From the Secular to the Habermasian Post–Secular and the Forgotten Dimension of Time in Rethinking Religion and Politics

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Abstract: Time has been the forgotten dimension in the debate on the post-secular, originated by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas in the Social Sciences two decades ago. This article proposes a study of post-secularity from the temporal dimension and concludes that it is possible to affirm that post-secularism is a way of colonialism by other means. The article also inquires into the capacity of the post-colonial approach to offer a critical reading of political religiosity that would include the underlying cultures of time. In response to this question, it explains the controversial nature of post-colonial thought with respect to this task. However, it argues that post-colonial and de-colonial perspectives are nonetheless useful for apprehending cultures of time among religious actors.

Keywords: Post-secular; Post-colonial; Time; Religion; Politics.

> Secularism is not only a matter concerning space,
> particularly the social space, but also time. It is not sufficient
> to treat the problem of secularism as a problem of space as it
> is equally a problem concerning time.[1]
> *A. Raghuramaraju.*

Introduction

This article proposes a reflection on time as a political place and approaches the temporal dimension as a localisation where power is deployed in terms of oppression and liberation. Human beings have always lived within two time coordinates: physical time and social time, which the Greeks called *cronos* and *kairós*. The first is time tied to the birth of a living organism, i.e. a chronological series between life and death. The second, the focal point of this article, is the way human groups represent time as a constituent vector of

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their representations of the social, the political, and the historical. It is the Greek *kairós* that alludes to the cultures of time.

As Giordano Nanni explains (2012), a certain culture of time, created through a mixture of technological advances and strong beliefs, 'was necessary for building empires' (Nanni 2012: 2). Europe was able to establish imperial dominion over other lands and peoples thanks to the creation and progressive universalisation of a standardised time – a temporal *lingua franca* – that made it possible to synchronise the world's diversity.

The idea of the secular, rooted in Christianity, became 'a hermeneutic category of modernity' (Koselleck 2003: 45; my translation) by representing this new era – or European project – in terms of time. The creation of modernity was marked by one particular form of temporality among many possible ones. The weak, fearful, peripheral Europe of the Middle Ages became a hegemonic aggressor largely thanks to a culture of time characterised by a mundane, immanent, linear, universal sense of time oriented to the realisation of an ultimate end (*telos*). Thus, the construction of the religious/secular binary – i.e. the time/eternity dichotomy that originated with Christianity – became the *cornerstone* of modernity and of European colonial expansion.

Since the end of the 20th century, and especially after 9/11, academics in the Social Sciences have incorporated the study of religions in national and international politics with a sense of urgency. The traditional secularisation thesis was critically revised by several authors who called for the need to demystify it. Since the 1970s, many sociologists of religion, like Robert Bellah (1970), accepted that secularisation – understood as a modern process of privatisation of religion, progressive disappearance, and institutional differentiation – was not inevitable, because religion still played an important role in modern society. José Casanova discredited the academic modern assumption about the need to privatise religion and defended the thesis of 'public religions' (1994); Peter Berger (1999), one of the leading proponents of secularisation, admitted that secularisation thesis admitted that it was mistaken and provoked counter-secularisation, i.e. increasing religiosity, political religion, and religious fundamentalism. In the same sense, Grace Davie (1994) stood up for the idea of 'believing without belonging' before his case study in England; the Indian political theorist Rajeev Bhargava (2000) showed the existence of 'multiple secularisms'; and the Saudi anthropologist Talal Asad (1993; 2003) proposed an anthropology of secularism that called for the need to de-construct the essentialist concepts of religion and the secular built by European modernity.

However, since the 1990s, the scientific concern was not to explain the weakening or exile of religion as a cause and a consequence of modernity, but rather to understand the reasons for the revival of religion in a secular globalised world and the social and political effects of this (Beriain and Sánchez de la Yncera 2012). The resulting reflections have progressively been situating the idea of *post-secularity* at the centre of the debate, and even speaking of the rise of Post-secular Studies (Lloyd and Viefhues-Bailey 2015: 16). The philosopher Jürgen Habermas has played a seminal role in introducing this new category in academic circles. For him, the age of post-secularism does not entail the rejection of the ongoing secularising process and the return of medieval religious authority. Rather,

post-secular society is defined by 'the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment' (Habermas 2009: 63).

According to the German philosopher, neither classical secularisation theory nor counter-secularisation propositions defended until now are enough to understand the increasing presence of religion in politics today and the challenges it poses against the modern Enlightened secularist ideology. Undoubtedly, his thesis on post-secularity has become a starting point for encouraging the debate on religion and politics in the Social Sciences with opinions similar or radically different to those defended by him (Connolly 1999; Mouffe 2006; Taylor 2007; Mahmood 2005; Mendieta and VanAntwerpen 2011; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and VanAntwerpen 2011).

