



RELIGION, SECULARISM, AND POLITICAL BELONGING

Leerom Medovoi and
Elizabeth Bentley / editors

**RELIGION,
SECULARISM
& POLITICAL
BELONGING**

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EDITED BY LEEROM MEDOVOI
AND ELIZABETH BENTLEY

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This book is dedicated to Srinivas Aravamudan

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INTRODUCTION

Translated Secularisms, Global Humanities

LEEROM MEDOVOI AND ELIZABETH BENTLEY

Provincializing Secularisms

This collection reckons with the growing certainty that nearly everywhere today, whether in Trump's America, the unraveling Europe Union, the post-Arab Spring Middle East, or rising China, we are being ushered into tumultuous new political worlds whose markedly altered religious and secular vectors demand our critical attention. This book, however, does not seek a singular secular point of reference (the secular state, the immanent frame, a disenchanting world, or even a unified scholarly language) from whose perspective we might claim to measure or compare those changing vectors. Instead, it presumes that the secular vantage points of its international contributors are non-identical. Secularism in its most general sense is worldliness (a claim we will elaborate), but different worlds beget different forms of worldliness. The hard work of translation across political worlds—with their distinctive historical situations, critical languages, and social agents—therefore guides this book's basic approach to the fluctuating global conditions of religion, secularism, and politics.

In their landmark 2008 collection, *Secularisms*, Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini were among the first to urge scholars to discard a monolithic conception of secularism in favor of an approach that engages its many global forms. Jakobsen and Pellegrini still referred to a single “dominant narrative of universal secularism” that had developed in Europe in the aftermath of the Protestant reformation, but they reframed that narrative as one whose claims to universality amounted to a form of self-misrecognition. In their account, post-Protestant Western secularism has propagated a “secularization narrative” through which the West views itself as a champion of enlightened reason marching inexorably forward to emancipate the world from magical thinking, superstitious beliefs, and religion’s improper interference in political life. For Jakobsen and Pellegrini, however, secularism had not so much spread alongside capitalism and European empire as it had multiplied and mutated. Everywhere that secularism arrived around the globe, it took on new local forms, whether in relation to America’s competing Protestantisms, Islam and Hinduism’s cohabitation in India, syncretic traditions in Latin America, or Buddhism in China. Today, argued Jakobsen and Pellegrini, we live in a world of many secularisms just as surely as we live in a world of many religions.¹

Jakobsen and Pellegrini’s account is ultimately ambiguous when it comes to the task of provincializing Western secularism. On the one hand, it calls upon us to always specify the secularisms that we seek to study. But on the other hand, their account also maintains that the world’s various secularisms, even while constituted by local conditions, are always also “articulated in relation to the dominating discourse of universal secularism, which is tied to the Protestant secularism of the market.”² This claim, contrary to the general thrust of their argument, seems to make Western secularism different from all others; its false universalism paradoxically becomes genuine insofar as every other secularism must always be defined in relation to it.

This collection heeds the first rather than the second of Jakobsen and Pellegrini’s calls. It engages the plurality of secularisms, asking what it would mean for scholars of religion, secularism, and politics to take seriously the diversity and differences among the world’s secular formations when they collaborate with interlocutors from other parts of the world. *Religion, Secularism, and Political Belonging* grows out of coordinated research conducted by four teams of scholars who have worked together to investigate the rapidly changing political environments of the early twenty-first-century Netherlands, United States, Israel/Palestine, and China as well as the historical conditions and contexts within which those changes occur.³ In the various chapters of this book, our authors approach the politics of religion and secularism in light of such recent

historical events as the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Chinese economic ascendancy, neoliberalism's global resilience, burgeoning right-wing populisms, and the international migrant crisis.

Our book relinquishes the assumption that there is a general type of "Western secularism" with which every part of the world (and every local secularism) must contend. Years ago, Dipesh Chakrabarty suggested that postcolonial historical criticism could only move forward by "provincializing Europe," by which he meant learning to treat Europe as one place among many others rather than as the sociological standard for modernity against which all other histories needed to be measured (and found wanting).⁴ This volume approaches the world politics of religion and secularism in much the same spirit, emphasizing the particularity and provinciality of every region's (re)configurations of the secularism/religion binary.

This approach admittedly risks inviting criticism from scholars who have come to fear that the rejection of secularism's unitary significance undermines what they see as its necessary role in grounding the activist scholar's critical responsibilities. For critics such as Stathis Gourgouris, Bruce Robbins, and Aamir Mufti, the world may be home to multiple secularisms, but what makes them all "secular" is nonetheless the intrinsic sharing of an indispensable virtue: their common commitment to questioning established dogmas or theologies, especially those of their own culture.⁵ "Critique and interrogation—as autonomous self-altering practices—are the persistent conditions of the secular," writes Gourgouris.⁶ This perspective draws actively on Edward Said's notion of "secular criticism" both for intellectual inspiration as well as the conviction that the secular outlook constitutes a necessary precondition for intellectuals to effect critically grounded political change.⁷ As Robbins puts it: "Said was also embodying secularism in the terms he most consistently used about it: as self-scrutiny, hence also as openness to further thought, further effort, and further change. These are virtues of scholarly writing but also of political action in the public sphere."⁸ For Robbins, it was Said's resolute willingness to question and indeed indict the "pieties of the tribe" that made him secular. To be secular, from this perspective, is to be a universalist precisely in the sense that one is axiomatically irreligious and philosophically iconoclastic in relation to any particular faith (and once again especially one's own). The secular critic names someone with the intellectual courage to shatter the idols of orthodoxy that would keep us enthralled to the political status quo. Without the secular, no critique. Without critique, no new way of thinking. And without a new way of thinking, no undogmatic vision of how to make the world a better place.

We share this incisive commitment to the principle of secular criticism but approach it with a somewhat different lineage and valence of the secular that can also be gleaned from Said's work. Was "self-scrutiny" what Said actually meant by the "secular" when he advocated for secular criticism? A nuanced attention to his use of the word in his classic essay "Secular Criticism" suggests otherwise. And in fact, we propose that an alternative reading of what Said intended by this freighted word offers a useful and productive framework for this book's diverse forms of engagement with the global vicissitudes of secularism, religion, and political belonging.

