

CHURCH AND STATE AS AGONISTIC PARTNERS IN THE TIME OF NEOCONSERVATISM*

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ABSTRACT

The point of this paper is to indicate that liberal secularist frameworks are not very useful to address the de-democratising phenomena that neoconservatism and religious right-wing actors are causing today. Taking the Argentinian context as object of philosophical analysis, I defend two intertwined theses that have bearing on the way left-wing politics and activism deal with the revitalisation of the political participation of right-wing and neoconservative churches and religious actors. The first one is that although the secularisation thesis cannot explain today's religious political revitalisation, at the same time the reconfiguration of the way Christian churches participate in politics is confined to the political ideology of secularism. The second thesis is an explanation as to why this is so: secularism is enacted within an agonistic-deliberative political field in which fully legitimised and polarised agents shape each other's agency, and that at the same time delegitimises those subjectivities and collectives that do not adjust to its homogenising polarisations. In sum, debating about secularism and religion is still needed, but today the focus of the discussions should be put in the way the liberal state and the hegemonic church authorities collaborate to marginalise several collectives from political participation.

KEYWORDS

Neoconservatism, Fundamentalism, Political Participation, Secularism, Religion

In 2020, the National Congress of Argentina deliberated to finally pass a new elective abortion law that guarantees public access to a legal, free, and safe abortion in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy.¹ The legislators who opposed the bill and the pundits invited to speak against it at both chambers shared the tendency existing in

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¹ 'Acceso a la interrupción voluntaria del embarazo. Ley 27610' [Access to the voluntary interruption of pregnancy, Law 27610] [available at: <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/345000-349999/346231/norma.html>]

Argentina since the decade of the 1980s of instrumentalising liberal and secular discourses and articulated their religious arguments in terms of rights, sovereignty and even of intersectionality.² Roman Catholic priests and legislators argued in secular terms that the law was not good for poor people, that it was not what poor women wanted, and even that abortion was an imperialistic imposition. In 2018, when the law was approved by the Chamber of Deputies but rejected by the Senate, the feminist Methodist theologian María de los Ángeles Roberto spoke in favour of the bill at an informative meeting at the Congress. She explained that the Bible did not condemn abortion, which was not even considered a sin by the Mosaic law.³

I. INTRODUCTION

Conservative ecclesiastical authorities and actors have always been around; the prefix “neo-” highlights that today they, even in all their diversity, participate in politics in a specific fashion. The salient characteristic of this participation in many political settings is that they speak the political and legal language of rights and of liberal-republican democracy to foster exclusionary policies and counter inclusive legislation and policies.⁴ While this happens, at the same time we find egalitarian activists that articulate a religious discourse to promote inclusive conceptions of religiosity, acting within their churches and religious communities with transformative effects.⁵ The problem is that the former ones play leading roles in

² See Jorgelina Loza and Magdalena López, *Representaciones y repertorios de expresiones conservadoras organizadas contra el aborto en Argentina (2018-2020)*, in A. Torres Santana (editor), *Derechos en riesgo en América Latina. 11 estudios sobre grupos neoconservadores*, Fundación Rosa Luxemburg- Ediciones desde abajo, Bogotá 2020, pp. 55-74; and María de los Ángeles Roberto, *Estado e Iglesias frente a la despenalización y legalización del aborto*, in Agencia Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Comunicaciones (ALC Noticias) and Grupo de Estudios Multidisciplinarios sobre Religión e Incidencia Pública (GEMRIP) (editors), *Dossier Estado Laico en Argentina*, 2018, pp. 24-26 [available at: <https://www.otroscruces.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Articulo-Mar%C3%ADa-de-los-Angeles-Dossier-.pdf>].

³ Her contribution can be watch here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OMO7bcfOz8.

⁴ Juan Marco Vaggione and Maria Das Dores Campos Machado, Religious Patterns of Neoconservatism in Latin America, in *Politics & Gender*, 16, 1, 2020, pp. 6-10. Juan Marco Vaggione, *The conservative uses of law: The Catholic mobilization against gender ideology*, in *Social Compass*, 67, 2, 2020, pp. 252-266. Wendy Brown, *American Nightmare. Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization*, in *Political Theory*, 34, 6, 2006, pp. 690-714.

⁵ For an analysis of the emancipatory effects of ‘inclusive churches’ (in contemporary Brazil and particularly in Recife), see Silas Veloso de Paula Silva, Júlia Alves de Almeida and Priscylla Karollyne Gomes Dias, *Muito além do Arco-íris: homossexualidade(s) e diversidade sexual em práticas discursivas em torno de uma Igreja Inclusiva da cidade do Recife-PE*, in *Periódicus. Revista de Estudos Indisciplinados em Gêneros e Sexualidades* 1, 14, 2020, pp. 124-159. These inclusive churches and their theological elaborations have strong liberatory implications both for Christianity and secular public policies. In Argentina, there is a strong plurality within Evangelist denominations that manifests itself in public confrontations on abortion and LGBT+ rights between ACIERA (the right-wing ‘Christian Alliance of Evangelic Churches of Argentina’ who opposes reproductive rights, sex

politics, while the latter are usually pushed aside to the margins of effective political participation.

In this paper I defend two intertwined theses that have bearing on the way left-wing politics and activism deal with the revitalization of the political participation of right-wing and neoconservative churches. The first one is that although the secularisation thesis cannot explain today's religious political revitalization, at the same time the reconfiguration of the way Christian churches participate in politics is determined by the political doctrine and ideological discourse of secularism. The second thesis is a philosophical-political explanation as to why this is so: secularism, taken as an ideology and political discourse, is enacted within an agonistic-deliberative political field in which fully legitimised and polarised agents shape each other's agency, and that at the same time delegitimises and marginalises those subjectivities and types of agencies that do not adjust to its homogenising polarisations.

