Reactive Politicization and Religious Dissidence: The Political Mutations of the Religious

1. Introduction

Religion is breaking records in contemporary democracies. In Latin America, a region characterized by its low confidence in institutions, the Catholic Church is by far the most trusted one.[1] Europe is debating, with limited success, the accommodation of the "Muslim other."[2] In the United States, the role of religion in politics has probably never been so noticeable.[3] These examples indicate that a construction of the world in which religion occupies a marginal position does not hold together any longer. Although it is possible to insist on a nostalgia for a secularized world—if it indeed ever existed—this is the time to move beyond that fiction and think about the roles of religion in novel ways.

Gender and sexuality offer the most challenging dimension of the question of the sociopolitical relevance of religion. A large part of religious revitalization involves reinforcing the institutionalization of the traditional family against the threat of liberation of gender roles and sexual identities.[4] Mainstream religious institutions have transformed that threat into the primary justification for their public interventions and political alliances. If, in general, religion had been the main carrier of patriarchy and heteronormativity,[5] much of the contemporary revitalization

[1]The Latinobarometro has shown, in a general survey carried out during 2004, that the Church has around 70% approval in almost all Latin American countries and this approval rate has been quite stable during the last ten years (see www.latinobarometro.org).

[2]Probably, the French debate over the prohibition of the Islamic headscarf is the most visible manifestation of these limitations. See, for example, Etienne Balibar, "Dissonances within *Laicite*," *Constellations* 11 (2004): **PAGE NOS??**

[3]Particularly when considering the role of religion in the 2004 Presidential elections.

[4]I use the term "liberation" to indicate the de-institutionalization of social and legal norms that enforce gender and sexuality inequalities. This liberation takes place, then, at two main levels: as liberalization at the state level and as democratization at the level of civil society. For the concept of dual politics in social movements, see Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994).

[5]Religion is the "major cultural reinforcer of modern industrial patriarchy": see

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has radicalized this position.[6] Patriarchal religious sectors are reinforcing a "pelvic orthodoxy" that holds feminists and sexual minorities responsible for the crisis of the family in contemporary societies.[7]

The challenge, then, is not just to move away from the fiction of a secular world, but to do so while intensifying the process of gender and sexuality liberation. While secularism as a paradigm seems inappropriate to fully capture religious revitalization, the risk of legitimizing religion as a political dimension is the empowerment of illiberal agendas. So the question becomes, how can the centrality of religion in contemporary democracies, which to a large extent aims to (re)gain control over women and sexuality, be accommodated with gender and sexual pluralism, without either de-legitimizing the former or renouncing the latter?

In this article I consider contemporary dynamics obscured in prevailing analyses that are important for understanding gender and sexuality beyond secularism as an ideological construction.[8] Despite the fact that, for decades, secularism offered an important analytical and normative approach for confronting religion and pushing forward gender and sexual liberalization, it has failed while doing so to notice important mutations. In particular, I offer an analysis of the ways in which the two main sectors politicizing gender and sexuality have mutated. After four decades of antagonism, feminist and sexual minority movements and patriarchal religious sectors have been mutually affected. In the process of sustaining their opposite agendas, both sectors have been partially reshaped, weakening the idea of the religious and the secular as an unbridgeable dichotomy. On the one hand, at least partially, patriarchal religious sectors have mirrored the politics of feminists and sexual minorities in their defense of the family. A strategic mutation has been taking place whereby religious activism takes the form of civil society organizations and secular discourses. This reactive politicization, not fully captured by current approaches, offers for analysis a phenomenon that takes place in

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Sheila Briggs, "Women and Religion," in Beth B. Hess and Myra Marx Ferree (eds.), *Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1987), pp. 408-41. For a summary of the main reasons why religion is an influential dimension on gender and sexuality, see Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. chap. 3.

[6]Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

[7]"Pelvic orthodoxy" is used by Daniel C. Maguire in "Religion and Reproductive Policy," in Kathleen M. Sands (ed.), *God Forbid: Religion and Sex in American Public Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 185-202.

[8]See Talal Asad's analysis of secularism as a political doctrine generated in modern Euro-America in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

the frontiers between the religious and the secular. On the other hand, some feminists and sexual minorities are embracing religious identities as a path toward gender and sexuality liberation. Muslim Feminists, Pro-abortion Catholics, and Gay Evangelicals are examples of the many ways that religious identities are being politicized in order to make traditional faiths compatible with the demands of feminists and sexual minorities. Thus, the concept of religious dissidence is proposed in order to comprehend the gendering and sexualizing of traditional religious identities as a significant political phenomenon.[9]

The inclusion of these concepts has a double purpose: analytical and normative. In the first place, reactive politicization and religious dissidence are proposed as a way of capturing opposing politicizations of the religious vis-à-vis gender and sexuality. Religion continues to be a crucial political dimension in contemporary societies, but in dynamic and novel ways. These two concepts contribute, then, to complementing the existing literature dealing with the connections between gender/sexuality and religion by offering an understanding of how complex politicization of religious identities is shaping local and global arenas. At a normative level, reactive politicization and religious dissidence explore the possibility of finding, in religious revitalization, a source for further democratization. Without denying that secularism has provided, and still does provide, a crucial theoretical apparatus for contemporary democracies, this article departs from the notion that it is important to move beyond secularism, even if for the purpose of bringing it back in a refreshed form. Reactive politicization and religious dissidence indicate that it is not by enforcing religious privatization, but, rather, by fully considering religion as a public and political dimension, that the pervasiveness of patriarchy and heteronormativity can be better understood and confronted.

2. Religion Beyond a Democratic Malfunctioning

In recent decades, two conflicting processes of "deprivatization" have been closely involved with gender roles and sexual identities. On the one hand, feminist and sexual minority movements have successfully taken gender and sexuality out from the corset imposed by the domestic sphere.[10] Focusing on the patriarchal and heteronormative aspects of so-

[9]I use the notion of "gendering and sexualizing" as a means to convey the addition of feminist and gay/lesbian/queer perspectives as a critical lens through which to address issues not previously analyzed in this manner.