Secularism as Worldly Practice

When Said brought the words "secular" and "criticism" together, he did so primarily to rebuke literary critics of his moment (the 1970s and 1980s) for disengaging critically and politically from the social worldliness of literary works in order to pursue instead their textual ambiguity: "In having given up on the world for the aporias and unthinkable paradoxes of a text, contemporary criticism has retreated from its constituency, the citizens of modern society, who have been left to the hands of 'free' market forces, multinational corporations, the manipulation of consumer appetites."⁹ It is these striking images of critics "giving up on the world" or of their criticism "retreating from its constituency" that captures the meaning of the secular that most interested Said. Academic literary critics, he argued, have come to inhabit the academy's ivory tower as if it were a monastery, a place where one retreats to reflect on works of literature as though they were the word of God. Said's "secular critic" is thus not literally an atheist but someone who rejects confinement to the ivory tower; her thoughts and actions are enough "in the world" to trouble the "quasi-religious authority of being comfortably at home among one's people."¹⁰

"Religion" functions here as a kind of metaphor for quietism that requires further consideration. Why would Said call "religious" (or more cautiously, "quasi-religious") that which renders someone comfortable with their failure to trouble the world? Throughout his essay, Said repeatedly figures this religiosity by way of various spatial images of places—the cloister, the monastery, the labyrinth—whose chief characteristic is their insularity. To inhabit these "religious" spaces is to escape into another world altogether. In that relatively untroubled and secluded world there seems to be no contact with the world events and societies, which modern intellectuals, critics, and societies have in fact built."¹¹ This peculiar manner of pitting the secular against the religious becomes legible once we recognize it as an allusion to perhaps the earliest usage

of the word “secular,” the first one appearing in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where it is defined as “living ‘in the world’ and not in monastic seclusion, as distinguished from ‘regular’ and ‘religious.’”¹² In the Middle Ages, the term “secular” served originally to distinguish between two kinds of clergy. While religious or regular clergy took vows to carry out their ministry within the spiritual confines of a monastic or religious order, thus cloistering themselves from the world of ordinary people, the secular priests worked in the parish, supervising the worldly activities of what Michel Foucault has called pastoral power, the oversight of the church’s flock.¹³

This specifically worldly form of religious activity was called “secular” because it involved living within the *saeculum*, which in Latin simply named a lengthy unit of time, approximating one hundred years (thus the words *siècle* in French or *siglo* in Spanish that designate a century).¹⁴ Living inside the temporality of human history, the secular clergy cared for the souls of their parishioners by tending to their temporal (their practical or historical) needs or difficulties. To use the terminology of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, secular priests were the *medicis advocent animarum*, or “physicians of the soul,” healing the world’s malevolent effects on spiritual well-being, or the inward aspect of what would later be called the “commonweal” of their flock.¹⁵

This account of secularism leads to a substantially different way of thinking about its historical meanings and aims. Consider, for example, how much it diverges from Charles Taylor’s highly influential argument that we live in a secular age primarily in the sense that we have come to inhabit an immanent frame that renders optional (and perhaps even difficult) any “belief” in a transcendent power beyond our world. For Taylor, “religion” is the name for the transcendental perspective of a “beyond,” while the secular names the condition within which the transcendent has retreated to become a dispensable elective position.¹⁶ Today, argues Taylor, even believers must live in accordance with a secular imaginary that renders religious belief as one choice among many, quite different from a believer’s situation five hundred years ago. As a key illustration of this argument, Taylor suggests that once upon a time, “we” (i.e., presecular Europeans) believed a “fulfilled life” to require something more than “ordinary human flourishing,” namely a faithful love and worshipfulness toward God. According to Taylor, the secular age is marked above all by the disappearance of anything beyond “ordinary human flourishing” as the necessary purpose of life.¹⁷

Notice how disruptive the figure of the secular priest becomes for Taylor’s underlying argument. The secular priest was necessarily concerned with human flourishing, for how could the pastor not care, first and foremost, for

the well-being of the flock? And yet, as the physician of the soul, the secular work of the pastor served a notion of well-being that transcended that of the everyday. Secularism, in other words, did not begin in the way Taylor conceives, as a retreat from the transcendental. Instead, it represented a way of bringing a concern with everyday human flourishing into alignment with something higher, more abstract, or indeed transcendent. These grander objectives of secularisms, along with their sublime ideological objects, have certainly changed over time and in different places: they began as the redemption of souls or the love of God but later they would take up loyalty to the state, the glory of the nation, the purity of the race, the *pax imperium*, the imperatives of economic growth, national security, human rights, or even the “greatest good for the greatest number.” Regardless of its particular aim, we can think of secularism as the umbrella term for the many projects that have concerned the administration of lives, the conduct of conduct, on behalf of those many ends we might call a “higher purpose.” Secularism, so conceived, does not presume an immanent frame at all. It is simply that the transcendent good it pursues remains always inextricable from (and only achievable through) the historically and socially specific world that it administers and seeks to better. From this vantage point, secularism should not be seen as a successor to religion, even in the quite sophisticated way that Taylor intends. It rather emerges within what will later be called religion, spins off as a project that sometimes wins autonomy from religion (but need not do so), and continues throughout to develop alongside religion, often in close relation to it.

It is more in keeping with this alternative understanding of the “secular” that Said criticized the literary critics of his day for secluding themselves from their “constituency,” abandoning the “citizens of modern society” to the sway of markets, corporations, and consumer manipulations. Said never called on literary critics to become secular by foregoing their (religious) calling. On the contrary, he urged critics to become secular precisely in the sense of zealously attending to people’s worldly needs.¹⁸

If the account of secularism we have offered here (as worldliness or pastoral care) does not sound very much like what Said called for, we would have to agree. Secularism in itself is not sufficient for the kind of political engagement that he wanted from scholars. But, and this is our point, Said never just called on us to become secular. He urged us to become secular *critics* because the critical stance is the one that impels us to interrogate the ideological basis of secular assumptions about what any world needs. Without a critical dimension, secularism lapses into the more ambiguous notion of governmentality or political regulation that is consistent with the way we have characterized it.

We cannot emphasize too strongly here the nonidentity of “secularism” and “criticism.” Secularism concerns values or missions that demand our worldly attention. It orients us (like a secular priest) toward a responsibility to minister on behalf of what people need. Criticism is a different value, equally important to Said’s project and ours because through it we discover that what people actually need may well diverge from what our “religious orthodoxies” tell us. Criticism can be conceived as an openness to the heretical insight. Even a secular priest should be prepared to question church orthodoxy upon discerning that the well-being of the parishioners depends on it.

To live up to Said’s fullest aspirations, therefore, we must become both secular *and* critical. Secularism without criticism means being immersed in the world without making the effort to consider what might be wrong or misguided about the norms of one’s culture. But criticism without secularism is merely cloistered activity, a discriminatory attentiveness to language or meaning that never circles back to help people in what Said called their “local and worldly situations.”¹⁹ Once we distinguish the “secular” from the “critical,” we can discern that secular critics need not be antireligious at all. In fact, they might paradoxically be deemed highly religious in precisely the medieval sense of the secular: as people who, like the parish priest, bring their zealous concern for the souls of the flock into the world through the worldly practice of their criticism.

