knowledge and culture»<sup>15</sup>.

Besides the explicitly acknowledged interlocutions, the philosophical proposal of transmodernity and diversal universalism presents significant resonances with similar quests, as shown by Mendieta's choice to place this perspective in a kind of ideal dialogue with a palette of important voices, highlighting how Mignolo joins Butler in giving voice to the «cosmopolitanism of the subaltern», and how Dussel does not only join Habermas in his quest for an alternative universalism but also resonates with the work of Cornell West. Extremely suggestive is also Mendieta's reference to Antony Appiah<sup>16</sup>, whose specific version of cosmopolitanism presents many point of convergence with both Mignolo and Dussel.

Although this skeletal review has rather emphasized the differences, post- and decolonial critiques do not only share some of their theoretical

<sup>13</sup> W. Mignolo, *The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism*, in «Public Culture», 12, 2000, 3, pp. 721-748.

<sup>14</sup> E. Mendieta, *Introduction*, in E. Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, London, Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 1-20.

<sup>15</sup> N. Maldonado-Torres, *Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique – An Introduction*, in «Transmodernity – Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World», 1, 2012, 3.

<sup>16</sup> E. Mendieta, *Global Fragments: Latinamericanisms, Globalizations, and Critical Theory*, Albany NY, State of New York University Press, 2007, pp. 11-12.

foundations, but most importantly converge in their relevance to the present: convincingly, Nigam suggests to read decolonization

«not as a particular, privileged mode of approaching the problem of knowledge or doing theory in the post colonial world but rather, as referring to a range of possible strategies that may allow us to think our present independently – as a necessary preliminary step towards epistemic reconstitution»<sup>17</sup>.

## 2. De-coloniality, post-coloniality, and secularization

These general remarks on the post- and decolonial reading of modernity are necessary to understand how these two schools of thought engaged with the debate on postsecularization and postsecularism as well as with the role of religion in the public sphere<sup>18</sup>. The reasons why topics such as the end of secularization and the crisis of secularism were bound to enter the post- and decolonial radar are evident, as the claim of being the point of origin of disenchantment and rationalization processes is crucial for self-constructing narratives of Europe (or West more in general). However, the path of this critical itinerary is far from being linear. As it will be briefly analyzed below, the critique to secularization and secularism will first of all focus on the profound connection between Christian theological categories and secularization/secularism, and will then proceed as far as to undermine the viability of the very notion of the category of religion. Their critique forcefully establishes the need to sharpen explanatory tools in order to re-frame and re-focus normative perspectives, thus motivating their rejection of secularism. The next paragraph will address how this itinerary will not lead to an enthusiastic embrace between post- and decolonial perspectives and the harbingers of postsecularization and postsecularism.

In fact, the first generation of postcolonial studies did not seem particularly interested in debating secularization and/or secularism<sup>19</sup>. Many among this first generation of scholars, beginning with Edward Said, still saw in secularity a space of emancipation; even more importantly,

<sup>17</sup> A. Nigam, *Decolonizing Theory. Thinking across Traditions*, New Delhi - London, Bloomsbury, 2020, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> It is now essential to maintain the distinction between secularization and secularism, and correspondingly between their respective «posts», previously sometimes overlooked. Whilst secularization indicates a series of historical, social, and cultural projects, secularism should be considered as a fully fledged political project – according to many, an «ideology».

<sup>19</sup> B. Robbins, *Is the Post Colonial Also Post Secular*, in «Boundary 2», 40, 2013, 1, pp. 245-262.

the memory of how relevant secularism had been for many decolonization struggles (from India to Palestine and Algeria) was still vivid<sup>20</sup>. Nonetheless, the critical work on colonial temporality necessarily entailed the subversion of the narrative of Europe's exceptionality as the source of processes of rationalization and disenchantment, of which Chakrabarty's affirmation of the time of «Gods and Spirits» represents a paradigmatic example<sup>21</sup>. The investigation of explanatory categories such as secularity, secularism, and secularization leads to unveiling the specific form of epistemic violence that frames the colonized in the realm of «not yet»: as Nigam remarks

«Ask anyone who has been trained in the social sciences ... and you will be told that there is something fundamentally wrong with 'us' and our societies: our modernity incomplete, our secularism is distorted, our democracy is immature, our development is arrested and even our capitalism is retarded!»<sup>22</sup>.

Decolonial scholars highlight how much this narrative is functional to the whole colonial project, as it firmly places the colonizers in the realm of critical reason, and the colonized into a space still dominated by «religion», tradition and, ultimately, irrationality.

«Colonization found a justification in secular discourse because, ultimately, the colonial others were conceived as primitives living in stages where only religion or tradition dominated their customs and ways of being»<sup>23</sup>.