As it is widely known, deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism are rival theories of democracy. Although in general terms I agree with Chantal Mouffe's critique of deliberative democracy and her rendering of agonistic pluralism,⁶ I think that liberal deliberation and agonism are not simply the irreconcilable core elements of opposing abstract conceptions of democracy. Deliberativism and agonism are views of political participation and decision making describing different but coexisting aspects of the political and of politics in formal constitutional democracies. Deliberative and agonistic theories both aim to describe how participation occurs and ought to occur in democratic settings to lead to legitimate and inclusive outcomes, considering pluralism and dissent. In many democratic scenarios, such as the one I analyse in this paper, both views work together to shape a particular political setting that is reducible to neither of them separately. They act jointly, arranging the territory of political participation in a specific fashion. Only those agents fully authorized in agonistic terms as legitimate mutual adversaries are the ones participating in the (liberal) democratic and dialogical procedures that take place both within institutions and within the public sphere. One of the problems with deliberative democracy is that it fails to fully recognise the fact that it takes place within agonistic frameworks: agonistic adversaries (agonistic partners) are the ones who get the authorization to deliberate together. Meanwhile, the rest of the demos, i.e., those subjectivities, agents and actors who do not adjust to the agonistic discursive adversarial polarization, are displaced to the margins of political participation, though remaining under the same normative roof. I will apply the

education in schools and LGBT+ rights) and FAIE (the center and left-wing 'Argentine Federation of Evangelical Churches', who advocates for reproductive rights, sex education in schools, and LGBT+ rights).

⁶ Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?*, in *Social Research*, 66, 3, 1999, pp. 745-758; Chantal Mouffe, *The democratic paradox*, Verso, London 2000.

hypothesis that secularism is enacted within the borders of this agonistic-deliberative domain to see if it explains some of the marginalising and de-democratising social phenomena of the present.

Secularism is in place not only in Western Europe and the United States of America. Secularism and the declination in post-secularist terms of the principles and ideas associated to it are as global as capitalism as they are an essential component of international right and transnational politics. I do not claim that all the critical and progressive principles that are associated with the idea of the secular state, such as separation between church (i.e., religious authorities) and the state, freedom of religion and religious equality, religious plurality, and diversity should be universally rejected. My aim is, rather, to analyse whether secularism as the mainstream ideology in which many political debates on the relationship between church and state are framed in secular-Christian polities such as, for instance, many South American democracies (and particularly in Argentina),⁷ is helpful if the aim is to keep the state and the church separated. I will focus on secularism as it is enacted in these contexts, and not in the USA nor in polities where the majority religion is other than Roman Catholicism and Christian religions in general, because analysing the way secularism works in these particular contexts has strong conceptual bearings on the universal scope and meaning of the concept of secularism. Indeed, my point of departure here can be illustrated with this passage by Saba Mahmood:

Secularism is not something that can be done away with any more than modernity can be. It is an ineluctable aspect of our present condition, as both political imagination and epistemological limit. To critique a particular normative regime is not to reject or condemn it; rather, by analysing its regulatory and productive dimensions, one only deprives it of innocence and neutrality so as to craft, perhaps, a different future.⁸

I bring up this quotation also because I want to highlight two things from it. The first one is that secularism is a pervasive political discourse and that as such it is not fading away vis-à-vis religious neoconservativisms. But at the same time, in many South American contexts, the emergence and growth of neoconservative religious actors in politics makes it important to emphasise, against an idea widespread in many progressive contexts in the region, that this presence is not a vestige from an obscurantist superstitious past that only more secularism could overcome. Religious practices, beliefs, ways of life, ethics, and traditions are not oppressive in themselves just for being religious, in the same way traditions are not unjust for being traditions. So, the situation is that both secularism and religions are central aspects of many polities. Democratic communities tend to value both. My concern in this paper is with the way they interact in those political contexts where they have established

⁷ In Argentina and in general in Latin America, “laicism” and “laic state” are more frequent than the term “secularism”. In spite of this, I will use “secularism” and “secular” because laicism is included under the ideology of secularism.

⁸ Saba Mahmood, *Religious difference in a secular age. A minority report*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2016, p. 21.

complex and problematic relationships, considering that religious phenomena manifest in several different ways that exceed the *moral conscience model of religion* that predominates in our (to different degrees) secular legal systems.

I use the term “moral conscience model of religion” to qualify what Webb Keane describes as “belief model of religion” by adding to that model some of the characteristics this author ascribes to the “morality model of religion”.⁹ It is true that the conception of religion assumed in the idea of freedom of religion predominantly used in secularist settings tends to reduce religiosity to a “sincere belief model”. This model is “at the heart of a moral narrative of modernity such that to maintain a religious practice that is not centred on belief— to pay too much heed to (mere) rituals, icons, clothing or dietary laws, for instance— is to remain backward”.¹⁰ I propose instead that this model of religion could be better described as a moral conscience model of religion, which in turn captures the predominant view of religiosity not as a matter of merely holding theoretical (rather than practical or ethical) beliefs about the afterlife, the soul and God, but mainly as a matter of holding moral propositional beliefs and sincere convictions (which Keane tags as “morality model of religion”). These moral convictions are usually no more than external preferences (mainly about other people’s sexuality, parenthood, and gender identity) and do not generally involve exercising practices of piety in community with others.

The moral conscience view of religion shares with the belief model described by Keane the idea that individuals freely and voluntarily choose their religious moral convictions as if they were shopping for a conception of the good life in a market of worldviews, as if one could simply and without cost and doubt change their ethics to a more conveniently secular religious practice. Freedom of religion understood in these moral conscience terms justifies the legal figure of an individual’s right (and ultimately a collective’s right, because it is also ascribed to churches and even commercial establishments) to have one’s beliefs protected from offense. “Offense” is, in turn, very widely construed so as to legally allow a Christian baker not to sell their products to homosexual couples or a church to demand the official censure of a work of art depicting the Virgin Mary as a pro-choice feminist, to give easy examples. At the same time that it protects these latter forms of religious claims, this secularist model tends to inhibit ritual, practical, and communal expressions of religion, such as wearing certain items of clothing to achieve humility, public expressions of popular religiosity in the form of altars to popular religious figures outside of the traditional official iconography, or non-monotheistic conceptions of the divine that give the Earth a sacred value. Keane is right in highlighting that what a secularist conception of freedom of religion values the most is the “propositional

⁹ Webb Keane, *What is Religious Freedom Supposed to Free?*, in W. Fallers Sullivan, E. Shakman Hurd, S. Mahmood and P. G. Danchin (editors), *Politics of religious freedom*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2015, pp. 57-65.