The question at hand is this: What if the secular is not religion’s opposite at all but the politically ambiguous project of ministering to populations that was at first intrinsic to religion, and only gradually gained some independence from it? How does this change our view of the scholar’s critical responsibilities? Perhaps the right way to understand “secularism” is that it always involved a kind of protopolitics, having originated in the worldly or temporal dimension of religious practice. If the secular originally named the sacred mission to conduct a population’s temporal life in support of its spiritual salvation, then what Foucault called “governmentality” in fact grew precisely out of the secular responsibilities of religion. To govern well is to take the world and its temporal affairs carefully into account, to adopt an uncloistered concern for the population as one administers to its deepest needs. Little wonder that even as the notion of the “secular” came also to be applied to princes, emperors, and kings, who also were expected to care for the temporal needs of their subjects, it nevertheless remained historically bound, for better or worse, to religion and its political sense of belonging.

Secularism, so viewed, cannot be indicted in any general way as a synonym for pernicious imperialist or capitalist political reason, even if certain versions

of secular activity surely have been that. Neither is secularism always and everywhere the guarantor of critical thinking and enlightened change even if it is indeed true that secular criticism (or heresy) intercedes in what we would now call the “political.” This genealogy helps us to set aside the impasse of the so-called postsecularism debates. Secularism is more like power itself, a broader and open-ended analytic term for worldly interventions within which we discover (and can enjoin) the history of political struggles and critical interventions over what kind of care a population actually needs and to what ultimate purpose. Worldly critics must by definition *intervene* in the secular. But the secular in itself neither guarantees such critical interventions nor precludes them.

This genealogy of secularism as worldly pastoral care might initially appear hard to reconcile with a more conventional understanding of secularism as rule by the religiously neutral state or disenchanted reason, but in fact they are closely linked. If we trace the genealogies of secularisms in their historic mutations and diffusions, we can see that state power and enlightened reason are important themes along the way. This is true even if we remain focused on the work of secularism within the Western Church. In the immediate aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, for example, the reshaping of religion’s worldly activity is illuminated by the itinerary of the “minister.” One key innovation of reformed Protestant Churches was that, unlike the ordained priesthoods of Roman Catholicism, they preached a doctrine of universal priesthood (every Christian a priest), advancing a form of Church governance by lay “elders” that dispensed with any fixed distinction between clergy and laypeople.²⁰ Secular care of the congregation thus became self-administered, conducted by “ministers” who were selected from among the members of the congregation to preach and care for their fellow congregants.

This quasi-democratic conception of the congregation converted it into a miniature model of a governmental society, a prototype for early social contract theory, and a site for fierce debates about the legitimate basis for what John Milton would call “church government.”²¹ Radicals such as Milton or even the more moderate John Locke contended that church government could only draw its religious authority through the consent of the governed (those in the congregation whom it ministered), offering arguments running parallel to those emerging around the same time in relation to “civil government.” Secularism, in this context of the new Protestant churches, was hardly a project outside, above, or beyond religion but was a project of democratizing worldly care that would have broader ramifications.

On the side of the state, we might examine Thomas Hobbes’s foundational treatise of modern political philosophy, *Leviathan*, which is normally remem-

bered as a reasoned defense of the absolute sovereignty of the state. If one looks closely at the famous frontispiece of Hobbes's book, however, it may be noticed that the king is equipped not only with the sword of the law but also with the crosier, the staff of the shepherd. Because he considered the sovereign to be he who acts as "judge of what opinions and doctrines are averse, and what conducting to peace," Hobbes held him responsible for "the well-governing of opinions consisteth [in] the well-governing of men's actions."²² In this sense, the sovereign was charged with ensuring the civil religiosity of the population.

In part III of *Leviathan*, subtitled "Of a Christian Commonwealth," Hobbes zeroes in on the question of how this general responsibility over civil religiosity manifests for a Christian sovereign. His answer is that a Christian king or ruler necessarily becomes the "supreme pastor, to whose charge the whole flock of his subjects is committed."²³ Both the clergy of the Church and the civil magistrates of the state are "but his ministers," those to whom the sovereign delegates the shepherdly duty of conducting the public good in both its temporal and spiritual aspects. Put another way, Hobbes saw the state becoming secular, not when it left religion behind but on the contrary by embracing its worldly duty to oversee religion. Put even more bluntly, the Hobbesian state becomes secular by becoming *more* religious, not less. For Hobbes, this duty explicitly takes the form of an established Church under the authority of the sovereign. But it is not hard to see how this authority might lead in a different direction, in a compromise with the Lockean option, for example, so that the duty of the state over the "well-governing of opinion" becomes the maintenance of a neutral playing field among all those religions that are judged as "conducting the peace." In either formulation, all religions become civil religions insofar as they serve the people under the state's authority by augmenting the cohesiveness of the social bond. They come to serve the end of political belonging broadly construed.

It is not just that the state assumes pastoral responsibility over religion, however, but that the state becomes pastoralized in the far deeper sense of absorbing broad secular responsibilities for the population. Following the English Civil War, one sees the rise of "ministerial" government along lines that parallel the uses of ministry in Church government. The post of prime minister literally emerges in England for the first time during the early eighteenth century, under the government of Horace Walpole. But equally important, subordinate governmental ministries also emerged, each of which tends to some temporal aspect of the incipient national population's commonweal (in its relation to treasure, foreign power, military capacity, labor power, health, education, and so forth).²⁴ What makes these kinds of ministries secular is not

some intrinsic exclusion of religion but the reverse: the persistence and deepening of the state's pastoral responsibilities for national well-being. And among these responsibilities, as Hobbes indicated, one may find the management of religion itself.

The globalization of secularisms that accompanied the various colonial and capitalist expansions of European power cannot be adequately reviewed here, but we can briefly say that the new political worlds of colonies and markets were sites for the exercise of power that required intensive pastoral strategies for secular governance. At the same time, secular formations themselves were transformed in relation to the radically different worlds in which they were now being practiced. Can one separate European rule over the colonized from the so-called government of souls? We know that conversion of the heathen was one important colonial strategy of power. But as we look beyond missionary activity, we can see new worldly practices at work: colonial anthropology, Orientalism, and even the study of comparative religion developed as new forms of imperial knowledge/power that are inextricable from governmental activity that reshapes the worlds they study. David Chidester has referred to the comparative study of African religions in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain as a project that sought to "classify and conquer."²⁵ Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan have similarly suggested that the best place to begin accounting for secularism in India is with the techniques used by British colonial bureaucracy (laws, the census, electoral constituencies, and the like) to create "religious and caste identities as political categories, with far-reaching consequences." When the British invented the category of Hinduism, they delineated a religion that also had the effect of producing a population ("Hindus") analytically separable from (and soon politically pitted against) Muslims of the Raj.²⁶ Such cases can be read as histories of secular scientific knowledge about religion. But they are just as self-evidently the histories of a certain strategy of secular knowledge-power, practices of pastoral government in which a way of knowing a population also operated as a mechanism of political administration. The secular politics of anticolonial nationalisms are also part of this history, and the postcolonial critique of colonial secularisms surely needs to also account for the ways that the politics of bettering the worldly affairs of the colonized through independence constituted a series of Third World countersecularisms.