However, despite overcoming many of the postulates contained in the secularisation paradigm, the 'turn' to the post-secular is, as this article argues, lukewarm, partial, and really not very transformative. The category arose with an internal contradiction that disqualifies it in explanatory terms and, fundamentally, in normative terms. Even though, following Habermas (2007; 2008; 2009), post-secularity aims to advance towards a more pluralistic democratic society, it ends up reifying the colonial representation of 'us' and 'others'. The real aim of this 'new' category, developed mainly in academic circles in Europe (and the United States), is to respond to the 'problem' of how to integrate the Muslim 'other' into their liberal democracies, and in doing so a sediment of colonialism remains. Then, the first part of the article focuses on exploring some of the postulates underlying the post-secular defended by Habermas. Particularly, the conceptions of rationalism and legalism are critically analysed in order to demonstrate that the post-secular is 'a colonialism by other means' (Bugyis 2015).

Paradoxically, one of the clearest imprints of the colonial power politics contained in the post-secular has been erased from the relevant debate in the Social Sciences. If the creation of a culture of time that is apt for the design, development, and legitimation of an enterprise of hegemonic power at the global level was so important for modern Europe, and if the very idea of a secular society implied a specific conception of time (mundane, linear, and teleological), then where is the temporal dimension to be found in the debate about post-secularity? If contemporary globalisation, despite its historical colonial link, has radically changed the social experiences of time and space, where is the reflection on time when we try to understand the political claims of religious actors? How is the post-secular approach to the conceptions of time contained in the behaviour of religious actors? Or rather, what is the culture of time contained in the post-secular category itself?

The answer seems to be that the temporal dimension is hidden. The second part of the article explores this question and argues that time, in its modern European modulation, was decisive for the idea of secularism and vice versa, and that said temporality, inherent to the idea of progress, remains present in the concept of the post-secular. Then, regarding the temporal dimension, the transition from the secular to the post-secular is not relevant in epistemological and political terms. Despite Habermas advocating for plural democratic societies in which religious people can participate in the construction of the public sphere (law, moral principles, norms, etc.), he reproduces the teleology of modern colonialism.

It would therefore be worthwhile paying greater attention to the temporal sense of the post-secular. The religious 'others' of today, whether they be historical minorities, migrants, political parties, or groups dedicated to criminal activities, are bearers of diverse conceptions of time. These are explanatory vectors of their conceptions of the political world and of their everyday action in it. For this reason, the challenge of the democratic integration of religious diversity requires attending to the temporalities of these groups, i.e. to the diversity of cultures of time in which their discourses and practices are conceived, interpreted, and legitimated.

The final part of the article relates post-secularity to post-coloniality in order to ask whether it is possible to overcome the imprint of colonial time on the post-secular through a post-colonial reading. In response, it is important to take into account the limitation underlined by Anne McClintock (1992), who considers that post-colonialism tends to reproduce the modern social time through the use of the prefix 'post-'. However, although the post-colonial and de-colonial works directly involved in the post-secular debate from a time perspective are almost non-existent – the work of the Indian political philosopher A. Raghuramaraju Raju (2000) being perhaps one exception – their 'epistemological turn' can be an important contribution. Their conceptual apparatus can be adequate to approach the idea of cultures of time, while its methodological proposals can facilitate an understanding from the voices of the religious 'other'.

From the secular to the Habermasian post–secular: colonialism by other means?

Critical voices have called the Habermasian post-secular reading 'a restorative narrative' (Shakman 2012: 945), since it presents a formula for accommodating both religious and non-religious individuals, which is excessively maintained within the parameters of a modern Enlightenment project (Asad 2003; Dallmayr 2012; Pabst 2012). He expressly defends the view that the Enlightenment deviated from its original purpose and is in need of reorientation from its historical pathologies – the violence of colonialism being one of them. In contrast, from a post-colonial reading, 'it is the Enlightenment itself that needs a kind of legitimating history, and it is this history that Habermas calls *post-secular*' (Bugyis 2015: 32).

As Mignolo said (2011b), this academic boom of post-secularity is untrustworthy because it is a category created in Europe to respond to a European problem. Thus, any attempt to use it to understand the religiosity of the 'other' means inventing a new marker of colonial identity. Is post-secularity therefore inherently post-colonial? Or is it simply the continuity of coloniality by other means? In order to answer these questions, this section focuses on the proposal of the post-secular made by Habermas and critically analyses two of the postulates defended by him, rationalism and legalism. The Eurocentrism of his proposal, largely shared by other authors such as Charles Taylor, makes it possible to see the colonial power inserted in the post-secular.

Rationalism

In a deeply globalised world, the classical liberal notion of citizenship is not enough to guarantee a democratic society. According to Habermas (2009), the increasing diversity of people coming from different origins and cultures has to be recognised in the public sphere, and religious people are not an exception for this challenge. Then, the post-secular democratic liberal societies are those that, while maintaining the neutrality of the State, recognise the equal participation of believers and non-believers in politics.

