

Public religious embodiment: A contemporary discussion



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Spiritualism is an inseparable part of human existence. The reduction of this dimension (spiritualism) will negatively affect human existence. This causes the emergence of new phenomenon, or even culture, in the life of modern society. The phenomenon is the increase of their interest in spiritualism. Even though spiritualism in this context is not always identical with religion, this phenomenon cannot be separated from capitalism. This article explores how the intersection of religion, religiosity and public segment is more likely to manifest in our everyday life. Humans are considered indisputably religious from ancestry; therefore, they are regarded as homo-religious. As technology and society progress, some scholars argue that in no time distant religion is going to give way to secularisation. However, it remains a vital and prominent role for humans despite the rate of secularisation in European and other Western societies. This sociological research utilises the transversal and residential theory to define religion as a phenomenon that crosses every aspect of life while maintaining a prominent public position. The result showed that humans are religious, and therefore religion is bound to exist in accordance with their existence. The study concludes that religion provides ultimate answers to questions that have not been answered by science and philosophy. Therefore, as long as humans exist, their place in society cannot be abolished.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This research contributes to providing education to the community that religion, social and culture have an integrated and interconnected relationship.

Keywords: spiritualism; secularism; embodiment; public sphere; religion.

Introduction

Several new terms are associated with the scientific study of religion, including 'public religion', 'desecularisation' and 'post-secularisation'. These terms mark the emergence of a new era that discusses the universality of the religious paradigm. Fans of this new trend assumed that the theory of secularisation, which states 'religion in the context of modernity does not disappear or suffer big losses', is false. Religion has been considered by classical theories on secularisation as something that is completely different from modern thought and distant from modernity. Nevertheless, religious traditions and groups persist and enter the public debate articulating both moral values and claims of recognition. Recent discussions on modern democracy acknowledge that religiosity is one of the aspects that need to be considered to understand political modernity, from both a theoretical and a practical perspective (Casola 2021; Gellman 2021). Although for several observers and even Western European societies that were once prime examples of the secularisation theory, the age of ignorance ended when they experienced a religious revival. In this context, its continued existence is obvious in the public sphere. In this view, religion assumed a new role, thereby rejecting the old assumption that religion was privatised. The research questions that this study explores are as follows: Did Western European societies experience such religious privatisation? Are they faced with a new public sphere era? Presently, the public role of religion is increasingly debated, especially in the academic world. Besides, concepts that underline its popularity and existence of religion enjoy a strong status (Bárceñas Barajas 2021; Ekman 2018:9; Strmiska 2000:110). However, it is unclear whether this occurrence was since this approach captured the empirical reality of academic discussions concerning religion. These issues were clarified after it was intrinsically addressed in this study.

Theoretical framework

Thomas Tweed's theory of transit and residence was adopted in this research. The theoretical analysis related to the importance of defining constitutional terms in different disciplines is based

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on the study of Tweed (2006). It was further reported that 'religion' is not an aboriginal word, rather a term created for intellectual purposes. After a series of arguments and suggestions related to the weaknesses of religious theory, it was defined as the confluence of organic-cultural flows, which intensifies joy and confronts suffering through human and superhuman forces and cross borders (Tweed 2006). Its plural form was used to clarify that 'generally religion is never discovered', rather there are observers who meet individuals' needs in certain contexts. This theory's two main guiding metaphors are 'residential and transition', which means that religion is concerned with finding a place and walking through space. Aquatic metaphors (influences and flows) imply that it is a complex process. Therefore, every religion is a flow of trends, regarded as 'orthodox' by institutions across multiple domains, where transversal confluences and spiritual streams are created (Tweed 2006). The use of aquatic and spatial metaphors is to prevent religious traditions from being essentialised as static, isolated and immutable. However, it needs to be understood as swirls of transluminal streams, which spawn both religious and non-religious entities. In this regard, Tweed (2006) described religion as sacrosapes that observe the various religious movements and their imprints to transform people and places, including the social arena and natural field.