Similar observations are necessary concerning capitalism's royal science: the study of political economy. Karl Marx pointed out long ago that the classic political economists mistook the historically specific characteristics of capitalism for unchanging natural laws.²⁷ In this straightforward sense, they were ide-

ological. But the scientific knowledge of political economy also had a governmental dimension: it worked to reshape social relations at large in the image of market relations. The expansion of capital (as Marx also stresses) required a range of important governmental actions upon the laboring population: stripping them of their common access to land, socially and legally normalizing the treatment labor as a commodity (the wage form), and disciplining workers in the factory, among many others. Political economy must be understood as the science of how to manage human conduct so it might serve the maximization of wealth. It is tied directly to policy (*polizeiwissenschaft*), so that by the twentieth century, what we mean by economics would come to include the problem of manipulating a population's aggregate demand, managing the velocity of its currency flows, or even caring for what John Maynard Keynes would call its "animal spirits."²⁸ In his famous lecture on governmentality, Foucault observed that, almost from its start, the objectives of "government" cleaved to political economy as the chief form of knowledge/power that ministers to the wealth/population/territory triad.²⁹ Economic science was secular, not because it embodied disenchanted reason but because it brought knowledge concerning the production and circulation of wealth to bear upon what it construed as the worldly betterment of populations.

Consider, as one final example, the historical figure who is widely acknowledged to have coined the word "secularism": George Jacob Holyoake.³⁰ Author of the manifesto *The Principles of Secularism*, Holyoake was actually a nineteenth-century British Owenite Socialist who preached "secularism" as a kind of creed that applied science to the practice of pastoral government. In that book, Holyoake defined secularism as "the study of promoting human welfare by material means; measuring human welfare by the utilitarian rule, and making the service of others a duty of life."³¹ Secularism is nothing for Holyoake if not a ministerial enterprise, albeit one that no longer requires a church because science proves a more powerful and effective means of achieving what were always the secular aims of religion.

Holyoake apparently named his project "secularism" in part to distance it from the hostility toward religion signaled by "atheism": he did not mean to oppose religion's capacity to promote human betterment. But he also chose the word "secularism" because it connoted his own ministerial mission. "The Secular," he asserted, "is sacred in its influence on life, for by purity of material conditions the loftiest natures are best sustained and the lower the most surely elevated."³² Secularism, in short, meant the "sacred" pursuit of human betterment by the full employment of our knowledge of the material world, including, but not limited to, scientific knowledge. For Holyoake, secularism

was closely related to socialism, but its relationship to various political projects or religious denominations was flexible, so long as its engagement with the improvement of temporal affairs remained front and center.

If secularisms need not be understood as finding their antithesis in religion, as this genealogical journey has suggested, then how else should we characterize their relation? Because there is no singular answer to this question, we must circle back to where we began: with the plurality of world secularisms and the need always to provincialize. In certain times and places, secular formations have constituted religion as something that itself needs to be ministered by the state (by way of a state religion, a separation of church and state, or an avowed state neutrality toward religion). As we have stressed, however, religions have long served as sites for secular responsibilities, caring for the worldly affairs of people in forms that can range from classical notions of charity (the principles of *zakat* in Islam or *tzedaka* in Judaism) on the one hand to fully statist projects of explicitly religious government on the other. Indeed, in the new forms of religious politics we see today (the Christian right, political Islam, Hindutva electoral politics), we seem to be witnessing a striking *resecularization* of religion as it increasingly assumes direct pastoral political responsibility for its communities. Some of our contributors might wish to call these postsecular conditions, but could they not more accurately be interpreted as the reactivation of some rather early inflections of the secular?

What view should we take concerning such resecularizations of religion? Our point is that we cannot know in advance of a careful and critical consideration. And why would a true secular critic expect otherwise? Without question, the politicization of religion today is a phenomenon that often proves damaging to just and inclusive projects of political belonging. In a context like U.S. Christian evangelism, for instance, the politicization of religion has undoubtedly served to reconcile subjects to their own immiseration by neoliberal market forces. In Europe today, the politicization of “Judeo-Christian values” has provided right-wing European populisms with a weapon that strikes against already precarious refugee populations. Hindutva party politics provides both a basis for the honeycombing of Indian citizenship and an ideology with which to justify acts of violence against Muslim and other South Asian religious minorities. These are all examples of pervasive reactionary mobilizations of religion in contemporary political life. At the same time, we do not consider the entry of religion into the political or public sphere to be necessarily pernicious. Context is critical. We share, for example, our colleague Mohanad Mustafa’s view (found in this book) that the incorporation of Islamic values in post-Arab Spring Tunisia has actually expanded political inclusivity. It is no more help-

ful to subscribe a priori to the narrative that religion is everywhere the passive victim of secularism than it is to assume that only secularism allows us to transcend our provincialisms and dogmatic particularities.

Toward a New Secular Criticism: Particular, Global, Translational

It has now been nearly a quarter century since Edward Said originally published his urgent plea for critics to uphold their secular responsibilities. At that historical moment, Said too was responding to the changing vectors of a particular world, namely a shift in American political circumstances that he pithily described as the “ascendancy of Reaganism, or for that matter [with] a new cold war, increased militarism and defense spending, and a massive turn to the right on matters touching the economy, social services, and organized labor.”³³ Throughout his career as a secular critic, Said interrogated and challenged a Western imaginary that legitimated its acts of violence (whether against the American poor or the villagers of Central America) as the self-defense of liberal freedom. Said’s writings frequently return to the question of how and why defending the secular principle of Western freedom had come to justify both a cold war against the “oriental” communist states of the East (the Soviet Union but also Vietnam and China) as well as a domestic war against the “totalitarian bureaucracy” of the Keynesian welfare state. Said’s magnum opus, *Orientalism*, can be usefully approached as a study of the nineteenth-century imperial ideologies that postwar American anticommunism had inherited and reinvigorated. By the time Said had published *Covering Islam* in 1981 (in the wake of the Iranian Revolution), he was further observing how Orientalized images of Islam as the exemplary enemy of Western freedom were folding into a fruitful strategy for advancing Reaganite neoliberalism at home and American power abroad in the name of fighting terrorism. Said, in other words, was not so naive as to think that the championing of “secularism” could not itself be an ideological maneuver that secular criticism needed to analyze and indict.