¹⁰ Webb Keane, *What is Religious Freedom Supposed to Free?*, p. 61.

stance toward one's thoughts"¹¹ whatever their content, which also entails a specific form of voluntary and discursive, even transparent, individual access to those thoughts, praised and privileged over "external" practices. The value attached to the idea that we are capable of freely choosing our religious and non-religious beliefs is what gives value to freedom of religion in the first place. The point that is important is that secularism privileges this conception of religion (as valuable insofar as it is a freely chosen set of moral beliefs, as illusory as this idea is) and so also privileges those people who have this particular attitude towards their own and others' religiosity, over other ways of living religion. This privileging of a certain conception of religion has, of course, great impact on the way religious subjects participate in politics.

In the second place, my concern is also about those epistemological limits to which Mahmood referred and the impact they have on the political imagination of left-wing activism and militancy. By flattening out diversity and plurality in those contexts, secularism can conceal and silence many aspects of the present. By functioning like this, it can throw one off the tracks when trying to understand the very problems that arise because of the way religions and secularism interact. Of course, this concealment and the normative expectations that come together with the way secularism describes the world do have actual effects on reality because they shape the way we perceive it and act in it. But how can one criticize something that conceals and mutes its own problems? The way out of this apparent dilemma is posing the adequate question. The question to ask when dealing with all the dilemmas, contradictions, clashes, and normative deadlocks that are brought about by the way secular and religious views of the political interact is *what normative work secularism does* in a certain place and time. This question is akin to the ones Joan Wallach Scott employs in *Sex and secularism* as orientations to develop her analyses of how secularism devised and organised modern gender inequality. I follow her in taking "secularism" as an ideological discourse: "secularism is a political discourse, not a transcendent set of principles, or an accurate representation of history. Like all discourses, though, it has a purpose and a set of effects that produce a particular vision of the world—a vision that shapes and is accepted as reality, even as it misrepresents history".¹²

What effects are produced by this particular vision of the world in a context like the one sketched at the beginning of the paper? In section II, my main aim is not to provide a detailed description of the place of religion in politics in the particular context of Argentina (although you find this account throughout the paper and footnotes), but to stress how attention to concrete practices shows the inadequacy of mainstream secularist and post-secularist abstract approaches to the matter. This section is

¹¹ Webb Keane, *What is Religious Freedom Supposed to Free?*, p. 61.

¹² Joan Scott, *Sex and secularism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2018, pp. 9-19.

intended to highlight the importance of a philosophical approach informed by the idea of situated and decolonised universalism. This perspective does not imply that I pretend to be describing all situations while describing my own practical context; on the contrary, it aims at gaining theoretical and philosophical insights from each context, so we do not fall prey to imposing a monolithic pure and ideal theory upon every reality. This perspective involves, thus, a non-ideal point of view that aims at perceiving social injustices, in this case in the way churches participate in politics within secular states, and using that knowledge to refine the concepts that are embedded in political practices. In section III, I explain how secularism, as an ideological discourse, works within what I call an agonistic-deliberative political setting, in which deliberation and agonistic politics are part of the same concrete dialectics and transform each other to form a mode of interaction different from what deliberative theorists of democracy and defenders of agonistic politics usually picture. In section IV, I draw some normative conclusions. Methodologically, this paper proposes a critical theoretical framework and *tests it* against a concrete practical context; it does not provide an abstract justification of normative principles. If the application of the framework I introduce to explain what is happening in a particular scenario is fruitful, then I only claim that it is useful also to refine debates and practices involving religion in the public sphere, not that it is a set of true *a priori* and ideal principles to apply to any given context.

II. CAN SECULARISM AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK EXPLAIN WHAT IS GOING ON?

In each polity secularism performs different tasks, has different political orientations, and puts different affects in motion. Secularism has a global character, as it is embedded in the liberal discourse of international law and rights and in the self-comprehension of mainstream philosophy and political and juridical sciences. It is also embedded in the political activism of different political movements and in most juridical and legislative practices; even “anti-gender”¹³ religious movements and churches increasingly appeal to the secularist principle of separation of state and

¹³ I do not focus in detail on the use of the turn ‘gender ideology’ in this paper but I want to remark that in South American political contexts, the neoconservative religious discursive strategy in the public sphere is to a great extent organized around the attack against ‘gender ideology’. As it is known, this turn was coined by Roman Catholic activist Dale O’Leary in the 1990s and is profusely used today by Catholic and Pentecostal hierarchies and activists, and by certain sectors of feminism who oppose trans rights. ‘Gender ideology’ encompasses all advocating for sexual, reproductive, and LGBTIQ+ rights and claims that are portrayed, in South America, as part of a ‘communist’, totalitarian, and anti-democratic menace that endangers ‘true’ human, civil, and political rights, liberty, and democracy. ‘Gender ideology’ is articulated in a liberal-democratic language that is essential to the way religious and non-religious neoconservatives (including trans-exclusionary feminists) dispute the meaning of human rights and democracy, mainly by exploiting the concept of religious freedom.

church when participating in politics against sex education and trans rights. As an ideological discourse, secularism does normative and epistemic work in all the polities where it is present mainly because it entails a certain universal narrative about the past, about modernity, about the state, about how the history of certain democratic values or principles (e.g., tolerance, neutrality), and of the enjoyment of rights such as freedom of religion, conscience and speech, and religious equality. Secularism is part of a global narrative that tells a tale of universal history. As Saba Mahmood put it, “insomuch as secularism is characterized by a globally shared form of national-political structuration [i.e., the “structure of the modern liberal state”], the regulation of religious difference takes a modular form across geographical boundaries”.¹⁴

Because of its global character and being “religion” and “state” plural and concrete phenomena as they are, attention to the way secularism works in each particular context is necessary to focus on the pertinent questions and to push aside those debates that, although ubiquitous in academia and political forums, miss the point of what is at stake. In the case of this paper, I am thinking about secularism from the context of Argentina, a Christian-Secular South American country. Argentina has a concordat with the Vatican and maintains a religious establishment privileging the Roman Catholic Church over other churches, religions and worldviews, while the right “to profess freely their religion” is constitutionally granted to all the inhabitants by the section 14 of the Constitution.¹⁵ Following an interpretation of Section 2 of the Constitution (“The Federal Government supports the Roman Catholic Apostolic religion”), the Argentine state also finances the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁶ The concordat (law 17.032, from 1966) was signed during a dictatorship but has never been derogated during democratic times, with which it gained legitimacy. Moreover, in Argentina the Catholic Church is a public juridical person, a legal status no other religion holds in the country. This legal and political framework where the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Catholic Church enjoys several political privileges coexists with a rich religious plurality that, as I will mention in a moment, pervades Catholicism itself.