[10]I am referring here to the contemporary feminist and sexual minorities movements that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s mostly in the U.S.A. and Western Europe, but also, though less considered, in Latin American countries, such as Brazil or Argentina. Both the feminist and gay/lesbian movements recognize antecedents dating back to the nine-

cial institutions, these movements have introduced into political and academic agendas new debates addressing inequalities.[11] On the other hand, most religions have resisted being marginalized, and continue to perform crucial public activities in contemporary societies.[12] Modernity did not in fact bring a decline in religious involvement; there has been, on the contrary, a strong revitalization of religious sectors, much of it invested in defending a traditional understanding of family. In those countries where a considerable liberalization of gender/sexuality has been produced, such as the United States or those in Western Europe, religious institutions are actively mobilizing, with different levels of success, to reverse those reforms.[13] In other countries, such as in Latin America, they have organized preventive reactions articulating networks and alliances to reaffirm a traditional understanding of the family.[14]

For decades, secularism provided a powerful paradigm that has strongly influenced the social sciences. Mixing analytical and normative elements and collapsing different dimensions, secularism served as a theoretical and political tool for regulating religion in democratic societies. On the one hand, secularization theory offered a historical account of modernity as a differentiation process that ended up with religion relegated to the margins. Not only would different faiths lose their centrality in shaping people's identities, but religion would also be confined to its own sphere. Secularization considers, then, the retreat of religion from political life, a de-politicization as a result of societal differentiation where the religious and the secular become distinguishable and autonomous spheres.[15] But secularism has also served as a political doctrine, as a way of constructing and confronting the religious. This construction presents religion as non-rational and, as such, in need of being accom-

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teenth century. However, the 1960s were a landmark in the history of these movements. The diversity and stages these movements went through is a complex matter exceeding the purposes of this article.

[11]Although patriarchy and heteronormativity emphasize different dimensions, both refer to a dominant model of gender and sexuality that socially and legally institutionalizes women and sexual minorities as less worthy—what Nancy Fraser terms "misrecognition" in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[12]For the proposal of religious "deprivatization," see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[13]In the U.S.A., however, the presence and power of conservative religious groups is much greater than in Western Europe.

[14]See *Debate Feminista*, *La Derecha y los Derechos*, Año 14, vol. 27, April 2003; Mala Htun, *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[15]In particular, this retreat is connected to the surfacing of the nation-states as an "imagined community." See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

modated as part of the private sphere. A democratic public sphere is, then, defined as an arena free from religion.[16] The corseting and weakening of the religious brought about by modernity opened the possibility for the development of democracy.

Although an important body of literature has been produced that interrupts the paradigmatic status of secularization,[17] the strong presence of religion in contemporary societies is considered, by many, to be an indicator of the need to reinforce secularism. What is usually referred to as a contemporary religious resurgence[18] has reinforced the urgency for secularism, principally among those concerned with gender and sexuality inequalities. The public presence of religious actors and discourses is considered as democratic malfunctioning that needs to be resolved by enforcing secularism as a political doctrine. Even progressive religious sectors tend "to speak the language of secularism" with respect to sexuality and reproduction.[19]

Two long-established approaches have resurfaced for understanding and confronting religious sectors publicly defending the traditional family. Either by being considered as a fundamentalist menace or as violating church and state separation,[20] patriarchal religious sectors are presented as eroding democracy. Although fundamentalism, as a category, was coined in the U.S.A. at the turn of the twentieth century,[21] it has become widely used for understanding a variety of religious groups and for

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[16]See William Connolly, *Why I am not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 20.

[17]There are multiple critical approaches to secularization that are usually presented either as neo-secularist (those that, although critical to traditional formulations, reaffirm the importance of secularization theory) or post-secular positions (those that present secularization as a specific political construction that cannot account for most of the religious dynamics in contemporary societies). See Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); and D. Yamane, "Secularization on Trial: In Defense of a Neosecularization Paradigm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (1997): 109-22.

[18]I prefer the term "revitalization" rather than "resurgence" because I am still not convinced whether it is a resurgence of religion in societies or a resurgence of academic interests in religion.

[19]See Kathleen M. Sands, "Public, Pubic, and Private: Religion in Political Discourse," in Sands (ed.), *God Forbid*, pp. 60-90.

[20]Particularly in the Americas, both the main political campaigns and the scholarly literature analyzing religious actors resisting feminist and sexual minority demands tend do so either as a problem of insufficient church separation or as fundamentalist emergence. For a more general consideration, see Courtney W. Howland (ed.), *Religious Fundamentalisms and the Human Rights of Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). For the use of discourses on fundamentalism or church/state separation in Latin America, see, for example, the several articles included in *Debate Feminista, La Derecha y los Derechos*, Año 14, vol. 27, April 2003.

[21]More precisely it emerged as a self-reference concept by a group of Protestant Christians.

conducting important international comparisons.[22] From its original meaning—to refer to those taking the bible literally—a series of characteristics are used to "categorize" fundamentalism, and all of them emphasize its opposition to modernity. Fundamentalist movements are defined as resisting the secularization process, particularly the decoupling of science and religion, and the pluralized understanding of family. The latter characteristic is what has transformed, in the view of some, the reemergence of religious sectors defending the "natural" family in fundamentalist manifestations.[23] The other narrative used to understand the religious defense of the traditional family is that of insufficient church/state separation. Separation from the church has been a mark of autonomy for states, availing them of the ability to govern without dependency on religious institutions.[24] In this sense, any influence of religious sectors on public policies or legal regulations is considered as a manifestation of the lack of autonomy of the state from the church, as the weakening of a democratic principle.

Although fundamentalism and the separation of church and state partially capture the problematic of religion reinforcing patriarchy, they become the short-hand terms for explaining a more complex phenomenon. These approaches tend to reduce religious public roles to an anti-modern influence or to a democratic malfunctioning. This is not to imply that these approaches, which are predominant, are unnecessary, but rather that they have become a reductive, thus incomplete, way to understand and confront patriarchal religious influences in contemporary democracies. By placing religion at the margins of modernity or democracy, they make invisible important sociopolitical dynamics; thus, neither approach fully captures the complex ways that religious sectors become politicized in their defense of the natural family.

The notion of reactive politicization is proposed in order to understand the religious revitalization defending the traditional family without necessary placing it in tension with democracy or modernity. These religious sectors *react* and organize against what they perceive as the crisis of the family generated by modernity and globalization. Yet, paradoxi-

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[22]The Fundamentalist Project has produced, for example, five volumes debating fundamentalism as an international phenomenon.

[23]In recent years, the concept of the "natural family," understood as "the fundamental unit of society, inscribed in human nature, and centered on the union of a man and a woman in the lifelong covenant of marriage," has been surfacing on the political agenda of patriarchal religious sectors (according to the Mexico City Declaration, World Congress of the Family III: www.worldcongress.org). The natural family is presented as universal, unique, and "self-evident," a conceptualization that has allowed heterogeneous religious groups—such as Evangelical, Catholic and Muslim—to come together.