Circumstances have changed considerably since Said’s time, although the political uses of anti-Islamism have only grown. The age of three worlds associated with the cold war has given way to a far more unstable geopolitical situation with multiple centers of power (a weakened United States; a more independent Europe, China, and India in ascendancy) and a stunning proliferation of governing ideologies and strategies of power. The twentieth century’s principal governmental strategies—the state secular models associated with Western liberalism, communism, and even postcolonial nationalism—are today either greatly diminished or changed. In their place, we sometimes find

political religions stepping into governmental roles, while in other places we see the growing appeal of populist nationalisms that claim to defend the people against various figurations of foreign and/or religious enemies.

What then might we most urgently want and expect from our secular critics in such a world? Given the distinct political trajectories at work across different countries and regions, perhaps first and foremost we need forms of secular criticism that are resolutely particular in their engagement with local conditions and strategies of governance. How does a secular formation minister to the “freedom” of the neoliberal marketplace in the United States, the minoritization of immigrant communities in the “pillarized” society of the Netherlands, the Jewishness of the “Jewish state” of Israel, or the management of religious minorities in Communist China? Said, of course, characterized secular critics as people who are not “at home” in the world about which they write, who call into question the self-justifying strategies of power that govern that world. The open question, of course, is what our criticism of local conditions can also tell us about the global turbulence that is characteristic of this new century.

Like good Saidian secular critics, the scholars from the four RelSec teams whose work appears in this book critically engage the political forces that they see reshaping the particular worlds they inhabit. We can offer some generalizations about the distinctive set of concerns that animates the work of each team. The American scholars, for instance, are primarily interested in interpreting the conditions that have enabled the emergence of a complex coalition in the post-9/11 United States among neoliberal market advocates seeking a “deregulated” capitalism, a Christian right bent on fighting a culture war against liberal secular humanism, and a xenophobic politics that leans ideologically upon Islamophobic discourses of civilizational war against terrorism.³⁴ The Dutch team, meanwhile, examines the complex implications across the European Union’s ideological spectrum as political reactions to new African and Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee populations drive many Europeans away from a strict Enlightenment framework for the European public sphere and toward a range of postsecular arguments proffered both by the multicultural left and the populist right.

The central concern for our scholars from Israel/Palestine consists in debating what is being lost and what might potentially be gained from the steady erosion of secular nationalisms in the Middle East in favor of expanding political religiosities, whether those are the rise of religious Zionist movements in Israel (once upon a time a political contradiction) or various forms of political Islamism found in occupied Palestine as well as in the rest of the Arab world.

By contrast, our Chinese scholars are primarily concerned with the uneven adaptations of Western discourses of secularism and religion in the new context of Chinese wealth and power, particularly as they concern the Chinese state's simultaneous efforts to regulate religion on the one hand and to reframe Confucianism in light of secular Western notions of "civil religion" on the other.

If the governmental problems raised by the secularism/religion dyad are so distinctive in these four parts of the world, what then is the value in bringing these particularities together under one cover? We would reply that, across all these regions, the increasingly explosive relationship between religion and secularism on one side, and political life on the other, seems to have become one of the "wicked problems" of our times. Here we find the universal moment in our analysis. A "wicked problem," as the policy and science disciplines understand, is an especially vexing and insoluble problem that is characteristically multivalent, too complex to formulate exactly, lacking any ideal solution, and likely symptomatic of other problems.³⁵ So it is here. Whether one begins with the rise of Islamophobia in the West, the virulent political theologies of the populist right, the steep decline of secular Zionism and Arab nationalism in the Middle East, or the communist Chinese state's growing adaptation of Confucian principles for civil order, one sees simultaneous transformations in worldly governmental practice that we could easily call "global climate change," were that phrase not already claimed by natural scientists to describe a different wicked problem. In a very general way, of course, we can trace these transformations back to certain traveling forces—the decline of American power, the neoliberalization of capital, indeed a warming Earth (Syrian refugees are climate refugees in both senses)—all of which are disrupting the comparatively stable arrangements that obtained in the latter half of the twentieth century. Like the planetary climate crisis to which it is certainly connected, however, the global picture one might draw of the crisis in the religion/secularism/politics triad looks quite different wherever one happens to look. In both cases, the climate is changing but the weather is local.

It is in the face of such a global picture of crisis that the temptation to universalize is surely the strongest. Étienne Balibar, in asserting that the prospect of planetary catastrophe will require us to invent a worldwide discourse of political solidarity, calls the new language that we need today "secularism secularized" because, in his view, global solidarity will necessarily take the form of a civic articulation, a citizenship language (*articulation citoyenne*), that has undergone so ruthless a critique of any residual particularity or partiality that it can emerge as genuinely universal: "The question of a secularism for the global age does not really differ from that of the development of universalism

or the very meaning of the category of universality in the current conjuncture. What language do we have with which to convince ourselves that there exists risks and interests ‘common to all humankind’?”³⁶ We will have to invent and share such a common language, Balibar suggests, even while we continue as native speakers of our particular languages. To use a Gramscian idiom, he aspires to a planetary common sense that can subsequently become “translatable into a multitude of discourses and language spoken by a multitude of groups and social conditions.”³⁷ Balibar’s call marks a powerful Hegelian return to the secular as a universal by which we overcome our particularities—our local forms of worldly loyalty and embeddedness—through a critical process that leads at last to genuine cosmopolitical solidarity. The difficulty, as he sees it, is how to get there. The process will surely involve translation across difference, but translation understood as an act of translingual communication that moves us toward commonality. He also appears to suggest that this translational process will purge us of the “religious” along the way because “when it is possible to translate one religious universe into another, the reason is *precisely that it is not purely religious*.”³⁸ What actually translates is always the secular dimension, that which is waiting to be dialectically elevated toward the universal language of solidarity.

Taken as a whole, our book suggests a different path. This is not a collection that hopes to move us toward a cosmopolitical Esperanto, even as a vanishing mediator, nor do we imagine that what global crisis calls for today is an effort to be pried dialectically out of our local worlds into a shared planetary perspective. We cannot run the biblical story of the Tower of Babel in reverse. In this book, translation is also important, not because it produces communication that can lead to a higher commonality but because it makes us better secular critics of our own world, and perhaps better neighbors too, when we are confronted with the foreignness of some other world’s secular criticism.