In the specialized literature, a polity with a Roman Catholic majority is usually taken to be a “Catholic country”, a mono-religious society with little room

¹⁴ Saba Mahmood, *Religious difference in a secular age*, p. 2.

¹⁵ ‘Constitution of the Argentine Nation’: <http://www.biblioteca.jus.gov.ar/argentina-constitution.pdf>

¹⁶ For an accurate description of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state in Argentina up to 2009, see Juan Cruz Esquivel, *Cultura política y poder eclesiástico. Encrucijadas para la construcción del Estado laico en Argentina*, in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 146, 2009, pp. 41-59. A solid work on the matter that focus on the way the election of Jorge Bergoglio as Pope has revitalized the presence of Catholicism in Argentine society, politics, and state, see Fortunato Mallimaci, *El mito de la Argentina laica. Catolicismo, política y Estado*, Capital Intelectual, Buenos Aires 2015. See also Pablo Semán, *Vivir la fe. Entre el catolicismo y el pentecostalismo, la religiosidad de los sectores populares en la Argentina*, Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires 2021 for a study on popular religiosity in the Greater Buenos Aires that highlights the rich hybridization between religions and religious denominations and its innovative effects on religiosity.

for plurality. This alleged lack of pluralism often triggers academic debates about the need to go back from post-secularism to simple traditional secularist restrictions to religious expressions in the public sphere so as to tame the theocratic impetus of such homogeneous polities that would see eye to eye in all moral matters. This is, for instance, Nadia Urbinati's position.¹⁷ But even for the specific case of Italy Urbinati has in mind, Tom Bailey and Michael Driessen remark that "a distinctive form of Catholic political pluralism has emerged [there], one that reflects an increasingly complex, dispersive world of Catholic movements, associations, individuals, media, traditions, and ideas".¹⁸

The first thing to note is that in South American settler colonial states seen as "Roman Catholic" countries, the history of colonization and decolonization has taught that Catholicism can serve a vast array of projects, from colonial purposes of hegemony building to emancipatory ones, as exemplified by the Zapatists' embrace of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico and the Liberation Theology and the Movement of Priests for the Third World in Argentina and Latin America in general. In contemporary Argentina, the *Católicas por el derecho a decidir* [Catholic Women for the Right to Choose] organisation has been essential for the success of the new abortion bill passed in 2020. Movements like this one and other religious groups that champion LGBT+ rights enrich feminist and left-wing politics as well as their own churches. They have a great transformative potential that does not have pernicious homogenizing effects on either the church or left-wing activism. More importantly, and this is most clear in the case of religious LGBT+ activism, they open up the possibility of not having to tragically choose between religious and sexual identities, which in turn enriches political participation.¹⁹ In the end, they have an impact on the laic conception of what it is like to be a religious agent participating in politics, as they politicize their claims vis-à-vis ecclesiastical authorities and make available public religious expressions and arguments *for* reproductive and LGBT+ rights vis-à-vis deliberative political institutions.

But not only is there a strong political, social, and even religious pluralism within Catholicism in Argentina that manifests itself in several popular forms. When someone claims there is no pluralism somewhere, most probably the speaker is erasing entire collectives rather than detecting a real absence of diversity. The risk of talking about "mono-religious democracies" is that of ignoring the importance of coexisting forms of religiosity and non-religiosity that have a considerable shaping impact on traditional Catholicism. In the case of Argentina, and this is valid for many

¹⁷ Nadia Urbinati, *Laïcité in Reverse: Mono-Religious Democracies and the Issue of Religion in the Public Sphere*, in *Constellations*, 17, 1, 2010, pp. 1-21.

¹⁸ Tom Bailey and Michael Driessen, *Engaging Post-Secularism: Rethinking Catholic Politics in Italy*, in *Constellations*, 24, 2, 2017, pp. 232-244, p. 234.

¹⁹ For an analysis of these dimensions and the way they intersect and impact on political participation, from a resource theory framework and intersectional approach situated in the USA, see Royal G. Cravens, *The Politics of Queer Religion*, in *Politics and Religion*, 11, 2018, pp. 576-623.

Catholic and Christian countries, one ought to distinguish between the strong political power the Argentine Roman Catholic Church's official authorities have, on the one hand, and the plural and diverse character of the way Catholicism is practiced throughout society, culture and politics, on the other. This diversity is, moreover, a product of the interaction between official dogma and popular religiosity and ethical worldviews in the Argentine territory. As Juan Martín Vives writes, "the religious landscape in Argentina shows there is no homogeneity in terms of religion. On the contrary, the majority religion coexists with various minority religions, as well as with other worldviews (like those of the native peoples) and an increasing number of people without religious affiliation".²⁰ In this framework, the secularism versus post-secularism debate concerning "mono-religious" polities loses the premise of mono-religiosity that had provoked it. The political problem is, and I quote Vives again, that "despite the deep transformations in the religious composition of the Argentine society, the model of church-state relations continues being virtually the same as that of 1853, when the first federal constitution was enacted".²¹

In the second place, but tightly connected with this, the secularism versus post-secularism debate misses the point because it works within the limits of a vision of the political that reduces issues of political participation to the expression of judgments, understood as public reasons, in deliberative institutional processes of decision making. This vision of political participation goes hand in hand with the secularist moral conscience model of religion. Its scope is extremely and unrealistically narrow and thus minimizes their difference. The main difference between secularism and post-secularism is that post-secular politics means that certain religious claims and expressions are to be allowed in political deliberations, but as an acquiescent concession to a political reality that insists on presenting religious people, instead of "progressing" to a more secular *modus vivendi*. If post-secularism is secularism's resignation, a second-best option, is it a good solution? I believe it is not. In post-secular theories, not all religious expressions are allowed to enter the public post-secularist forum, the problem being that the question reappears: what criteria do we use to choose which religious claims will be allowed?