Acknowledging the involvement of emotions, Tweed (2006) also pointed out that religion triggers both happiness and affliction. This means that it provides a lexicon for different kinds of positive and negative emotions. Subsequently, both human and superhuman forces are included in Tweed's definition because, in their effort to intensify joy, adherents appeal to superhuman forces in various imaginable ways. The last sentence of this definition is 'the core of the theory'. This description enables the itineraries to restrict terrestrial, corporal and cosmic crossings for women and men in natural and social spaces (Tweed 2006).

Tweed stressed that religions are portable and further stated that members need to engage in three specific crossings, namely, terrestrial, bodily and cosmic. Land crossings such as pilgrimage, mission, social space, and forced and restricted pathways vary according to changes in travel and communication technology. Religion not only marks changing economic and social borders, but also tends to transcend social spaces rapidly. Corporal crossings define the boundary between a person's personality and the natural world and mark the life cycle transitions, which includes birth, passage and death. Finally, cosmic crossing involves the transfer and transformation of telegraphs, which is analysed by their imagined horizon (Tweed 2006).

Conceptual understanding

It is relevant to understand the phrase 'public area' in the context of religion. According to Elom (2005), the term 'public sphere' commonly refers to society. The organised and realised common space of a particular population is separate from those that allow individuals and families to live privately with

their religions. The public sphere is described as the ability of the state to exercise authority that benefits all. In addition, it is considered the first intermediary between society and Europeans (Astor & Mayr 2020:210; Lewis 2021:112; Peltonen 2001:350; Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir 2016:207).

Moreover, public religious approaches that refer to religion in the public field are similar to the social arena, which involves the passive and active participation of a considerable proportion of society. In this arena (sphere), information is collected, processed and distributed by the presence of mass media (Beck 2010; Gerhards & Neidhardt 1991:31-89). There is a possibility that the political sphere is the most visible and important aspect of the public field. This has a potential impact on the entire society and the political system. Besides, public religious approaches are frequently practised in this area.

Conversely, it is believed that religion has defiled a consensus, which led to the emergence of several definitions associated with communication and practices that refer to a supernatural reality. Therefore, this research adopted Thomas Tweed's definition because it is similar to the issue being investigated. Tweed (2006) defined religion as a confluence of organic or cultural fluxes that intensifies joy while minimising suffering by drawing on human and superhuman forces to create homes and cross borders.

The debate on the secularisation and recurrence of public religion is perceived as the most accepted and undisputed concept. According to Stark and Finke (2000), academic debates on religion were dominated by preliminary studies until the 1970s. Initially, Berger (1990) emphasised the privatisation of religious conviction during secularisation. Berger reported that religion was crowded out in the public sphere through socio-economic development. The last stage of religious practice is the private sphere. Alongside the rejection of the secularisation notion, Luckmann (1979) got involved with the idea of religious privatisation. It was assumed that religion tends to be 'invisible' rather than declining. Besides, its social aspect in modern society has been altered, although religion only changes its form (Asad 1993; Banas 2017:50; Boltanski 2018:60; Ólafsson 2011:10).

In this article, religion is restricted to the invisible personal domain. Interestingly, religious practices are a private choice and do not affect the public domain. This was the so-called theoretical privatisation of religion, which re-determined the theory of secularisation and became a major position in this study. In contrast to the classical thesis on secularisation, the proponents of the 'privatisation' proposed that religious practices need to be privatised and not necessarily decreased. The pioneering work of Casanova (1994) resolved the question related to the dominance of the privatisation thesis. Casanova subdivided the thesis on secularisation into three hypotheses in the book entitled *Public Religions in the Modern World*. This includes (1) the functional differentiation of secular religion, (2) the decline of religious practice and faith, and (3) the privatisation of religion. However, Casanova

tried to refute the third hypothesis. Instead, it was assumed that religion takes on a public role in modern society, although, in certain circumstances, deprivation tends to occur (Casanova 1994). Globally, this is defined as the refusal of religious traditions to accept the marginalised and privatised role of modernity and secularisation theories (Barber 1996; Casanova 1994; Davis Brown 2019:15; Hekmatpour 2020; Siedentop 2014).