Our inspiration comes from the great German Jewish critic and thinker Walter Benjamin, who, in his essay “The Task of the Translator,” argued that the value of translation is not that it converts the content of another language into our own but that it makes our own words strange to us when we hear the echoes of a different language in the translated text.³⁹ In his famous yet simple example, Benjamin explains that the German word *Brot* and the French word *pain* do not have the same “intention” but in fact exclude each other’s meaning, because bread means something different in German than it does in French.⁴⁰ It is not only that bread itself is lived and used differently but also that the words carry different cultural connotations and values that make them noninterchangeable and indeed opposed, agonistic. Citing his con-

temporary Rudolph Pannwitz, Benjamin writes: “Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works.”⁴¹ The translator’s task should not be to change the language of the other into our own, nor for that matter into an Esperanto that transcends both languages. Instead, the task is to render *our own language foreign*. Judith Butler has eloquently characterized this approach to translation as seeking the “condition of a transformative encounter, a way of establishing alterity at the core of transmission.”⁴² And yet this establishment of alterity by way of transmission is in fact very difficult to achieve, not least because of our own psychic investments in the languages that we already use for our critical work.

Consider, to offer just one example, a Dutch scholar bent on the question of how to widen European secularism’s promise of toleration so as to encompass new migrant refugee communities. Upon encountering (and seeking to translate into a critical secular European idiom) a Palestinian or Israeli scholar’s effort to activate certain religious frameworks for political cohabitation, it might be difficult for Dutch researchers to read it as anything other than a dangerous regression from what they understand as secularism’s promise of universal inclusion. We are here trying to translate across the critical secularisms of two political worlds. What will it actually take for that Dutch scholar to rearticulate his own scholarly language into one that can effectively absorb the Israeli scholar’s sense that a return to religion might offer more critical insight and worldly political promise than a “secular” Zionism that has steadily made it impossible to imagine an Israel that is both Jewish and democratic? Or to engage the reasons why an Islamist framework might seem critical to achieving a fully inclusive Palestinian political project or perhaps even an eventual one-state solution to the conflict? How must the very idiom of Dutch secular criticism change, what kind of transference must occur, for such alterity to enter the act of transmission? And how will that effort to reorient the Dutch situation ramify back upon the critical outlook and interventions of the Palestinian and Israeli scholars?

What such transferential and transformational moments of translation offer is a difficult but more genuine pathway to a global solidarity whose methodological foundation and political aim is not progress toward universalism but an openness to being changed by the foreign, and perhaps then to a kind of agonistic identification with that foreignness, that strange particularity. The particular could at least momentarily seek its opposite not in the universal but,

quite literally, in the translated, that which names the reverberations sounding when two or more particulars, by colliding with one another, are both transformed.

Does such an approach to secularism leave us with any overarching conception of the global at all? We should be clear that we are not proposing that the universal be rejected in the name of the particular. A one-sided embrace of particularism can lead to the relativistic valorization of “local values” that only undermines our capacity to take a critical stand against the authoritarian tendencies of our times. We therefore do not think it is wise to “back” the particular any more than the universal. There is no choosing sides between them. What we are arguing, instead, is that no access to the universal is possible except *by passing through the particular*. The particular is not that which we ought to leave behind (or shed) as we dialectically purify ourselves and our thought process of its contaminants. We can never become purely universal (secular) subjects. We can, however, catch a glimpse of the universals that connect particulars and that ground our impulses to critique when we attend to the moments of estrangement that occur when we translate back and forth between those particulars. When we refer to our project as a kind of “global humanities,” we are honoring the importance of the universal. It is just that we do not think you can do global humanities without working through the local, and that you do not find the universal by rejecting the particular.

Benjamin’s term for the universal in “The Task of the Translator” aligns with what we have in mind. According to his essay, when we let our own language fall under the spell of another, and let it be thereby changed, opened up, recast in the other language’s modality or *intentio*, we approach something that he calls “pure language.” Perhaps the most vexing and controversial of his concepts, “pure language” evokes a seeming impossibility. It is certainly not Balibar’s universal language of “secularized secularism,” a language we imagine (or want) everyone to speak. Rather, it corresponds to no actually existing tongue, nor any tongue that ever could be. It articulates a place in which, by hearing the echoes of one language through a translation rendered in another, we catch whispers of some third language that is entirely free of content and particularity. By way of a metaphor, Benjamin imagines a broken vessel whose fragments, when glued together, “must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way, a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.”⁴³ This well-known religious metaphor, which

is known in Jewish Kabbalistic literatures as *shevirat hakelim*, tells the story of the shattering of primordial vessels that gave rise to the diversity of creation. In its religious register, pure language does indeed reverse Babel: it references a self-complete Adamic language that existed before the linguistic fragmentation of humanity. But there is no putting the vessel back together out of its fragments. In Benjamin's secular idiom, in its worldly purpose, the concept of "pure language" theorizes the work of translation by reconceiving the relation of the particular and the universal. The *part* is that which we can see, hear, and speak, while the *totality* (as is also the case for Fredric Jameson) is that concrete universal that can never be grasped on its own terms, and so must always be approached through the relationships that emerge among the particulars it contains, through their mutual translations.⁴⁴

For the kind of secular criticism that is this book's aim, "pure language" expresses the impossible asymptotic (and thus never-ending) project of the global humanities. The global will never resolve itself into a singular universal language that transparently apprehends and thoroughly criticizes the secular forces of every part of the world in the name of a higher secularism. We will not solve our wicked political problems by speaking from the viewpoint of such a universal. Nevertheless, the global points toward a pure language we can never reach directly. To use Benjamin's image, the "global" is best grasped as the shattered vessel of global secular criticism itself, a project that emerges into view only through comparative studies that might reveal how one fragment of local knowledge fits perfectly with that of another locale yet does not thereby need to resemble it.

Itinerary of This Book

This book is organized with a translational glimpse of the global in mind. It does not provide separate, self-contained dossiers for each region. Instead, its work is divided into three sections—on religion, secularism, and political belonging, respectively—that serve to juxtapose the secular criticisms of different if related political worlds. Each section begins with two keyword entries, composed by RelSec scholars, that frame a critical intervention into the particular political context that generated it. But "Brot" is quickly followed by "pain." The subsequent chapters talk back to the informing contexts and the assumed interventional value of the keywords. In the process, each section repeatedly reframes the significance of the section's opening acts of criticism within other worlds.