Wendy Brown has skilfully captured just how competent right-wing Christians are in speaking the liberal language of rights to advance their religious agendas.²² Let me add: whereas religious authorities are usually very skilled in translating religious

²⁰ Juan Martín Vives, *Religious freedom without equality? Religious minorities and the establishment of religion in Argentina*, in *Journal of Law and Religion*, 33, 2, 2018, pp. 172-191, p. 175. For an extensive survey on religiosity in Argentine society, see Fortunato Mallimaci and others, *Sociedad y Religión en Movimiento. Segunda Encuesta Nacional sobre Creencias y Actitudes Religiosas en la Argentina*, in *Informe de Investigación*, 25, CEIL-CONICET, Buenos Aires 2019 [available at: <http://www.ceil-conicet.gov.ar/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ii25-2encuestacreencias.pdf>].

²¹ Vives, *Religious freedom*, p. 175.

²² Wendy Brown, *In the ruins of neoliberalism. The rise of antidemocratic politics in the West*, Columbia University Press, New York 2019, chapter 4.

claims into liberal and deliberative language and are always welcome to speak at legislating chambers when they want to block access to health services like abortion, arguments against the capitalist exploitation and privatisation of a certain territory on the ground that it has a sacred character for an entire collective are not considered as public reasons in most liberal deliberative and juridical settings. Secularism favours the first sort of religiosity and authorises its full legitimacy to participate in politics because it corresponds, in the end, to the sort of religious subject that is presupposed by secularist normativity. In a nutshell, post-secularism shares with secularism the tendency to reduce religion to a moral conscience model briefly described in the previous section. This fails to be compatible with the ways in which religions are practiced within the very societies for which it has been proposed as a strategy for reaching a tolerant consensus, as this religious favouritism marginalises whoever does not adjust to that model. Besides this normative failure, secularism and post-secularism share an explanatory failure because of the rigidity of their conception of the social world. Indeed, another reason why the secularism versus post-secularism debate is not useful to address problems associated with contemporary religious neoconservatism is that we live in the times of the discredit of the secularisation thesis. I want to highlight how two aspects of the obsolescence of the secularisation thesis relate to the situation in which religious authorities and collectives are revitalising their right-wing political participation while at the same time different inclusive advocacies find a hospitable place in religious ambits.

In “Lack of pluralism and post-secularism in Catholic countries”, Sebastián Rudas distinguishes two claims behind the secularisation thesis. The first is an empirical claim that has been disproved. It holds that “religion and modernity, roughly speaking the consolidation of democratic government, a capitalist economy, and scientific and technological development are inversely related”, which has raised the expectation of the “eventual disappearance of religion in modern societies”.²³ In is not even necessary to analyse the evidence provided by authors like Rodney Stark to acknowledge that this expectation has been shown completely unrealistic.²⁴ The ethical and political problem with this claim is that it is built upon the normative underpinnings of the secularisation thesis, i.e., the secularist belief that the modern state’s secular institutions are just and fair (if they do not overstep their public jurisdiction into the private sphere) and that religion (when allowed in the public arena) is violent. Indeed, from this first empirical claim based on an evaluative premise, the secularisation thesis draws a normative claim:

an adequate place of religion in modern societies is the private sphere, however defined. It is assumed that in a healthy modern state religion must remain a private issue. The practical consequences of this normative

²³ Sebastián Rudas, *Lack of pluralism and post-secularism in Catholic countries*, in *Constellations*, 27, 2, 2020, pp. 258-272, p. 359.

²⁴ Rodney Stark, *Secularization, R.I.P.*, in *Sociology of Religion*, 60, 3, 1999, pp. 249-273.

dimension are grounded in the claim that religion must be located in private life: the household, the family, individual conscience, and private institutions. One sphere where there has been specific reluctance to let religion in is the *political* sphere, that is, in state institutions and forums of formal politics. Influenced by the secularization thesis, politicians and scholars have assumed—surprisingly uncritically, as José Casanova [...] points out—that religion should occupy no place at all in liberal democratic politics.²⁵

The normative claim that “religion should occupy no place at all in liberal democratic politics” has also shaped how the political participation of religious authorities and movements is perceived and understood, no matter what their place in the political compass may be. Moreover, confining something considered violent (that is the reason it is displaced from the political territory) to the household, the family, individual conscience, in a word, “the private”, i.e., precisely the place the liberal state is, supposedly, not to intervene, sounds risky to say the least. Does religion cease to be dangerous once it is confined to the private sphere? *Is privatisation enough to depoliticise religion?*

The current scenario can be summed up as follows. It is clear that the narrative of moral and political progress entailed by the secularisation thesis has to be abandoned, but this abandonment should not lead to a nihilistic forsakenness of emancipatory agendas. Juan Marco Vaggione puts it clearly:

The challenge, then, is not just to move away from the fiction of a growing secularity, but to do so while intensifying the process of gender and sexuality liberation. While secularism as a paradigm for social analysis seems inappropriate, given religious revitalization, the risk of legitimizing political religion is the empowerment of illiberal agendas.²⁶

But this puts the question not simple at the frontiers between the religious and the secular, as if they were two separate lands and everything could be solved by just walling the borders between the public and the private. On the contrary, the challenge has to be met within an agonistic-deliberative political territory that maps its own borders by hierarchising subjectivities and types of agencies with the very secularist dichotomisation “secular-versus-religious”. But can the challenge be met at all under these circumstances?

III. THE AGONISTIC-DELIBERATIVE FIELD

How to deal, in theory and in praxis, with the reactive politization of religious movements? A typical secular subject’s attitude towards this situation is something

²⁵ Rudas, *Lack of pluralism*, p. 359. He is quoting Casanova’s classic work: José Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994, p. 11.

²⁶ Juan Marco Vaggione, *Reactive Politicization and Religious Dissidence: The Political Mutations of the Religious*, in *Social Theory and Practice*, 31, 2, 2005, pp. 233-255, 234.

like this: “We must defend our secular, non-religious victories from the attacks of this vestige of an obscurantist past”. In Argentina, this diagnosis is widely found in the discourse of many left-wing and feminist and LGBT+ activists, intellectuals, and citizens in general any time topics such as abortion or LGBT+ rights take the centre of the public agenda. This diagnosis is not a good depiction of what is actually happening, but an *allochronism*.