In this context, the privatisation of religion is an inessential requirement in modern societies. Interestingly, religion maintained its public function in several circumstances and refused to be confined to a marginal or private role. It also assumes new and strengthened public roles in some cases (Casanova 1994). However, Casanova coined the term 'public religion', which was analysed and published in the book entitled *Public Religions in the Modern World* (15 June 1994). This term refers to the participation of religious organisations in modern societies. The idea of public religion became more prominent in scientific studies, and this marked the beginning of a new discourse in modern societies. Irrespective of Casanova's success, the seminal work published in 1994 has undergone several changes. This was realised by assuming a more global perspective, which stated that the prevailing concept of secularisation is primarily a Western European ideology, charged with Western centrism and methodological nationalism (Casanova 2003). Simultaneously, Casanova maintained the general assumption, which stated that religion was deprivatised and divided the vast argument into two: Firstly, the idea of religious activity in the political sphere was elaborated by Casanova. Despite being interested in limiting public religion to civil society initially, it was argued that the presence in the political sphere or even the state does not necessarily contradict the requirements of democracy. Secondly, an obvious stand was taken regarding the Western European case, as an increase in religious presence was witnessed in the public domain (Bergmann 2017; Casanova 2003, 2006:7–22; Euchner 2019; Oddsson 2016:470; Willard, Henrich & Norenzayan 2016:225).

Preliminary studies carried out by Huntington (2003) and Berger (1999) helped to promote religion's reappearance in politics and public affairs. Huntington (2003) identified religion as a key to the presumed clash between different cultures in the study entitled *The Clash of Civilizations*. However, the general argument about the clash of civilisations was sceptically reviewed in several religious studies. On the contrary, Berger's ideas were openly welcomed in the university. In the book entitled *The Desecularization of the World*, Berger (1999) refuted the previous dissertation on privatisation and argued that 'presently, the world is even more religious than it has ever been'. Besides, academic debates about religion have been moved towards a new paradigm, which led to the dissolution of the secularisation theory (Beaumont, Eder & Mendieta 2018:10; Bosetti & Eder 2006; Echlin 1995:287; Martin 2016; Smith 1974).

Understand the approach to public religion as a trend in religious study

A new trend was brought about by the scientific study concerning public religion. Casanova's idea quickly spread through academic discussions and gained popularity (Furseth 2021). Several publications that rejected the privatisation thesis and accepted the deprivation of religion were perceived from this perspective (Casanova 2019). Recent academic and public studies have stated about the growing role of religion in modern societies' public sphere. According to Myer and Moore (2006), the continuous and rising significance of religion in the public domain of modern societal communities has virtually achieved the axiom of academic discourse (Angrosino 2002:245; Griera, Martínez-Ariño & Clot-Garrell 2021:293; Pétursson 1983). Presently, a transdisciplinary discourse on public religion involves various academic fields, namely, sociology, politics, theology and philosophy. Conversely, the contributions drawn from different disciplines have at least one thing in common: the presence of religion in the public sphere. The hypotheses and assumptions of public religion depend on a particular theory.

However, there are certain common assumptions, such as:

1. In the public sphere of modern Western societies, religion is empirically discovered. But according to Edward Bailey's view, religion never left the public domain but only became dormant or implicit (Astley 2013; Barbre 2021).
2. The presence of religion in the public sphere is either persistent or tends to increase.
3. Religion has a significant impact on public discussions.

These assumptions are used to distinguish between public religious approaches. This characterisation implies that not every contribution is in line with the description of the following arguments. This study is aimed to identify several flaws in the debate on public religion in Western Europe. Furthermore, the arguments were specifically based on contributions that assume an increasing presence of religion in Western Europe (Goldstein 2009:160; Smith 2002:580; Sommerville 1998:250).

Public religious approaches towards Western Europe are roughly classified into three categories: firstly, to witness and welcome a new religious presence in the public eye; secondly, to describe a new religion based on the absence of a normative level; and, thirdly, to analyse the impact of public religion on European democracies by adopting a tiered approach. Some examples of each category are stated here. Habermas (2001) carried out a study on the first category and stated that the new or post-secular age has begun. In the past, vastly secularised societies, such as highly developed European countries, (e.g. Russia, Germany, England and France) tend to have a new sense of religion that plays certain public roles. Habermas (2001) stated that religion is relevant to the dialogue concerning public debates. A normative argument advocates that post-secular societies promote religious contributions in public. Consequently, religious reasoning

contributes to contemporary and future societal, ethical values. Habermas (2001) reported that modern societies tend to find solutions to moral problems by listening to religious discussions in public (Feierman 2019; Gorski, Philip & Ates 2008; Leclerc 2001:230) and French sociologist Willaime proposed a similar theory. Willaime further stated that even France's highly secularised public and political sphere has a new and more open approach to religion (Gentile 2006; Taylor 2007).