Part I, which revolves around the plurality of secularisms, launches with two keyword entries, on "neutrality" and "science," each of which challenges the

worldly claims of their respective (and quite different) secular practices. The keyword entry on “neutrality” is politico-juridical in focus, tracing neutrality’s rise as a new legal norm in the United States (in place of “separation”) that has increasingly provided evangelical movements with access to governmental powers. “Science,” meanwhile, in tracking three different levels at which the secular claims of science are deemed (in)compatible with religion, concludes that it is precisely when science tries to offer an account of the power of religious faith or the sacred that it most clearly fails to meet the standards of its own truth protocols.

In the first chapter of part I, Pooyan Tamimi Arab strategically reverses the critique of the neutrality keyword by arguing that, in Western Europe at least, a strict neutrality paradigm is both traditional and remains indispensable as a secular framework for the political governance of religion. Disputing the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum’s argument that neutrality should be supplanted by contextually sensitive political accommodations of religious difference, Tamimi Arab suggests that Nussbaum’s dilution of the neutrality framework’s importance is itself contextually insensitive. It misses the challenges arising in the Dutch context, where a growing aversion to Islamic presence in the public sphere has led to attempted legal restrictions on the visibility of Muslim life. If, as this introduction has argued, secularism intervenes in a population’s everyday life in the name of their pastoral needs, Tamimi Arab shows that, absent a robust principle of neutrality, the Dutch state’s secular management of religion may well acquiesce to the banning of Muslim sartorial practices, mosques, and Islamic calls to prayer, and that it may lead to erosion in the political claims of Muslim citizens.

Despite a proliferation of research into secularisms across the globe, Chinese modes of secularism remain understudied, perhaps because many conventional Western assumptions (that secularism must be about separation of church and state or represent a modern break with traditional religious beliefs) seem not to apply. Albert Welter’s chapter proceeds in two steps. First, he shows how European concepts of religion and secularism did find translation into Chinese, albeit through native words that reorganized their meaning in local ways. Second, he suggests that these concepts had to operate in a social framework vastly different from the public/private-sphere distinction that was so important in European theory and practice. Welter brings these questions back to the possible understanding of Confucianism as a species of secularism insofar as it played a role in the administration of religion in China—specifically Buddhism. However, it did so by way of what he calls a “sphere of proximity”—a continuous terrain where public and private, secular and sacred

aims converged. As such, Confucian secularism is characterized not through a Westernized separation of church and state but through a framework wherein the state strategically sanctions religious institutions and activities that support governmental policy.

In the next chapter, Mohanad Mustafa considers the unique context for the practice of postsecular politics in post-Arab Spring Tunisia, exploring the significant political accommodations of Islam that have occurred in the public sphere. Prior to this first (and arguably only successful) iteration of the Arab Spring revolutions, Tunisia was one of the most emphatically antireligious secular states in the Arab world; its government in the postcolonial period combined a rigidly authoritarian regime with a radical secularization project that attempted to both exclude religion from the public space and suppress political Islam. The 2010 popular revolution led to the collapse of the authoritarian regime, the beginning of processes of democratization, and a resurfaced questioning of the relationship between religion and politics in Tunisian public discourse. Mustafa argues that two concurrent, differential forces—the rise of political Islam and the attempted break with the deposed regime’s radical secularist legacy—have produced an inclusive mode of secularity that compromises on the status of “religion.” This inclusive secularity, in which a mutually beneficial separation of church and state paradoxically complements the injection of religion in the public sphere, offers in his view a very rare model for envisioning postsecular democratization in the Arab world.

In the penultimate contribution of part I, Marcia Klotz and Leerom Medovoi critique the sacralization of markets by way of considering why neoliberalism, which appears in many parts of the world as a “secular” force, nonetheless is so often closely allied with religious traditionalism. Tracing the genealogies of political economy that would enable such relationships, Klotz and Medovoi outline a long-standing theological foundation to liberal economic thought that, even in its contemporary permutations, has proven attractive to certain forms of organized religion in the United States. The durability of America’s neoliberal regime of power, which has survived severe economic crises, financial meltdowns, and waves of strong political opposition, according to the authors, owes a great deal to its religious form of self-legitimation and its unique form of theological subjection through investing in acts of faith through uncertain times.

In the final chapter of part I, and in a reading of the Dutch context that diverges strikingly from that of Tamimi Arab, Ernst van de Hemel considers the uses of religion in the sharp turn to the political right occurring today not only in the Netherlands but throughout Western Europe. Whereas Tamimi

Arab makes a case for the viability of a “strict neutrality” conception of political secularism, van den Hemel instead emphasizes the ways in which populists are “deneutralizing” European political secularism by directly asserting its cultural equivalence with Judeo-Christian religious traditions. European populists assert the basis of Western secularism in Christianity, not (like Talal Asad, for one) in order to critique its provincial particularity but as a means of forging a populist national selfhood that legitimates the xenophobia of such parties and movements as the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV, Freedom Party). Van den Hemel explores these developments through a close reading of the PVV’s Twitter feeds, where one finds a remarkably high number of references to religion, albeit as a concept that becomes retroactively interchangeable with progressive Dutch “heritage” or “culture” even while justifying the exclusion of Muslim immigrants.

Part II of the book turns from a general concern with the secular toward the belonging claims of religion, launching with lexical entries on “nationalism” and “fundamentalism,” each of which map out a different framework for political belonging that has in its own way mobilized the secularism/religion binary. The “nationalism” keyword calls into question nationalism’s alleged status as the paradigm for secular political belonging to the state par excellence by showing how it is repeatedly shadowed by religious belonging. The entry also calls attention to the growing capacity for envisioning nonnational states, citing important contemporary examples such as the European Union or the Islamic state, where state formations appear to be finding alternatives to nationalistic strategies (civil and religious, respectively) for grounding their project of secular governance. Meanwhile, the “fundamentalism” keyword entry traces the discursive delineation of “bad religion” by considering the development of “fundamentalism” as a political discourse that has always worked to produce regressive enemy figures. Beginning with evangelicals in the early twentieth century but making an international jump in the late 1970s to political Islamism, the fundamentalist stands as a category for the religious abnormal, a dogmatic fanaticism whose resistance to modernity itself serves to threaten civil society.

Working in tension with one or both of these keywords, the chapters that follow challenge these readings of “nationalism” and “fundamentalism” in a number of contexts where the “religious” has found its political mobilizations. In their chapter, Raef Zreik and Mohanad Mustafa, for example, explore the vital role that religion has played in the revolutionary and anticolonial political thought of the Palestinian nationalist movement through a close consideration of Dr. Fathi Shaqaqi, founder of the Islamic Jihadist movement. Through

a close reading of Shafaqi's work, they show not only how Islam could be conceived as always having represented the anticolonial heart of Palestinian nationalist activism but more generally how religion and nationalism at times operated (at least in movements like Islamic Jihad) as inextricable twin elements in a sacral politics of liberation that neither of the keyword entries on nationalism or fundamentalism are in a position to entertain.