I use Fabian Johannes’s concept of “allochronism” in the sense expounded by Berber Bevernage, who explains how this practice of denial of coevalness in our own practical contexts produces de-responsibilisation. What Johannes Fabian termed the “allochronism of anthropology” is more systematic than mere anachronism. Anachronism “signifies a fact, or statement of fact, that is out of tune with a given time frame” and is “a mistake, perhaps an accident”; on the contrary, allochronism is brought about by a set of “devices (existential, rhetoric, political)” that are put in motion to produce the denial of coevalness.²⁷ Berber Bevernage extends the concept to “the practice of symbolically allocating into another time phenomena that take place in the chronological present” in our own practical contexts.²⁸ As this practice of allochronism produces the Manichaean illusion that past being evil, evil is thus past, its effect is that we do not take any responsibility for those phenomena taking place *hic et nunc*, which in turn is an obvious obstacle to solving the problems associated with them.

A reading of secularism able to explain the reactive politization of religions without endorsing a narrative of secular progress and hierarchisation of religiosities could help to avoid the de-responsibilising practice of allochronism. The theses of this paper aim at constructing such a reading. I will elaborate on them in the remaining of this section. The first one is that although the secularisation thesis cannot explain today’s religious political revitalisation, at the same time the reconfiguration of the way Christian churches participate in politics is confined to the political doctrine and ideological discourse of secularism. The second thesis is a political explanation as to why this is so: secularism is enacted within an agonistic-deliberative political field in which fully legitimised and polarised agents shape each other’s agency, and that at the same time delegitimises those subjectivities and types of agencies that do not adjust to its homogenising polarisations. My strategy now is not to abstractly justify these claims with analytical arguments, but to *apply* the explanatory framework they make up to the Argentinian debate on the abortion law, to see if they provide a

²⁷ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1983, p. 32.

²⁸ Berber Bevernage, *The past is evil / Evil is past: On retrospective politics, philosophy of history, and temporal Manichaeism*, in *History and Theory*, 54, 2015, pp. 333-352, p. 344. Another lucid critique of temporal Manichaeism in progress narratives of left-wing and LGBT+ movements is to be found in Moira Pérez, *Queer Politics of History. On Progress Narratives and Its Outcasts*, in *lambda nordica*, 3, 4, 2016, pp. 15-34.

fruitful critical depiction of it and to draw some normative conclusions from this practical context.

My two claims render a conception of “secularism” as a representational and normative conception of the political (i.e., an ideology, or political discourse) that frames in dichotomic and Manichean ways the comprehension of the state, churches, their history, of religiosity in general, and of social opposition to inclusive movements. I understand secularism as a “strong discourse”, in the sense that it is a resilient worldview that normatively legitimises the very description of history and political reality it creates. I borrow the use of “strong discourse” from the way Vlasta Jalusic applies it to neoliberalism,²⁹ following Pierre Bourdieu’s use of the turn of phrase. Bourdieu took the phrase, in turn, from psychiatrist Erving Goffman, who attributed it to the way psychiatric discourse works in an asylum. The idea is that a strong discourse is part of a wider project and serves to the legitimization of a normative regime that orients choices and behaviour so as to fit the description it intends to impose on reality. Because of these effects they have on practical contexts, strong discourses are “hard to combat”.³⁰ In this sense, even when it is a fact that neoconservative religious actors are progressively strengthening their political participation, they tend to be perceived as an anomaly and as an *external*/menace to democracy, caused by the alleged persistence of a primitive religious past, and not as what they are: an unjust epiphenomenon of a structurally unjust political and secular (or post-secular) present.

Using this reading of secularism, we can explain, for example, why many polities usually end in an impasse when discussing abortion and LGBT+ issues in formal deliberative and dialogical decision-making processes. The idea of a deep moral (instead of political) disagreement is simply inadequate to explain such impasses. In secularist settings, i.e., where secularism is endorsed as a normative regimen (not in secular settings in general), “progressive” actors already are condemned to end up in an impasse with neoconservatives. Indeed, before entering the dialogue they have assumed a closed definition of their position (as secular, progressive, reflective, good for women, good for “women +”, good for “poor women”) and that of the “other” (as fundamentalist, religious, acritical, conservative, bad for women). But this particular “other” is not that kind of “other” who gets historically marginalised and pushed away from effective political participation. On the contrary, they are the agonistic partners with whom the secular subject shares the rooms of institutional as well as informal deliberative interactions.

Within the set of political agents already authorized in secularist settings, there is a certain kind of “fundamentalist” that does not contradict the rules of the secular game, a religious subject that is perfectly secular in that they act politically in

²⁹ Vlasta Jalusic, *Feminism, Citizenship and the Possibilities of an Arendtian Perspective in Eastern Europe*, in *The European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 9, 2, 2002, pp. 103–122.

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *The essence of neoliberalism*, in *Le Monde diplomatique - English edition*, December 1998, available at: <https://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu>.

complete accord with the rules of liberal democracy. This “fundamentalist” is the stereotype by which Pentecostals and Roman Catholics are understood in many secularist and “progressive” settings. Facing “progressive” activists, they are a “repugnant cultural other”, as Susan Harding famously put it. But instead of being ostracised, they act as the secular subject’s agonists and deliberative partners. These “traditional” fundamentalists (in many South American Countries, “old” Roman Catholics and “new” Pentecostals) secure and regenerate secularism. As Susan Harding put it:

Fundamentalists create themselves through their own cultural practices, but not exactly as they please. They are also constituted by modern discursive practices, an apparatus of thought that presents itself in the form of popular “stereotypes”, media “images”, and academic “knowledge”. Singly and together, modern voices represent fundamentalists and their beliefs as an historical object, a cultural “other”, apart from, even antithetical to, “modernity”, which emerges as the positive term in an escalating of oppositions between supernatural belief and unbelief, literal and critical, backward and progressive, bigoted and tolerant. Through polarities such as these between “us” and “them”, the modern subject is secured.³¹