[24]This process has been particularly important in Catholic dominated countries where the distinction between church and state has been historically difficult to draw.

cally, they in turn also become global and modern. Even if their articulations are merely strategic, they are nonetheless legitimate components of democratic politics. The notion of reactive politicization is proposed in order to capture the public interventions of religious sectors reinforcing patriarchy as a legitimate component of contemporary democracies.

2a. Reactive politicization

Although patriarchal religious sectors continue to be the main opposition to gender/sexuality liberation, they have changed, at least some of them, the ways in which they defend their understanding of the family. Religion has not only resisted privatization, but, in articulating that resistance, has adapted and mutated. Thus, narratives on church/state separation or on fundamentalism, while identifying some forms of religious deprivatization, tend to overlook other politicizations, which, though resisting pluralism, have become part of the democratic game. After decades of feminist and sexual minority movements, patriarchal religious sectors have mirrored, to a certain extent, these movements as a way of confronting them. These mirroring mutations, which tend to be overlooked in prevailing analyses, constitute an important dimension of religious politicization in contemporary societies.

The notion of reactive politicization aims to capture some of these mutations. The mutations are "reactive" in the sense that they are triggered by the crisis of the natural family, which is generally understood to be generated by the legitimization of feminist and sexual minority demands. They are, then, *actions resisting* feminist and sexual minority movements. These movements have changed not only academic and political agendas, but also the ways in which sectors resisting them mobilize. In particular, feminists and sexual minorities have become constitutive outsiders that provide a crucial rhetoric not only for the urgency of religious activism, but also for the possibility of interdenominational alliances that would otherwise have been impossible.[25] Religious groups, which have been historically characterized by strong confrontations, have come together in their opposition to feminist demands.[26] Probably the best example is taking place at the United Nations, where the American Religious Right, the Vatican, and some Islamic countries have

[25]For the role of "constitutive outside" as part of the political, see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).

[26]It has been called an "unholy alliance" and is taking place at national and transnational levels. For the U.S.A., see **FIRST NAME??** Bendyna et al., "Uneasy Alliance: Conservative Catholics and the Christian Right," *Sociology of Religion* 62 (2001): 51-64. For the transnational level, see Doris Buss and Didi Herman, *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

formed a unified anti-feminist bloc.

These reactive mutations are "political" in the sense that they are a legitimized part of the democratic game. The term *politicization* aims to capture what is usually overlooked by secularized approaches: the inclusion of religious groups defending the family as legitimate public actors. Beyond the content of their position—an illiberal one—these groups are constructing novel political spaces in their confrontations with feminist and sexual minority movements. The anti-pluralism found in some religious sectors is also a vibrant part of civil society; they represent the politicization of religious identities that cannot be reduced either to an irrational or fundamentalist phenomenon or to a problem of incomplete church/state separation. They are a manifestation of how civil society, as a democratic arena, is also a locus for illiberal manifestations. This politicization does not necessarily enrich public debates—many times it does the opposite—but it includes an antagonism that is crucial for understanding gender/sexuality politics.[27] Reactive politicization is, in many ways, shaping the discursive grammars of political debates.

Among the multiple changes that are part of the reactive politicization, it is possible to highlight two principal ones. In the first place, there has been an increased "NGOization" of religion.[28] The religious defense of the natural family is not only undertaken by churches or temples and their representatives, but also by an increasing number of civil society organizations defending religious doctrines. Such organizations represent an important face of religious revitalization. In the second place, patriarchal religious sectors are articulating their worldview less through religious discourse than through secular discourses. Instead of centering on the notion of morality and God, they are turning to scientific data and legal discourses in a sort of strategic secularism. This is not to imply that religious institutions and discourses have lost centrality vis-à-vis the phenomenon of reactive politicization. On the contrary, part of that centrality needs to be understood as reactive politicization; the NGOization and strategic secularism are ways in which religion continues to be a crucial public dimension.

2a.i. NGOization of the religious. Mirroring the emergence of feminist and sexual minority movements and organizations, some religious

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[27]For the constitutive role of antagonism in democratic politics, see Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993)

[28]The term "NGOization" is taken from an analysis of feminism in Latin America: see Sonia E. Alvarez, "Latin American Feminisms 'Go Global': Trends of the 1990s and Challenges for the New Millennium," in Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar (eds.), *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998).

sectors have also taken civil society as a privileged arena for confronting those movements. Since the 1970s, beginning in the United States and later expanding worldwide, an increasing number of religious organizations have been pressuring nation states and transnational forums to protect their worldviews, abortion being just the most visible component.[29] Although these organizations defend different religious traditions, such as Evangelical Protestantism, Mormonism, or Catholicism, their common reaction against feminism and sexual minorities has allowed a coordinated functioning.[30]

The emergence of these religious NGOs presents a defense against a double menace articulated by feminist and sexual minority movements. In the first place, the defense of the natural family vis-à-vis the increasing legitimacy of feminist and sexual minority movements' demands is the main reason why some societal sectors decide to organize and become political actors to defend their religious worldviews. It is constructed not as an issue of accommodation, but of survival; the encroaching legitimacy of feminist and sexual minority demands is assumed to destroy the bedrock of society.[31] In particular, these religious NGOs have over-politicized abortion and homosexuality, considering any liberalization of gender and sexuality as leading, unavoidably, to them. The reason these organizations monitor and control every reform that is in any way associated with issues of the family is because they read any move that challenges the centrality of the natural family as a strategy that by default aids in legalizing abortion and homosexuality. Abortion and homosexuality, constructed in non-negotiable terms, are just the most visible di-

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[29]For an account of these organizations in the U.S.A., see Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), particularly the "Introduction," in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). For the role of Catholicism as a normative tradition opposing gender/sexuality liberalization in Latin America, see Htun, *Sex and the State*.

[30]The following organizations are part of the New Christian Right in the United States: Christian Coalition of America; American Family Association (combatting sex and violence in the media); Focus on Family (against homosexual rights and feminist theory); Family Research Council (lobbies Congress and executive-branch agencies); Concerned Women of America (opposes gay-rights legislation and other issues it believes are detrimental to women and families). See Steven P. Brown, *Trumping Religion: The New Christian Right, the Free Speech Clause, and the Courts* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002). Further examples are: The World Policy Center; The Family Research Center; Human Life International; and The Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society. In Latin America, most of these organizations are Catholic, such as Portal de Belen, Fundacion 25 de Marzo in Argentina, or the different branches of Human Life International in almost all Latin America countries.