A quite different interweaving of religious and national forms of belonging has also emerged in recent years on the Israeli side of the conflict, a subject that Ori Goldberg explores in his chapter on the evolution of Israeli "national religious" party politics. Goldberg focuses on the party once known as the National Religious Party (Mafdal) and re-formed as Habayit Hayehudi (the Jewish Home), examining the constitutive interaction between the party's religious vision and its social and economic positions. The mainstay of Israeli national religious politics has traditionally been support for a "greater" Israel through the settlement of occupied Palestinian territory. While this religious vision is still in focus, Habayit Hayehudi's economic position has shifted significantly from moderate fiscal and social conservatism to a radically capitalist, free-market approach. Goldberg employs critical theological theory to examine these shifting nodes of interaction, highlighting the ominous political theology underlining radical transformations of this nature.

In his chapter on aspects of Chinese religion, Mu-chou Poo takes a deep dive into the dense history of the management of religion in the Chinese context, which, as he observes, raises methodological problems because the range of social phenomena that might be considered religious in China differs so dramatically from dominantly Abrahamic regions of the world. For Poo, the question of what has counted as religion, or how it should be regulated in Chinese history, needs to be considered in light of three principal contexts: the historically continuous expectation of the strong state's "celestial authority" in China, the historical tension between Chinese intellectuals and the commoners regarding such popular activities as deity worship and divination, and, most recently, the influence of Western intellectual traditions in religious studies. Poo suggests ultimately that the secular/religious divide cannot be sustained in the Chinese context even as there is room for rich analysis of the uses of the sacred for the reproduction of civil relations and Chinese political belonging.

David N. Gibbs returns to a theme that runs through many of the American contributions, namely the historical convergences between market economics, Christianity, and political belonging in the U.S. political sphere. In this case, the investigation concerns the way that so-called fundamentalism has in fact been critical in the hegemonic shaping of recent American nationalism.

Gibbs's chapter, in an interesting parallel to Goldberg's reflections on the Jewish Homeland Party in Israel, considers how the rise of evangelical Protestantism influenced a decisively conservative political shift in the U.S. Republican Party of the 1970s. Gibbs argues that this conservative shift was led by business elites, who sought free-market economic policies and military expansion but pursued those objectives by establishing common cause with evangelical Christians. This emerging power bloc, which proceeded by condemning Democratic "secularists" and claiming to support the renewal of "traditional values," led to a lasting business-Christian alliance whose combination of money, votes, and religious fervor remains a distinctive feature of contemporary U.S. politics today.

Although, as the "fundamentalism" keyword rightly suggests, Islamic subjects have been repeatedly and adversely mapped as "fundamentalist" in many contemporary secular political contexts, Eva Midden focuses her attention on a complex situation within this framework in the Netherlands: the gendered tensions that ensue when European women of Christian origin adopt traditional Islamic religious practices. Midden's chapter, "Among New Believers," focuses on the controversial position that these women hold in Dutch society, where they are often confronted with questions of national identity (are they still "Dutch"?), and of emancipation (did they make a conscious choice, and how does it influence women's emancipation?). Midden grounds her analysis in a reading of the Dutch television show *Van Hagelslag naar Halal* (*From Dutch Chocolate Sprinkles to Halal*), wherein a group of Dutch female converts travel to Jordan with their mothers in hopes of developing mutual understanding within the context of their newly defined relationships. Midden analyzes the show's staged dialogue not as a realistic depiction of these relationships but as symptomatic of the gendered tensions between religion and national identity that circulate in Dutch popular media. Midden argues that these converts' religious choices are interpreted as a direct challenge to—and incompatible with—the secular values that presumably define Dutch identity.

Part III bridges the two preceding sections in a consideration of when and how the secular and the religious can come together to create complex and sometimes politically positive forms of belonging. This section begins with two keywords, which evoke contrapuntal approaches to negotiating religion, secularism, and political belonging: "civil religion," an entry composed by Muchou Poo of the Chinese team, emphasizes the secular worldly purposes that religion can be asked to serve, while "faith," contributed by Israeli scholar Ori Goldberg, gestures toward the religious intentions, the higher purpose, that is potentially offered by the nominally secular forms of citizenship and political belonging.

In chapter 11, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri challenges the positive inflection of civil religion espoused in the keyword entry by taking stock of the intensely Islamophobic challenges that Muslim citizens of the United States have faced when it comes to participating in the civil vision of the American polity since the 9/11 attacks. GhaneaBassiri proceeds by analyzing the virulent backlash to American Muslim leader Feisal Abdul Rauf's activism and writings by anti-Shari'a activists. Although the concept of civil belonging in a republican framework does operate under certain conditions in American society, GhaneaBassiri observes how the question of who belongs in America inevitably pivots back to identity markers, particularly given the challenges to civil acceptance posed both by transnational notions of Muslim religious community and by the political anxiety that organizes around Shari'a. GhaneaBassiri demonstrates that the discourses surrounding Muslim belonging reveal a struggle in contemporary American politics between liberal conceptualizations of citizenship—wherein the exercise of civic duties works to renew the social contract between the state and communities—and an illiberal, nativist, and isolationist understanding of citizenship as an act of will on the part of those whose race, religion, and gender represent the embodiment of America in a popular imaginary.

Similarly interested in the redefinition of citizenship by (and against) minoritarian subjects, but more hopeful about the possible outcome, is Markus Balkenhol, who explores how the claims to citizenship articulated by the Netherlands' Afro-Surinamese community route through their religious practice. Beginning with the paradigmatic shift to integration in the early 1990s, Surinamese Dutch of African descent have mobilized the colonial past—particularly Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade—to formulate claims to citizenship. For the self-identified “descendants of the enslaved,” full citizenship constitutes a form of emancipation—the realization of the promise held by the abolition of slavery. Notably, however, these claims to citizenship are not prefaced upon dominant understandings of emancipation-as-secularization. Rather, these claims are put forth with an understanding of emancipation that encapsulates both formal, legal citizenship and *cultural* emancipation: the revaluation of cultural forms and practices that have been suppressed or disavowed under colonialism. Drawing upon ethnographic research from Winti ceremonies in the Dutch public sphere, Balkenhol demonstrates how “descendants of the enslaved” articulate a critical position in which participation in secular political life in the Netherlands and religious practice are not delineated as separate practices that must stay on their respective sides of a public/private divide.