How does the figure of the fundamentalist, a product of the ideological discourse of secularism, work when it is used in “progressive” activism? By appealing to polarisation, a secular movement and a laic state institution can claim full legitimacy for their policy proposals as necessary to prevent religious fanatics from imposing theology and their personal private religious views on public legislation. But what actually happens is that the recourse to the threat of the religious fundamentalist homogenises both fields, the secular and the religious, and thus reinforces the ascription of evaluative dichotomic features to both sides, which regenerates the whole process. By othering fundamentalism, then, the secularist discourse polarises the political field in such a way that only two types of agents and agency are recognizable as such, i.e., the secular subjects, movements, and state institutions versus churches’ authorities and religious movements. This othering is, indeed, an authorisation of a particular other *as a legitimate adversary* in the political realm. This is the core of the process by which secularism shapes an agonistic-deliberative public arena: only politically authorized voices (both secular and religious) *deliberate* with each other *as equals* within the limits of an *agonistic ground* prepared in such a way so as to exclude those subjectivities and types of agencies that do not adjust to the ideas of religiosity and non-religiosity portrayed by the ideology of secularism. This agonistic field is a territory within the jurisdiction of liberal deliberative democracy, not somewhere outside of the presuppositions of rational deliberation and consensus building.

When agonistic partners arrive at deadlocks, these are frequently solved by sheer bargaining. Bargaining is not in itself problematic; it is a component part of politics. The problem of this particular bargaining is that not everyone affected by its

³¹ Susan Harding, *Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other*, in *Social Research*, 58, 2, 1991, pp. 373-393, pp. 373-374.

outcome is invited to the negotiating table, not everyone invited is allowed to speak, and even if they are allowed to voice their claims, not everyone is listened to, understood, and taken into account. The typical secular subject (for instance, progressive activists within official and formal political institutions such as legislative chambers or working in different levels of public office, including ministries, generally enjoying class, race, and/or gender privileges) and the typical religious subject (religious leaders who are already a part of the ruling elite) interact in a fashion similar to opposing movements in that they influence each other's agenda and strategies. However, their interaction differs from the way movements and counter-movements interact. Opposing movements interact shaping each other's strategies but do not usually have the same political effective weight in a polity.³² The typical secular subject and the typical religious subject are, on the contrary, co-legislators on an equal standing, sharing the exercise of political power as they take equal part both in the deliberative and in the bargaining moments.

A central normative and evaluative tenet of secularism as an ideology is that the state is neutral and impartial towards religion. But when states and positive legal *corpora* sanction "freedom of religion" and all the rights and duties pertaining to religious people and churches, they *eo ipso define* what "religion" is, what is a "church", and what religious "freedom" actually entails, and what is the normative scope protected by it. By doing this, the state and positive law favour a certain type of religion over others, authorising and de-authorizing different religious expressions and experiences, and organising them hierarchically. That secularism works normatively like this is now almost a truism since Talal Asad's and Saba Mahmood's lucid critiques of secularism. I cannot add much to their critique, but I do wish to stress that this work is done (and has always been done) with the active participation of hegemonic ecclesiastical authorities; it is not the autonomous and sovereign doing of laic subjects. The image of a political authority absolutely sovereign over ecclesiastical authorities is a normative and rather naïf idealisation of the concrete

³² I am thinking of Tina Fetner's description of the interaction between right-wing religious politics and LG activism in the United States. This author studies the 'oppositional, yet symbiotic, relationships that opposing movements develop over time' (Tina Fetner, *How the Religious Right shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2008, p. xxii). In the twentieth century, these relationships carried beneficial effects for the lesbian and gay movement in the USA, as 'the religious right, with its vast resources and political power, has turned a spotlight onto lesbian and gay rights issues, helping the lesbian and gay movement get its message to a wide public audience. Similarly, the religious right has helped push these issues into the platforms of political parties and elected officials' (Fetner, *How the Religious Right*, p. xxii). The religious right's powerful and highly organized activism has in the end helped the lesbian and gay movement to grow, although with the cost of relegating trans rights among other struggles. A less optimistic (perhaps more realistic) view on the contemporary relationship between movements and counter-movements regarding gender issues can be found in Elizabeth Corredor, *Unpacking 'Gender Ideology' and the Global Right's Antigender Countermovement*, in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44, 3, 2019, pp. 613-638. Today's anti-gender countermovement is so complex that it includes even sectors of feminism itself that campaign against trans people's rights.

power of the modern state. Churches, ecclesiastical powers, and religious subjectivities are crucial and active participants in the building of the Leviathan. Powerful religious actors operate, act, and deliberate within the political field arranged by the ideology of secularism, not outside of it, because it is a field they have helped to arrange as privileged agonistic partners with full legitimacy to act politically. Neither the idea of the Modern state nor concrete states are religiously neutral institutions capable of superseding religious authoritative structures and popular religiosity with a proxy *religion civile*.

A series of problems sets off from the secularist polarisation of the agonistic-deliberative political terrain. To begin with, polarisation delimits the political compass and the possible positions within it, cancelling all further debate over an issue. This leads to the incapacity to articulate wider and deeper demands and self-criticism within feminist, inclusive, left-wing, and LGBT+ movements, as well as to the incapacity of contesting authorities within churches. For instance, Blas Radi has analysed how polarization in debates on abortion bills tends to marginalise trans men's activism within pro-choice movements, obstructing their access to reproductive justice.³³ At the same time, LGBT+ religious activism for inclusion in churches usually does not receive support from the secular public, who sees religion affiliation as *per se* a symptom of cisheteronormativity. As a result, the political compass is shifted to the right.

Political dichotomies work in a marginalising fashion. The breaking of the political into two main types of agents fully authorised for participation outcasts whoever does not adjust themselves to those definitions. By depriving them of an efficacious political participation, it sends them to the margins of the demos but not outside of the political regime: they still remain under its jurisdiction and are, thus, unilaterally affected by decisions taken without their effective participation. Once this marginalisation has taken place, both "progressive" actors and the churches' authorities are free to call them "the voiceless ones" and speak on their names. Political marginalisation leads, thus, to instrumentalisation, which deepens the negative material and symbolic consequences of marginalisation.