The exploration of West-centered modernity leads to even more radical results when it comes to identifying how much the categories of secularization, secularity and secularism were indebted to the specific Jewish-Christian for a double reason. First of all, postcolonial and decolonial reflection crosses paths with that of authors such as Marcel Gauchet or Charles Taylor, to make just a few names, in highlighting

<sup>20</sup> See M. Walzer, *The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions*, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> D. Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe. Postcolonial thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000. David Martin's work deserves to be at least mentioned for his contribution to a redefinition of «secularization» «as primarily a local Western phenomenon», as remarked by S. Brewitt Taylor, *David Martin's The Religious and the Secular (1969): An Underestimated Masterwork in the Study of Western Secularization*, in «Society», 57, 2020, pp. 132-139, here p. 137.

<sup>22</sup> A. Nigam, *Decolonizing Theory*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> N. Maldonado-Torres, *Secularism and Religion in the Modern/Colonial World-System: From Secular Postcoloniality to Postsecular Transmodernity*, in C.A. Jáuregui - M.L. Moraña - E. Dussel (eds.), *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2008, pp. 360-387.

the huge debt that the notion of secularization still owes to the articulation of immanence and transcendence typical of Christianity, or even of all Abrahamic religions. Each following a specific itinerary, they all reach a similar conclusion in identifying the *seculum* as the «time in between» the incarnation and the realization of eschatological hopes. In this perspective

«the confrontation between European Christianity and modern European secular discourse may be understood as an intra-imperial event, inserted in the logic of the management of the modern/colonial world-system»<sup>24</sup>.

The acknowledgement of Jewish-Christian roots of secularization questions the viability of its alter ego, «religion».

Following Talal Asad's view of religion as the result of discursive practices rooted in specific political processes as well as in power relationships, post- and decolonial authors deconstruct how Western categories, originating from a Christian background, have been imposed on a plurality of diverse experiences<sup>25</sup>. The subsequent recognition by mainstream scholarship of a plurality of «World religions» has preserved, rather than undermined, Western universalism, disguised under a pretence of pluralism<sup>26</sup>, by operating a foreclosure of all practices, subjectivities and discourses that would not fit into the straitjacket of «religion». In short, the crucial move of a post- and decolonial approach consists in highlighting the mutual dependence of secularization and religion, as both of them share a common origin in specifically Christian theological categories.

«Christian categories for understanding Christianity – as well as modern/colonial distinctions between the religious and the secular – became the optics through which other 'religions' would be observed and analyzed. The religious would be distinguished from the secular, and Christianity would often be conceived as the religious formation most attuned with modernity and the secular organization of society»<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.

<sup>25</sup> T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2003. For a detailed analysis of the debate, E. Bugyis, *Postsecularism as Colonialism by Other Means*, in «Critical Research on Religion», 3, 2015, 1, pp. 5-40.

<sup>26</sup> This is the thesis developed by T. Masuwaza in *The Invention of World Religions Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago IL, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> N. Maldonado-Torres, *Religious Studies in/and the Decolonial Turn*, in <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/theorizing-modernities/religiousstudiesdecolonialturn/> March 2020, accessed 10 May 2020.

This brief account of how secularization is reframed by post- and decolonial studies provides the basic elements to focus their position in the debate on the crisis of the secularization. In light of the above, a postsecular perspective may appear as yet another enforcement of a European-centered narrative, as it resorts to that notion of «religion» whose relevance and viability have been so drastically challenged. Rooted in a misconception, the paradigm of postsecularization thus continues to hide rather than reveal non-Western genealogies and identities. When «religion» itself is seen as the forced application of a Christian theological scheme to a series of phenomena and processes that originate elsewhere, both secularisation and its «post» reveal their profoundly «colonial» nature. To put it bluntly, Christianity, and even more, religion are only a Western affair, and so is secularization; consequently, postsecularization can hardly be anything else than another attempt of exporting and forcing European-born categories onto the colonized: Maldonado-Torres speaks of the «postreligious» character of decolonial transmodernity, which «recognizes that what is often referred to as «religion» can be as colonizing as secularism itself<sup>28</sup>.

### 3. Is postcolonialism postsecular?

Deconstructing explanatory categories such as secularization paves the way for a reconsideration of secularism as a political process, as well as on possible alternatives based on its «post», namely postsecularism, a term loaded with normative implications<sup>29</sup>.

The dark sides of secularism have been thoroughly explored and debated; many voices have remarked its inadequacy to accommodate identities and practices not originated within the Jewish-Christian horizon. Ashish Nandy opened the way, stygmatising secularism as a «hegemonic lan-

<sup>28</sup> N. Maldonado-Torres, *Secularism and Religion in the Modern/Colonial World-System: From Secular Postcoloniality to Postsecular Transmodernity*, p. 383.