[31]Particularly, the legitimization of abortion and homosexuality has been constituted, by these sectors, in non-negotiable issues and the ultimate hidden purpose of any criticism to the natural family.

mensions of a wider sociopolitical agenda on gender and sexuality.

Second, these organizations also defend national sovereignty, which they consider weakened by the imposition of feminist and sexual minority demands on nation states. The legitimization of homosexuality and the decriminalization of abortion are presented as part of an "imperialist ideology" that threatens not only the natural family but also national sovereignty. To counter this ideology, these religious organizations have become transnational. Not only do they exist in different countries creating and recreating regional networks, but since 1997 these organizations have also organized three international conferences—World Congresses on Family—the largest forums on family issues.[32] This transnationalization is also manifested in the activism these religious organizations are engaged in at the United Nations.[33] Many religions reinforcing patriarchy find in globalization an inherent reality, either because they have never been fully "nationalized," like Catholicism or Islam, or because they have become increasingly international, like Evangelical Protestantism.[34] Other religious groups, particularly the American Religious Right, have moved from an anti-global standpoint to one that embraces their roles as global actors building a transnational pro-family agenda.[35]

Although these organizations represent an identity project that is antagonistic to feminist and sexual minority movements, the antagonism has also brought these organizations closer to the politics activated by those movements. The concept of strategic secularism is proposed in order to capture the complex articulations between the religious and the secular as part of the reactive politicization phenomenon.

2a.ii. Strategic secularism. An important transformation of patriarchal religious sectors has to do with the increased articulation of secular dis-

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[32]Three main congresses have taken place: Prague (1997), Geneva (1999), and Mexico (2004). The conveners of the Mexico Congress were The Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society and Red Familia. Approximately 3,200 people from over 75 countries participated in the Mexico Congress. Among them were government representative from Mexico and the U.S.A. (Martha Fox, Mexican First Lady; and Ellen Saverbrey, U.S.A. Ambassador at the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, who read a letter from President Bush); Catholic Church hierarchy (Cardinals Alfonso Trujillo, Renato Martino, and Norberto Rivera); and members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference at the U.N. (Mokhtar Lamani, Shahid Husain) (see information in World Congress on the Family's website: www.worldcongress.org).

[33]Buss and Herman, *Globalizing Family Values.*

[34]See José Casanova, "Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a 'Universal' Church," in Peter Beyer (ed.), *Religion in the Process of Globalization* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001). According to Peter Berger, Evangelical Protestantism and renascent Islam are the two "most dramatic cases of globalizing religion." See Peter L. Berger, "Globalization and Religion," *The Hedgehog Review* 4 (Summer 2002): **PAGE NOS??**

[35]Buss and Herman, *Globalizing Family Values.*

courses, scientific and legal, in their defense of the natural family.[36] Although secularism tends to separate the religious and the secular into two independent types of discourse, many religious actors, on the contrary, consider them as reflecting the same truth.[37] Instead of decoupling the religious and the secular, these actors tend to present them as belonging to a coherent framework in which their frontiers are neither delineated nor conclusive. The reactive politicization of religion is also manifested by an increased articulation of secularized discourses. If feminists and sexual minorities reinforce secularization as a way of liberating gender and sexuality, the religious reaction defends the natural family by increasingly articulating secular discourses. As part of the reactive politicization phenomenon, religious activism tends to strategically insert secular justifications in its defense of a religious worldview.[38] However, this switch from a religious into a secular defense of the family does not necessarily mean that there exists a position more open to debate and negotiation. The openness, or lack thereof, to negotiation does not necessarily depend, at least when considering gender and sexuality, on the religious or secular character of the intervention.

Religious sectors articulate two main types of secular discourse when defending the natural family. In the first place, there is an intensified use of scientific data. In general, religious sectors have been shifting from a moral/religious discourse to a scientific one in which the position is presented in rational terms and substantiated by objective data.[39] The condom debate constitutes the most recent example of strategic secularism. The attack against condom campaigns made by religious groups at local and global levels is mostly grounded not on the moral values of monogamy and abstinence, as it used to be until very recently, but on scientific

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[36]It is possible to think of similarities between this strategic secularism as part of the reactive politicization phenomenon and the production of "scientific arguments" to support creationism—in particular, John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co., 1961), where the authors argue that modern science provides evidence to reject evolutionism and support creationism. (See Michael Ruse, "Creationism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (available on line).)

[37]It is possible to hypothesize that more than different interpretations of facts, there exist different regimes of truth. For an analysis of Western Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism as responding to two regimes of truth, see Minoo Moallem, "Transnationalism, Feminism, and Fundamentalism," in Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem (eds.), *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (London: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 320-48.

[38]The distinction between religious versus secular reasons is, of course, a contested one.

[39]The use of scientific data has been a characteristic of the pro-life movement in the United States almost since its formation. See Michael W. Cuneo, "Life Battles: The Rise of Catholic Militancy Within the American Pro-Life Movement," in Weaver and Appleby (eds.), *Being Right*), pp. 270-99.

data showing that condoms are not efficient enough to prevent HIV prevalence. Some of the arguments lack empirical evidence, such as the affirmation that condom porosity allows HIV viruses to circulate.[40] However, there is a more sophisticated position affirming that the percentage of condom failures, for technical or human reasons, is high enough to conclude that condom campaigns are not efficient enough to prevent HIV.[41] The other scientific information used to sustain an anti-condom campaign is the success of the Ugandan case, an exceptional case in the African context because it has significantly decreased HIV prevalence. The explanation of Uganda's success is that instead of promoting condoms, or *only* promoting them, it has based public policy campaigns on behavioral changes such as the age of sexual debut, casual and commercial sex trends, partner reduction, *and* condom use.[42] Condom failure and the Ugandan case are increasingly being used by religious sectors as scientific proof of the need to enforce a traditional understanding of sexuality based on sex only within marriage as the only successful way to confront AIDS.