Another problem that arises when using the discourse of secularism in left-wing and inclusive movements is that secularism and the political power of churches and religious lobby regenerate each other. Ecclesiastical authorities and anti-gender movements will appeal to the secularist conception of religion as a place free from state intervention to secure privileges for their institution, providing "public reasons" to support their anti-egalitarian agendas. A clear example of this is the movement "*Con mis hijos no te metas*" [Don't mess with my children]. This Christian organisation is active in Argentina and other South American countries and opposes sex education, abortion, LGBT+ rights and reproductive and non-reproductive rights. In Argentina, the movement articulates a public discourse based on citing the American Convention on Human Rights, the Constitution, and the National Education Law, endeavouring to show how its religious

³³ Blas Radi, *Reproductive injustice, trans rights, and eugenics*, in *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters*, 28, 1, 2020, pp. 1-12.

and conservative claims are perfectly consistent with the secular juridical framework of international treaties and of politico-juridical deliberation in general.

Under the present conditions, church and state are usually already separated to the advantage of right-wing ecclesiastical authorities, churches, and movements, i.e., religious denominations and lobby groups who already are proficient in speaking the language of secular deliberation. This, in turn, promotes an illegitimate political inequality among religious people and institutions. At the centre of my analysis was the fact that there are political debates that tend to get locked into impasses (which is a common, not necessarily problematic moment in any democracy), such as when abortion bills or policies concerning sexual rights and gender identity are debated. A non-ideal perspective as the one I employed here adopts the premise that conflict is unavoidable, ineradicable, and not necessarily, nor usually, violent, and that reaching consensus is not an aim to be pursued no matter what. But in certain democratic contexts, secularism can be a way of using conflict to protect the inegalitarian and marginalising ways in which political participation and power are distributed, instead of a way of acknowledging difference to amplify the voices of the disenfranchised ones.

IV. SOME NORMATIVE CONCLUSIONS

Three broad normative conclusions can be drawn from my analysis.

First, the normative orientation of the laicist-secularist principle of separation between church and state, both in societies with evident religious diversity and in contexts where a certain religion predominates, should be that it cannot be used to promote the supremacy of some religious institutions over other churches and visions of the world. The problem is that in many secular contexts it is used in this way. Indeed, the principle of church and state separation functions in the context described as if it were a transparent criterion to justify the state's non-interference in church matters. But let's ask some normative questions: is this the function for which we value the principle in its best rendering? Are its uses and applications faithful to the critical meaning for which it is cherished as an essential component of a normative order, independently of its genealogy?

In any contemporary democratic context, by means of laws, public policies, and treaties the state defines what a church is and what is not a church. Being or not being legally considered a church by the political authority is crucial because this status determines the rights a religious community has and has not. Laic states thus regulate significant aspects of churches, religious lives and subjectivities. Now, the state does not do this independently from ecclesiastical participation; on the contrary, every norm and policy associated with the separation of church and state are the product of a negotiation with religious actors that participate and have been participating politically throughout history, directly (with ecclesiastical authorities holding public offices, for example) and indirectly (with lobby, economic power, or

by exerting pressure on parishioners that are members of the parliament). Obviously, not all religious communities participate in politics with the same weight. In Latin America in general, the Roman Catholic authorities (which does not mean Catholics in general) have had and continue to have a leading role within institutions.

The predominant influence the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical authorities have on politics does not respond to any sort of extra political “representation” of Catholic majorities. Indeed, political representation and ecclesiastical representation are not congruent: Catholics deeply disagree among each other and with the church authorities regarding political and religious issues. Even if there are political parties and candidates that publicly identify as Catholics (or any other religion), this does not mean that they will act politically in representation of their churches. This seems very evident, but it tends to be forgotten when analysing the matter. Democracies do not give any legal and political authorisation for churches to act politically in representation of a religious community, as if this latter were a cohesive unity of voters agreeing on all pertinent matters.

The separation of church and state in its most democratic reading limits the ecclesiastical authority’s jurisdiction and protects the rest of the religious communities from the inegalitarian and unfair political supremacy of a church in particular. It does not imply the absolute arbitrariness of the Roman Catholic Church; it implies the protection of a certain set of individual and communal religious rights and the religious plurality and equality of churches, religions, and visions of the world. *The problem with mainstream conceptions of secularism is that they cannot explain why the separation of church and state is actually most frequently used to the advantage of a powerful church.*

Second, what about the religious rights *against* ecclesiastical authorities and the state? In 2021, on the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued the statement “The right to freedom of religion or belief and the right to live free from violence and discrimination based on SOGI are both built on a promise of human freedom LGBT persons deserve that promise fulfilled”. There we read:

Religious authorities have a responsibility to ensure that religion and tradition are not utilized to promote discrimination of persons based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. However, imputations of sin to the conduct and choices of LGBT individuals in the name of religion are often used as the justification for criminalization and other punitive measures in legal systems that, in many cases, derive from colonial structures that were superimposed on cultural views that were more accepting of diversity.³⁴

For many people, practicing their religion and belonging to a religious community is an essential aspect of their lives without which they would lose a sense of worth

³⁴ Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/2021/05/right-freedom-religion-or-belief-and-right-live-free-violence-and-discrimination-based-sogi?LangID=E&NewsID=27091>

and dignity. The value of this belonging is practical, and cannot be reduced to a secularist conception of religion as a set of beliefs freely chosen by an individual. Leaving one's religion does not amount to merely changing one's mind; it involves also leaving communal practices. This is why ecclesiastical authorities cannot act so as to make LGBT+ parishioners just give up their right to develop communitarian religious practices, and also why inclusive churches are so important. *A secularist vision of religion fails to explain why it is important to protect LGBT+ people's religious rights instead of leaving the predominant churches a carte blanche concerning their treatment towards these collectives.*

Third, a secularist conception of the separation of church and state fails to explain that there is no actual conceptual and normative clash of rights between sexual and reproductive rights and LGBT+ rights, on the one side, and religious rights, on the other. The perceived clash is a product of the polarising effects of the agonistic-deliberative territory secularism shapes; what actually exists, is an instrumentalisation of the legal system and the language of rights to promote anti-egalitarian aims. Debating about secularism and religion is still needed, but today the focus of the discussions should be put in the way the liberal state and the hegemonic church authorities collaborate to marginalise several collectives from political participation. The point of this paper was simply to indicate this, i.e., that liberal secularist frameworks are not very useful to address the de-democratising phenomena neoconservatism and religious right-wing actors are causing today.