<sup>29</sup> Attempting a full reconstruction of the sociological debate on postsecularization would far exceed the possibilities of this article; the basic reference is however to P. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Grand Rapids MI, William P. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 1999. The task of summarizing the various implications of «postsecularism» is even harder, as the term may thus indicate quite diverse political projects. On the one hand, a postsecular perspective is invoked by those who wish to welcome, rather than exclude, religious arguments and identities in democratic public spheres; for this tradition of thought, Habermas' work constitutes a pivotal point of reference. In other cases, postsecularism indicates the renewed attention to religion motivated by a more or less explicit dismissal of the capacity of immanent politics to provide a shared horizon of values and meaningful social bonds.

guage ... popularized by Westernized intellectual and middle classes»<sup>30</sup>. Decolonial and postcolonial studies thus converge in identifying secularism as a part of the modern, colonial epistemology, «a shared sense of what counts as knowledge, and they apply power to that knowledge, changing the world to fit the way it is perceived»<sup>31</sup>. More recently, Maldonado-Torres affirmed that the confrontation between European Christianity and modern European secular discourse may be understood as an «intra-imperial event, inserted in the logic of the management of the modern/colonial world-system»<sup>32</sup>. On this point, it may be appropriate to mention that the Indian context has provided the breeding ground for a series of creative re-appropriations and reformulations of secularism, such as those attempted by Bharghava and Chandhoke<sup>33</sup>. At a closer glance, even the Latin American milieu shows some openings towards secularism. Dussel himself does not discard *in toto* a secularist perspective, when aiming at overcoming the

«opposition between fundamentalist religion (as an alienating irrational myth) and secularism (a Eurocentric, colonialist and dominating ideology) to arrive at a mature, healthy relation between critical-thinking and liberating religion and the necessary secularisation of political, economic, and other organisations»<sup>34</sup>.

Transmodernity itself, as it was briefly mentioned above, revolves around a dialogical and dialectic structure; trans-modern thought, affirms Maldonado-Torres, «is inspired by the recognition that religion is a modern concept that can never subsist without its opposite, modern secularism»<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> A. Nandy, *The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance*, in «Alternatives», 13, 1988, 2, pp. 177-194, here p. 177.

<sup>31</sup> V.W. Lloyd - L. Viefhues-Bailey, *Introduction: Is the Postcolonial Postsecular?*, in «Critical Research on Religion», 3, 2015, 1, (special issue), pp. 13-24, here p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> N. Maldonado-Torres in C.A. Jáuregui - M.L. Moraña - E. Dussel (eds.), *Coloniality at Large*, p. 367.

<sup>33</sup> See at least R. Bharghava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics*, Oxford University Press, 2005, and *How Secular is European Secularism*, «European Societies», 16, 2014, 3, pp. 329-336, and N. Chandhoke, *Beyond Secularism: The Rights of Religious Minorities*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999. See also H. Bhabha's appeal for a «subaltern secularism» that «keeps faith with those communities and individuals which have been denied, excluded, from the egalitarian and tolerant values of liberal individualism», H. Bhabha, *Unpacking my library again*, in I. Chambers - L. Curti (eds.), *The Post Colonial Question*, London - New York, Routledge, 1996, pp. 199-211, here p. 209. For a critique of post colonial antiseccularists, B. Robbins, *Is the Post Colonial Also Post Secular?*.

<sup>34</sup> E. Dussel, *World Religions and Secularization from a Post Colonial and Non Eurocentric Perspective*, in D. Peteren - D. Whalof (eds.), *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History*, New Brunswick NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2002 pp. 179-190.

<sup>35</sup> N. Maldonado-Torres, *Secularism and Religion in the Modern/Colonial World-System: From Secular Postcoloniality to Postsecular Transmodernity*, p. 383.

At a first glance, the postsecular project appeals to a postcolonial sensitivity because, by restoring the prestige of religion, it provides «as an antidote to secularism as a colonial political project, the secular-colonial-modern»<sup>36</sup>: the normative secularity whose imperialist character has been forcefully denounced, among others, by Saba Mahmood<sup>37</sup>. A more careful scrutiny reveals a series of possible glitches. The first and most evident objection stems from the analysis of circumstances; conversations on the crisis of secularism appear strongly influenced by domestic Western issues, primarily connected with migratory flows and concerns about the (supposedly) growing Muslim presence.