The reactive politicization of religion is also taking place by articulating legal discourses. Religious actors are becoming part of lawmaking processes, particularly by using judicial mechanisms. Religious activism has taken its battle to the courts. Mirroring the use that progressive sectors have made of litigation strategies to allow gender/sexuality liberalization, some religious sectors are also judicializing their defense of traditional values. In the United States, for example, during the last two decades several organizations belonging to the New Christian Right[43] have been actively using the courts, at the state and federal levels, as crucial battlegrounds for religious conservative activism.[44] It is also possible to

[40]This has been sustained by important Catholic referents, such as Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, who is the Vatican's Pontifical Counsel for the Family.

[41]This position is based on existing scientific evidence, which indicates that condom use has an efficacy of 90%, and concludes that a 10% failure is too high for being the base for public policy campaigns. For several years an intense debate has been going on over the level of efficacy of condoms for preventing HIV. What is relevant for this article is that religious groups opposing condoms are increasingly doing so by referring to "scientific" data.

[42]According to the USAID report, the most important determinant of the reduction in HIV incidence in Uganda "appears to be a decrease in multiple sexual partnerships and networks." Although the same report raises doubts about the possibility of Uganda's experience being replicated in a different sociocultural context, "especially in more cosmopolitan, Westernized settings," C-Fam presents Uganda as a leading case indicating the need to revise public policies on sexuality. See Janice A. Hogle (ed.), *What Happened in Uganda? Declining HIV Prevalence, Behavior Change, and the National Response* (U.S. Agency for International Development, September 2002), p. 9.

[43]Although the majority of these organizations are identified with Evangelical Protestantism, they are also connected to Catholicism, Mormonism, and mainline Protestantism.

[44]Probably the most important legal strategy used by these organizations is the free

observe a similar, though more recent, trend in Latin America. Particularly in Argentina, Chile, and Costa Rica, organizations connected to conservative Catholic sectors have activated litigation strategies. These organizations have been quite successful in utilizing judicial power in order to challenge the use of particular contraceptives.[45]

Four decades of antagonism have generated mutations in religious sectors defending the natural family. While the paradigmatic influences of secularization have frozen, to some extent, the imagination of secular sectors in confronting religious influences, religious sectors, on the contrary, have learnt and successfully applied secular strategies without, necessarily, becoming secularized. In building their antagonism they develop a sort of strategic secularism that is neither what secularization is supposed to be about—more open discourses and negotiable positions—nor what it is not—the imposition of a religious doctrine. It is in that middle space of the secular/nonsecular that the empowerment of religion has been taking place. It is an empowerment that cannot be confronted by further secularization, because it is already partly secularized without having lost its religious aspects. The image of a religious sector actively evangelizing people has switched into one of a religious sector being reactively politicized defending the natural family as a social and legal principle—a switch from an active evangelization into a reactive politicization, as an appropriation and redeployment of secular strategies of political intervention.

At a normative level, understanding reactive politicization as a legitimized part of democracy opens the possibility of addressing illiberal religious influences in ways different from those proposed by secularized approaches. Distilling the issue of religious public influence into simply a failure of church/state separation or explaining it by way of a fundamentalist manifestation overlooks articulations that are more pervasive, democratic, and open to contestation. The challenge is not to de-legitimize religious public influences as nonpolitical spaces, but to produce a more subtle understanding of the multiple ways in which these influences play out, to repoliticize the religious. Instead of disarming the antagonism by relegating religion to the private sphere, the challenge is to consider these multilevel antagonisms as a crucial public dimension constituting gender/sexuality.

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speech clause. See Brown, *Trumping Religion*.

[45]In Latin America these organizations have initiated judicial cases by using the Writ of Amparo, which is a constitutional remedy to guarantee the inviolability of the rights set forth in the constitution. For example, by filing Writ of Amparo, Portal de Belen obtained in Argentina a Supreme Court decision affirming that life begins at the moment of conception and that day-after pills should be considered abortive—not contraceptive—methods.

3. Religion Beyond Patriarchy

Secular suspicions toward religion also underplay the progressive potentialities of religious actors and discourses. The general tendency is to collapse the religious/secular dichotomy into the regressive/progressive one and to consider religion as an inherently patriarchal reality. There are, however, an important number of studies exploring the ways in which religious traditions, even patriarchal ones, become compatible with plural understandings of gender and sexuality. Some of these studies consider the process of individualization as a way of integrating religion with liberalized understandings of gender and sexuality. Modernity did not bring a religious decline, at least not a generalized one, but it did intensify people's autonomy in building their identities.[46] People remain highly religious, but for many that religiosity is a more reflexive one. Individuals have overcome the dependency from religious authorities and the passive acceptance of doctrines. Another type of literature considers the liberationist, though sometimes unintended, consequences that even patriarchal religions could have on gender relations. Instead of assuming that mainstream religions, such as Catholicism or Pentecostalism, reproduce their patriarchal understanding of family, these analyses point to situations, historical and contemporary, in which religion decreases gender inequality.[47]

Another set of studies, more relevant for this article, considers the influences of feminist and sexual minority worldviews on religious tradi-

[46]This is precisely, for some scholars, the way in which the theory of secularization needs to be reshaped, as a move from the institutional to the personal or as a process of individualization. See Yamane, "Secularization on Trial." In this sense, religion continues to be a crucial identity but one that people combine and negotiate. The democratizing of gender roles and pluralizing of sexual identities are important parts of these negotiations.

[47]Historically, for example, although secularization permitted, during the nineteenth century, the sanctioning of some legislation favoring gender rights, it also generated legal norms reinforcing patriarchal authority within the family even beyond pre-existing religious norms. See Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneux (eds.), *Hidden Histories of the Gender and the State in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). Furthermore, there is some research on nineteenth-century Europe and Latin America indicating that different religions provided unique social spaces for women to avoid male domination. Religious institutions, although strongly patriarchal, offered spaces for women to build their identities beyond marriage. Research on more contemporary situations has found that even patriarchal religions could, unintentionally, democratize gender relations or even trigger the emergence of grassroots women's movements. In this sense, there is an interesting debate on potentially liberationist consequences of women participation in religious institutions, even in those that sustain a traditional understanding of family. For an analysis of the "positive influences" of religions, either Catholicism or Pentecostalism, on women in Latin America, see Elizabeth E. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); and Carol Ann Drogus, *Women, Religion, and Social Change in Brazil's Popular Church* (Notre Dame: University Press of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

tions. Although a process of neo-traditionalization is going on, it is also possible to observe an opposite process, one of *gendering and sexualizing* of the religious. In these analyses, religion tends to be portrayed as a dependent variable being affected by pluralized understandings of gender and sexuality. This type of study concentrates on more active and political integration where religious and feminist or sexual minority worldviews are becoming part of a combined project. Gendering and sexualizing indicate the application of feminist and sexual minority perspectives to religious beliefs, discourses, and institutions.