France's hyper-secularity triggers a process of religious restructuring. Based on Willaime's opinion, religion is an important source of public discussions and participation in individual and collective identity-building processes. In other words, Willaime opined that public discussion should refer to religious values because religion comes from God. Contributions from this category emphasise its positive role in post-secular societies as a discursive resource (Bruce 2011; Juergensmeyer 2017; Lanman & Buhrmester 2015; Stolz 2020:20). The second category is based on a more descriptive analysis of the supposed presence of the public religion in Western Europe. Obviously, research carried out by Casanova is the most prominent example of this category. Grace Davie (2006), a famous sociologist, also addressed public religion in his recent research. It was believed that the European model of secularisation had been questioned by the migration of individuals from all over the world. Although this model promotes religious privatisation, there are various ideas about its appropriateness in society. Therefore, Europeans do not need to organise religious discussions in public because it is becoming more rampant. Davie (2006) reported that religion is becoming more rampant in the public sphere, a tendency driven by the presence of Islam across the European countries (Gearon 2019:12; Kaufmann & Goujon 2012:70).

However, two additional examples associated with this category include Downey and Koenig (2006), and Eder (2002). Downey and Koenig (2006) stated that in the context of European unification, religion acquired a new public presence and vitality. Besides, a new privileged religious role results in the process of European integration. Likewise, studies carried out by Habermas (2001), Eder (2002) and Bosseti and Eder (2006) stated that a post-secularisation process exists. In Eder's view, this means a growing public and less private religion. It was assumed that religion in Western Europe (e.g. France, Germany, England and Belgium) tends to return to the public sphere. Subsequently, descriptive analyses were carried out on this category, although occasionally they tended to be similar to the first one by distinguishing the positive potentials of religion (Bailey 1990:490; Horsti & Nikunen 2013:490; Jonsson 2001:250; Masuzawa 2005).

Finally, the last category analyses the presence of religion in the public sphere from a more critical perspective. The research carried out by Myer and Moore (2006) is an example of this category. It was further reported that religion is

engaged in public and political affairs. Meyer regarded this process as a positive potential threat to the secular foundation of the modern state as opposed to Habermas (2001), and Leclerc (2001). Meyer's views do not, however, appear to reflect the common position of public religious approaches. Generally, the supposed new presence of religion in public spheres of Western Europe is welcomed. However, it should be noted here that a return of religion to the public sphere is not a return to the status religion in the public sphere enjoyed in a pre-secularisation period. The return of religion now to the public sphere is merely, as Charles Taylor indicates, the addition of another option people might have: whether to be religious or not.

The role of religion in the public sphere offers a brief overview of the contributions to Western Europe's public domains, which assumes an increasing presence of religion. In addition, a wide range of studies have emphasised the importance of public religion in Western Europe. These contributions are part of a growing academic debate. Unfortunately, none of these studies critically questions whether the public sphere of modern Western European societies has a significant or growing religious presence. Casanova's ideas have become a popular concept for the academic debate, as the number of public religious publications keeps growing and increasing. In accordance with scientific discourse, the concept of public religion is perhaps the trendiest approach. On the contrary, there is little or no criticism. An exception is a research carried out by Dalferth (2010), which emphasised that post-secular societies are not religious or secular, and Berger (1999) helped promote religion's reappearance in politics and public affairs. Huntington (2003) further reported in the book entitled *The Clash of Civilizations* that religion is a key to the presumed clash between different cultures. The general argument about the clash of civilisations was, however, treated sceptically. Casanova has moved academic debates about religion towards a new paradigm that proclaims the dissolution of the secularisation theory.