Postsecularist positions have to face more compelling objections from the field of decolonial and postcolonial studies: the critique of postsecularization as an interpretative tool evidently challenges the viability of postsecularist political projects, insofar as it questions the notion of «religion» at the root, unveiling its partiality. The original question should perhaps be reformulated as follows: «can postreligious be postsecular»? Problematizing the genealogy of secularization in such a radical way, post- and decolonial studies raise doubts on the legitimacy of even the most well-meaning postsecularist openings towards «others»<sup>38</sup>. The uncritical assumption and use of the category of religion may result in a sort of paternalistic «ethnographic philanthropy» as in the pregnant definition of Amin R. Mufti<sup>39</sup>.

#### 4. Postsecular is post- and decolonial

This brief account of post- and decolonial positions on postsecularization and postsecularism did not have any ambition of exhausting a much richer and complex debate. What is at stake, however, is not so much establishing whether and to what degree secularism deserves to be sal-

<sup>36</sup> V.W. Lloyd - L. Viefhues-Bailey, *Introduction*, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> S. Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age. A Minority Report*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of possible objections to Habermas' postsecularist proposal see P. Losonczi, *Radicalising the Postsecular Thesis. Provincialising Habermas*, in T. Bailey (ed.), *Deprovincialising Habermas. Global Perspectives*, New Delhi, Routledge, 2013, pp 218-238, here p. 229.

<sup>39</sup> A.R. Mufti, *Why I am not Postsecularist*, in «Boundary 2», 40, 2013, 1, pp. 7-19, here p. 14; «I am not a postsecularist because postsecularism envisions a philanthropic orientation of the postcolonial liberal Western subject toward its others, which closes off in advance any possibility of engagement and critical involvement in the postcolonial societies and communities in question, with only the Western subject being understood as self-critical», p. 16.

vaged, but rather investigating how the post- and decolonial paradigms can contribute to the quest for genuinely pluralist public spheres, where difference is recognized and not only «tolerated». If postcoloniality perhaps does not have to be postsecular, the opposite is surely true: any postsecular project genuinely oriented towards pluralism and inclusion must engage with a post- and decolonial perspective.

Post- and decolonial studies offer a major contribution as «*maîtres de soupçon*»<sup>40</sup> exactly because of their problematization of the category of religion. Too often, in fact, «religion» is hypostatized, represented as refractory to any form of reflexive self-criticism, negotiations and hybridization. Even when carried out with the best of intentions, this kind of essentialization processes do not lead to genuine recognition dynamics, as much as they result in forms of misrecognition. On the other hand, casting away the notion of religion too hastily may result in yet another attempt of silencing and foreclosing diverging identities, as though they were based upon some kind of cognitive «misunderstanding». On the contrary, religion may function as «a reflexive identity marker, that mobilizes persons and things, desires, and practices in particular traditions in distinctive ways»<sup>41</sup>. Insofar as religion is perceived as an important component of identity for individuals and groups it becomes an element in emancipatory claims for recognition that deserves to be taken into due consideration. Within this framework, the decolonial critique of religion is an important card to play to reinforce intersubjective and dialogical views of identity. Muddling the water of «religion», the radically alternative genealogies proposed by post- and decolonial studies help overcome the stark opposition between Western secularism and a hazy dimension of «religious», where non-dominant forms of agency remain confined<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> «Masters of suspicion»; by this expression the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur defined Marx, Freud and Nietzsche.

<sup>41</sup> Cecile Laborde provides an interesting argument against the deconstruction of religion from a liberal point of view, remarking how it may undermine all the *acquis* of liberalism, primarily the defense of individual freedom against a dominant religion allied with political power. C. Laborde, *Three approaches to the study of Religion*, in «The Immanent Frame» <https://tif.src.org/2014/02/05/three-approaches-to-the-study-of-religion/>.

<sup>42</sup> V.W. Lloyd - L. Viefhues-Bailey, *Introduction*, p. 17.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The brief considerations presented above have focused mostly on how the radical shift in the angle of observation on secularization, secularism and their respective «posts» suggested by decolonial and postcolonial studies may provide fresh resources in the quest for genuine democratic pluralism. Furthermore, the relevance of a post- and decolonial glance is apparent for any reflection on «religion and politics» in the context of globalization. The list of possible applications embraces dramatically urgent topics, ranging from the permanence of «religious» vocabulary and symbolism in violent conflicts to the attempts of manipulating religion in view of exclusivist identity narratives. The conversation between these paradigms is far from having exhausted all its possible implications. As Paolo Costa brilliantly points out, by refusing any ideological simplification, it constitutes a powerful defense of human cultural diversity and an effective tool in the fight against the hegemonic pretension of imperial powers<sup>43</sup>, whose continuing attempt at domination proves the survival of coloniality well beyond the end of historical colonialism.

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<sup>43</sup> P. Costa, *La città post-secolare Il nuovo dibattito sulla secolarizzazione*, Brescia, Queriniana, 2019, pp. 120-121.