Religious denominations, civil society organizations, and theological debates are different spaces where those sexualizing and gendering practices take place. Some denominations have softened, or even reversed, their position on women and sexual minorities, such as the increased acceptance of the ordination of women, homosexuality, or the affirmation of gender equality in marriage. Feminist and sexual minority demands have gained legitimacy in different religious communities and, even when it comes to the two most controversial topics—abortion and gay marriage—it is possible to find denominations supporting them.[48] But also within those religious traditions reaffirming patriarchal understandings of the family, an important process of gendering and sexualizing is going on: the emergence of dissident organizations and theologies. While many religious traditions are reinforcing the defense of the traditional family, an increasing number of people are politicizing, from within those traditions, a counter-doctrinal religious position on gender and sexuality. Faiths such as Catholicism or Islam, although appearing homogeneous, have important internal differences, which constitutes an important type of pluralism.[49]

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[48]On the topic of abortion, a number of liberal Christian and Jewish denominations agree that abortion is sometimes an acceptable option and agree that it should be kept legal. Among these groups are: American Baptist Churches-U.S.A.; Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Episcopal Church (U.S.A.); Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and the United Methodist Church (see the Religious Tolerance website, www.religioustolerance.org, for a detailed analysis of these denominations' positions on abortion). On the issue of homosexuality there is a variety of possibilities; however, the topic of same-sex marriage has become the most controversial one. In the U.S.A. the following churches do allow their clergy to perform gay marriages: Unitarian Universalist Association, Reform Judaism, Reconstructionist Judaism, American Baptist Churches and the United Church of Christ. See George Chauncey, *Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). There are denominations, such as Metropolitan Community Churches, that have been created for the specific purpose of providing spiritual and religious services to sexual minorities.

[49]In general, these sexualizing and gendering practices distinguish the egalitarian inspirations of most faiths from the "perversion by powerful authorities interested in maintaining their status." See Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 1.

The concept of religious dissidence is proposed, precisely, in order to capture the importance of these internal fractures as an identity model and, more relevantly, as a political phenomenon.[50] Those people marginalized in their religious communities are increasingly contesting current institutionalizations on gender and sexuality without leaving those religious traditions. In a time of religious revitalization, dissidence to mainstream faiths offers a crucial political position. This article emphasizes religious dissidence as a crucial politicization of religious identities that opens an analytical and normative space for pushing gender and sexual liberation further.

3a. Religious dissidence

People (re)act in different ways, and to dissent is an important politicization of the religious that activates the right to demonstrate one's community belonging by breaking an assumed consensus. Instead of exiting patriarchal religion, some people have politicized their religious identities in order to combat patriarchy and heteronormativity within different denominations and in society at large. Dissidence is, then, a paradoxical way of inhabiting an identity, of being a community member. Etymologically, there are two ways of expressing a position of dissidence: as a "dissident," one who expresses disagreement by action, and as a "dissenter," one who does so in writing. Following the etymological components, it is possible to identify two connected articulations of religious dissidence: civil society organizations and theological debates.

On the one hand, religious dissidence is manifested in the emergence and functioning of civil society organizations whose main purpose is to confront mainstream religious doctrines. Since the 1970s, several groups have emerged challenging doctrinal positions.[51] A multiplicity of civil society organizations has been created within traditional faiths reconciling a religious identity with feminist and/or sexual minority standpoints.[52] These pro-change organizations have been analyzed as provid-

[50]For an analysis of dissidence at the level of citizenship, see Holloway Sparks, "Dissident Citizenship: Democratic Theory, Political Courage, and Activist Women," *Hypatia* 12 (1997): 74-110; or, for an analysis of dissidence at the legal level, see Madhavi Sunder, "Cultural Dissent," *Stanford Law Review* 59 (2001): 495-**END PAGE??**

[51]Debra C. Minkoff, *Organizing for Equality: The Evolution of Women's and Racial-Ethnic Organizations in America, 1955-1985* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

[52]Organizations such as Catholics for a Free Choice, favoring abortion decriminalization, or Dignity, favoring sexual minorities, are the most visible examples within the Catholic Church. Although they originated in the U.S.A., they currently have an international existence. In recent decades, pro-sexual minorities organizations (with different levels of institutionalizations) have emerged in practically all mainstream religious communities, such as Al-Fatiha, a Queer Muslim organization aiming to "promote the pro-

ing an instance for institutional change by articulating faith and reason.[53] They have also been considered as "free social spaces" for certain marginalized groups, such as women and homosexuals, where they can get together and organize for the purpose of demanding recognition and equality.[54] For others, these organizations are a result of a change in the way people protest. During the 1960s and 1970s, public manifestations were the main instruments for demanding liberation. More recently, people began mobilizing within certain institutions, such as the military or the Catholic Church,[55] switching from the streets to the interior of different institutions, including religious institutions.[56]

On the other hand, the phenomenon of dissenters, as those who break consensus in writing, is manifested in the importance that feminist and gay/lesbian theologies have acquired in recent years.[57] Though emerging in different religious communities, these alternative theologies share a basic purpose: to overcome patriarchal and heteronormative components in mainstream faiths and to show the compatibility between these traditions and feminist and sexual minority positions. In this sense, theological discourses are an important language for religious dissenters. The increasing numbers of feminist and gay/lesbian theologies,[58] which tend

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gressive Islamic notions of peace, equality and justice" (see Al-Fatiha website: www.Al-Fatiha.org). It is also important to mention the existence of ecumenical organizations, such as Ecumenical Women 2000+ or Other Sheep, that represent a coalition of different religious groups united by a counter-doctrinal understanding of gender and sexuality.

[53]See Michele Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Faith, Reason, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[54]See, for example, R. Stephen Warner, "The Metropolitan Community Churches and the Gay Agenda: The Power of Pentecostalism and Essentialism," in Mary Jo Neitz and Miriam S. Goldman (eds.), *Sex, Lies, and Sanctity: Religion and Deviance in Contemporary North America* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1995), pp. **PAGE NOS**??

[55]Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, "Stepsisters: Feminist Movement Activism in Different Institutional Spaces," in David S. Meyer and Sid Tarrow (eds.), *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. **PAGE NOS??**

[56]Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, *Faithful and Fearless: Moving Feminist Protest Inside the Church and Military* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[57]Although the article uses "gay/lesbian theologies," the correct label would be "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer theologies."