Religious contributions to the public sphere

A supernatural being was used as a criterion for the presence of religion based on the general definition. Moreover, this criterion needs to consider whether the actions and communications, generally referred to 'religiously', fit into this definition. It is important to note that there are two types of communication, namely (1) public debate on religion-related issues and (2) public contributions by its actors. It is obvious that the criterion for religious communication is usually not met in public discussions related to religious issues. For example, mass media reports of certain murder cases referred to the perpetrator's motives and failed to use religious communications to describe these events. Generally, the coverage of this analysis in Western European mass media is not in accordance with supernatural mediation and is therefore unreligious. Instead, public officials use a secular

reasoning scheme that refrains from supernatural references (Astor, Marian & Mar Grier 2017:130; Dobratz 2001:290; Fordahl 2017:553; Swatos 1984:40).

The second type of communication is more complicated. With respect to the issue of public communication, the actors often represent a religious organisation. However, they do not necessarily contribute to every public input. Moreover, only those public communications that apply the religious argument to a supernatural entity or concept were proposed. Religious organisations, groups and persons are involved in the public sphere in various ways. Besides, the representatives of these organisations directly participate in the public sphere through TV talk shows or radio programmes. They also publish their views in books, newspapers or web pages. The release of media statements is one of the most important public communication methods for religious actors. This, therefore, enables one to analyse its press statements to explore the public communication of a religious organisation. Press releases from the English and Evangelical churches in Germany were adopted. Furthermore, both institutions account for a large part of the religious market in their countries and are considered to be highly influential (Beaman 2020; Berger 1990; Kitiarsa 2010:570; Smith 2003).

Public place of the religion

Modern societies involve various public spheres. There are wider spaces, which usually focus on a variety of topics found on different logics. The political sphere is the public space that attracts the most attention and is a key aspect of modern society. Dalferth (2010:240) stated that other public spaces correspond to certain subsystems of society. In addition, certain public spaces facilitate or even request religious communication. Besides, daily religious communication happens on several sites in Western European media, such as TV and radio stations, newspapers and websites. They are a public niche dedicated to religious communication. The actors tend to communicate religiously without being rejected or ridiculed by supernatural concepts. However, these areas are located on the fringes of the media space, thereby forming isolated small islands of religious communication. Individuals tend to publicly communicate and use this media space on a daily basis. However, their communication is far from the main public sphere.

This niche is different from the public political arena. Unfortunately, it is not directly related to or involved in politics. The fact that religious communication occurs on the margins of the public shows that it plays a marginal position and role in Western society. However, there are examples from the United States of America where religion plays an important role in social and political actions and statements. Religion is rarely practised in the main public sphere, while on the periphery it occurs on a daily media.

The various religious activities that occur in the governmental circle were further investigated. A practical example is

Nigeria, where virtually all the presidents and governors always give room to prayers. Most of them first adhere to prayers and religious advice before embarking on a campaign rally. They have chapels in the majority of the government houses, where they always pray. The observation of some religious holidays in Nigeria is a clear indication that religion is a central aspect of gender that is unavoidable. This is one of the reasons why this research is skewed to the extent that religion presents itself in every human effort.

Conclusion

This study attempted to raise some critical issues concerning approaches to public religion. Interestingly, the public religious approaches emphasise its presence and influence in contemporary societies. However, the influence on Western Europe is quite enormous. Therefore, the findings on the existence and influence of religion are based on pervasive concepts. The use of the word 'religion' in a variety of social phenomena often allows for the characterisation of the actual general impact of its existence.

Public or a major religious presence is beginning to emerge in Western Europe. There seem to be exceptional cases and contexts; besides public religion is limited. Interestingly, the public sphere remains a secular one in which non-religious actors participate. The assumption that 'public religion' has evolved appears to be a theoretical trend rather than a reflection of empirical reality. In this study, the arguments emphasise certain general weaknesses in their approach to public religion, thereby challenging their assumptions on its significantly increased presence in modern society.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

A.M., J.S., M.M., M.F.M. and I.T. contributed to collection of data, data documenting and analysis, and manuscript preparation. A.M. was the senior author for this study. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft of this article and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

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Data availability

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