[58]These theologies are being generated in almost all mainstream religious traditions. For a general framework of these theologies, see Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (eds.), *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); and Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking (eds.), *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Continuum, 1997). The following are some examples of publications considering the issue, particularly within Catholicism: Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988); Elsa Tamez (ed.), *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989); Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition,*

to re-interpret, or, in more radical attempts, "deconstruct" scriptural references to women or (homo)sexuality, have become powerful political discourses. They not only integrate feminist and sexual minority concerns within religious viewpoints, but in doing so they also open a space for inter-faith dialogues. These theologies are being constructed in different denominations, but their common roots in feminist and gay/lesbian theories bring them closer. Furthermore, these theologies are strongly shaped by the regional/local realities where they are produced. For example, Latin America feminist theologies are particularly important because they are very much based on Liberation Theology, a valuable source of progressive socio-political activism, and, while maintaining its core elements regarding class inequalities, they incorporate oppressions based on gender and sexuality.[59]

Either as civil organizations or as theological debates, the phenomenon of religious dissidence presents a way of affirming a religious identity, a way of belonging that opens an important political space. Dissidence, understood in this way, is manifested in the emergence of discourses and associations that, while reaffirming a religious identity, reinforce a level of antagonism from within that same tradition. The moment of dissent, the moment of evidencing the fractures of communal identities, is also a moment of re-affirmation of that same identity. Paradoxical as it may sound, dissidence requires a high level of voluntary membership, as the reinstated belonging to the same institution it criticizes. Unlike the figure of the deserter, who resigns membership and vacates a power space, dissidents (re)affirm their belonging.[60]

However, although dissidence implies a level of identification, it also needs the articulation of an antagonism, a publicization of a fracture. It requires a withholding from an assumed consensus, a refusal to conform. Dissidence is more than disagreement; it is the breaking of a consensus that, due to its disruptive character, generates a tendency for its eviction. A common reaction against dissenters is the attempt to expel them from the community by labeling them as "outsiders" who have infiltrated to

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and Norms (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Mary E. Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); Marcella María Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000). It is also important to mention organizations such as the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) that mobilize in the U.S.A. and internationally to include feminist values to generate religious and social changes.

[59]See Elina Voula, *Teologia Feminista: Teologia de la Liberacion* (Madrid: Iepala, 1996).

[60]Dissidence as an alternative to nomadism, desertion, and exodus as ways of being-against has been proposed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 210-14.

destroy a shared tradition.[61] Religious dissidence offers, then, important counter-doctrinal discourses to confront faiths, such as Islam and Catholicism, which tend to be presented as homogeneous realities. These fractures, which are crucial political spaces for the liberalization of gender and sexuality, are defectively incorporated by secularized approaches, particularly by current legal doctrines on religion.[62]

Although dissidence requires a level of individualization—it is necessary to have a level of autonomy to dissent—it is something more. Dissidents not only accommodate their religious identities and alternative definitions of gender and sexuality, they also mobilize in order to transform those amalgamations into a legitimized option. Dissidence involves a political project that goes beyond invidualization as a social dynamic. It is a politicization of religious identity that serves as a basis for people's sense of community and mobilization.

The concept of religious dissidence is relevant at a normative level. Religious dissidence, as a political phenomenon, illuminates many elements that are obscured by the strong dichotomization between the religious and the secular. In the first place, it moves the line of antagonism to disarm the conservative discourse that the influence of a secular culture is to blame for what dissidents consider a crisis of the family. Dissidence illuminates a different type of antagonism: those within the religious sphere. Furthermore, it shows that the frontiers between religious/secular, at least when dealing with gender/sexuality, are flexible and dynamic. Gender and sexuality need, also, to be understood as spaces where the religious and the secular fuse and interact. Finally, dissidence allows for more strategic alliances between religious and secular sectors with similar agendas toward gender/sexuality. The strong secularism of progressive sectors has generated a generalized suspicion toward the public articulation of religious discourses. In summary, religious dissidence offers the possibility not only of shaping feminist and sexual minority demands into religious language but also of building interdenominational alliances.

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[61]In 1998, Pope John Paul II amended the code of canon law to make it easier "to prosecute and punish dissenters." See Mark Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 215. According to Appleby, conservative Catholics agree that the most powerful threats to Catholicism come from within the Church. See "Epilogue," in Weaver and Appleby (eds.), *Being Right.*

[62]For an important critique to the consequences of secularized legal conceptions vis-à-vis the phenomenon of "internal" dissidence, see Madhavi Sunder, "Piercing the Veil," *Yale Law Journal* 112 (2003): 1399-**END PAGE??**

4. Conclusions: Outing the Religious

This article proposes a re-thinking of gender and sexuality from the perspective of a post-secular understanding of social and political dynamics. By "post-secular" I do not mean to suggest that secularism has stopped being an important construction. Indeed, upholding secularism has in fact gained urgency in the last few years. Rather, it suggests that the limitations of secularism have become evident. Religion has proven that it remains vital despite the limits that would be placed on it by developments such as modernization, globalization, and/or democracy. In doing so, it has demonstrated that secularism as an analytical and normative theory has become a dated tool in the understanding of contemporary societies. The insistence on upholding secularism as a political doctrine, in the wake of religious revitalization, ironically demonstrates its inability to fully capture and address the complexity of the religious.

Many of those seeking to enforce secularism do so as a way of shielding the liberalization of gender and sexuality from religious revitalization. The debates concerning *laïcité*, church/state separation, and fundamentalism tend to be shaped by that logic: they seek to de-legitimize religious public influences as a way of enforcing and promoting the liberation of gender and sexuality. This article, however, endorses the opposite logic: it proposes a necessary departure from strict notions of secularism, precisely to strengthen the movement toward gender and sexual equality. In particular, this article focuses on dynamics that, partially distorted in secularist constructions, are central for understanding the complex intersection that binds gender, sexuality, and religion. It is in these dynamics, kept closeted in secularist assumptions, that important political and theoretical spaces are opened for effectively confronting both patriarchy and heteronormativity.

This article proposes two notions that help encapsulate the political relevance of contemporary dynamics: reactive politicization and religious dissidence. Reactive politicization refers to the political mutations undergone by conservative religious activism in order to more effectively defend the traditional understanding of the family. Attempting to explain this phenomenon, as secularism does, as a manifestation of insufficient church/state separation, or to merely label it as fundamentalist, is to reduce—even to render dangerously invisible—the complex nature of the religious revitalization phenomenon. It is thus necessary to "out" the mechanisms whereby religious institutions and groups are politicizing their demands. Traditional religious sectors have not abandoned their pretensions to moral hegemony on gender and sexuality; they have, however, reconfigured the strategies whereby they pursue and affirm it. To understand, or even to confront, these reconfigurations, it is necessary to

suspend some of the problematic secularist assumptions about religion.

At the core of the phenomenon of reactive politicization is the antagonism with feminist and sexual minority movements. These movements are portrayed as threatening the "sacred" space of the family. The revolutionary changes brought about by feminists and sexual minorities, at social, cultural, and legal levels, are presented as a direct attack on a shared religious worldview. In a reductive way, these movements are generally considered as the sources responsible for the current crisis of the patriarchal family. Reactive politicization is not just about abortion or homosexuality. Rather, the very way of life to which the natural family is central is believed to be at stake. There is no doubt that abortion and homosexuality are the most politicized dimensions of reactive politicization, probably because they are the most divisive topics. Yet, what is ultimately being defended is the sacred definition of the family, believed to be threatened by pluralism.

Furthermore, the antagonism toward feminist and sexual minority movements helps unify groups that are otherwise highly heterogeneous. These movements are pictured as expansionist, aiming to impose their ideology worldwide, so resistance toward them and the perceived threat they pose is active even in those contexts in which their presence is marginal. Thus, these reactions have resulted in creating an otherwise nonexistent "overlapping consensus" that has generated a useful space for the articulation of national and transnational alliances. The antagonistic reaction and the efforts to organize against feminist and sexual minority movements have encouraged religious sectors to appropriate similar tactics of intervention. The activation of judicial courts, the strategic articulation of scientific discourses, and the conformation of transnational networks are examples of the political mirroring produced in sustaining their antagonism. Interestingly enough, while reactive politicization describes a radicalization in the opposition of religious actors against feminists and sexual minorities, it also indicates how the two sectors have become closer in the type of political game they implement.

Reactive politicization emphasizes the family as a religious and national reality; however, it does so by going secular and transnational. In the first place, religious activism amalgamates religious and secular dimensions in mobile and creative ways, showing that there is not an essential difference but, rather, a continuity and mutual reinforcement between these two dimensions. Although the strategic switching from religious into secular is not novel,[63] it has become a defining element in religious activism. In the second place, the phenomenon of reactive politici-

[63]As already mentioned, debates on creationism also have some of the characteristics of strategic secularism.

zation highlights a multilayered rapport between national and transnational dimensions. There is a conflation between the natural family and the national family, which have become interchangeable terms. Feminists and sexual minorities are pictured as foreign influences aiming to impose an anti-national ideology. They are considered not only to be outside of "nature"—that is, "unnatural"—but also outside of "nation"—that is, "invaders" or "infiltrators." Yet, at the same time, reactive politicization involves a high level of transnationalization when building alliances and a common agenda. The organizing of international conferences and the activism at the U.N. are examples of the ways in which these sectors have gone global to defend the national family, which paradoxically is defined as a universal one. Reactive politicization portrays religious activism as a global project while, at the same time, structuring the defense of the family as a national project.

In this article, the phenomenon of reactive politicization is complemented by the analysis of religious dissidence, which addresses the internal pluralism of religious communities. Religious dissidents remain religious; however, they do so by opposing the official construction on gender and sexuality. Feminist and sexual minority worldviews, which have been regarded as the cause of religious neo-traditionalism, are also triggering the surfacing of dissident religious identities. Catholic, Evangelical, or Muslim individuals, among others, affirm their religious identities by participating in organizations or writing theologies to adjust their faiths to encompass egalitarian definitions of gender and sexuality. Instead of "exiting" their religion or just individually accommodating their "dissonances," dissidents shape their identities in opposition to official doctrines. Religious dissidence makes evident internal fractures that are open political spaces, crucial to the process of gender and sexual liberation. Thus, it is possible to confront religious reinforcement of patriarchy not only with secularized discourses—which continue to present crucial democratic alternatives—but also with dissident discourses accommodating the claims of feminists and sexual minorities. In a time of religious revitalization, it is important to emphasize religious pluralism, not only that existing between different religious traditions but, as dissidence illustrates, that within mainstream faiths as well. If religion continues to be a crucial public and political dimension, it should be so as a pluralized reality. It is the challenge of legal doctrines and political systems to foster this double-sided pluralism.

Religious dissidence amalgamates two seemingly opposite subject positions, and in doing so it redefines community boundaries. Dissidents are part of religious communities. By placing themselves at the borders of mainstream religious communities, even at the risk of expulsion, dissidents stretch the meaning of being Catholic, Muslim, or Evangelical.

Dissidents propose a re-reading of religious practices and beliefs from the nonconformist standpoints of feminists or sexual minorities. Religious dissidence emphasizes the egalitarian components of different faiths and considers the patriarchal and heteronormative elements as historical and secondary constructions that even go against the core of their faiths. In addition, religious dissidents are also part of feminist and sexual minority movements. They incorporate into those movements religious and moral justifications for gender and sexuality liberation. Dissidents justify controversial issues, such as abortion or homosexuality, from religious and moral viewpoints. These justifications are of significant interest and import insofar as they complement the secular movements' own resistance to appealing to, or constructing, moral discourses to justify their beliefs and demands. It is by virtue of this involvement of both religious communities and liberationist movements that religious dissidence has become an important contemporary phenomenon.

If we admit that the standard proposal of progressive theorizing on gender and sexuality—in its different versions—is that the exclusion of religion from the public sphere is a necessary step in the democratization of gender roles and sexual identities, the phenomena of reactive politicization and religious dissidence make it possible to propose an alternative—indeed, opposite—path. It is, precisely, in legitimizing religion as a public reality that further democratization can be achieved. The secular corset on religion has proven insufficient to prevent its empowerment and ramification; it is even possible to speculate that religious revitalization, at least partially, has been a reaction to the hegemonic influences of secularism. It is important, then, to out the religious and to understand the complex roles it fulfills in contemporary democracies and the ways in which it has mutated. Moving beyond secularism is a necessary step in this direction, even if for the purpose of bringing it back in refreshed and more nuanced formulations. Contemporary religious revitalization is not necessarily to be read as a time to strengthen secularism or to enforce the religious/secular dichotomy, but as an opportunity to become "strategically religious."[64]

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