Following Habermas, the way to effectively carry out this participation is through communicative reason, i.e. the public deliberation among different persons through language (Habermas 2011). It is not the aim here to explain the communicative reason defended by Habermas, but rather to critically explore its potential to be a really democratic inclusion of religious beliefs and practices in the so-called post-secular societies. Then, is communicative reason really open to religious rationalities?

It seems to be too narrow if one notes that many spaces of human reflexivity remain outside of it; that is to say, in Habermas's work human experience is reduced to that which modern thought might explain: 'experience is limited to what can be known' (Mardones 1998: 171). It is a particular understanding of reason, directly associated with a logical argumentative capability. Therefore, it is a rationality that has difficulties for taking into account, for example, the symbolic and an important part of the experience of the sacred, which, as defended by Asad (2001), can vary in its particular socio-cultural and political context without having the essence that Habermas seems to attribute to it.

On the contrary, those religious practices that appeal to symbolism seek a relational language as in discursive language defended by Habermas. Therefore, the symbolic, like argumentative language, also appeals to an order of intelligibility, but one that requires considering experiential dimensions derived from the imaginary, the figurative, the iconic, dance, and literature and not just logical and argumentative rationality (Mardones 1998: 176–7). It would thus seem that Habermas ultimately facilitates the inclusion of enlightened critical religions – favouring the receptivity of Christianity – in recognising the value of their contributions in terms of justice and solidarity in excessively high-tech and ethically sterile societies. However, he does not open the door to the intelligibility contained in symbols, narration, and the evocation of religious or spiritual experience coming from Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, indigenous cosmologies, and animism, for example. Habermas associates religion with a different and inferior rationality – religious reason versus secular reason – as well as establishing a hierarchy among religious beliefs, Christianity being the nearest to secular reason.

This postulate explains the importance given by Habermas to *translation*. Religious people can be involved in democratic politics but religion has to go through the process of translation in order to become a 'reasonable' religion compatible with the secular principles that constitute the liberal State. Then, the scope of the traditional secularist model is widened by Habermas insofar as he affirms that secularism in a post-secular society consists in the translation of religious discourse, not its destruction. Three criteria have to be met by religion in the translation process: 'religious consciousness must, first, come to

terms with the cognitive dissonance of encountering other denominations and religions; it must, second, adapt to the authority of the sciences which hold the societal monopoly of secular knowledge; and, finally, it must agree to the premises of a constitutional state grounded in a profane morality' (Habermas 2003: 104).

However, the fact that he demands that believers undertake an exercise of *translation* discloses his assumption that a secular rational language really exists which is neutral and accessible to all, believers and non-believers alike. Post-colonial authors like Mustapha K. Pasha assert that this is a symptom of the cultural and philosophical autism of Western thought (Pasha 2012: 182) or simply a proof of colonial epistemological arrogance. Habermas expressly recognises an additional burden for believers, which a constitutional state that treats all citizens equally should not establish. Nevertheless, he insists that the nature of liberal political institutions is based on a secular rationale, so that those who 'do not have enough knowledge or imagination to find correspondingly secular justifications [for political issues] that are independent of their authentic beliefs' (Habermas 2008: 127) can nevertheless participate in the public sphere pending their attainment of 'the epistemic ability to consider one's own religious convictions reflexively from the outside and to connect them with secular views' (Habermas 2008: 130).

Finally, communicative reason assumes an encounter between linguistically competent individuals, since consensus results from the strength of the best argument. Underlying this proposal is an enlightened theoretical understanding of society as that which is composed of autonomous rational individuals who are free and in a position of equality, without attending to the reality of historical relations of power and structural injustices. This short-sightedness conceals the situation of those who have been discriminated against, excluded, and deprived of their rights as citizens, and who are incapable of acting and justifying their own social, political, and moral aspirations through argumentative rationality. Therefore, communicative reason can end up acting as an artefact that generates a ghetto that, in its attempt to achieve greater democracy, will hardly include those who have been historically excluded and oppressed.

Legalism

Habermas's notion of politics is not exactly restricted to institutional political frameworks. He aims in precisely the opposite direction, i.e., towards the urgent need to humanise politics, which is why he proposes the exercise of inter-subjective linguistic interaction among citizens in the public arena. However, it is worthwhile asking to what extent this makes it possible to broaden the dominant, modern colonial understanding of *what religion is* with respect to its forms of enunciation and political action.

The post-secular defended by Habermas does not transcend the modern–Western definition of religion that was produced by Europe in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. In Europe's transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, a semantic reformulation took place regarding the Latin concept of *religio,* which originally referred to the *practices* of worshipping the gods, god, or the infinite in a given *locus*. It was radically transformed into the idea of an internal human impulse of faith common to all. This was a new defi-

nition of religion inherent to a particular European socio-historical process that would eventually endow the word with its modern connotations of essentialism, abstraction, universalisation, and internalisation (Cantwell 1963; Despland and Vallée 1992; Platvoet and Molendijk 1999). This is the definition of religion underlying Habermas's post-secular proposal. Underlying the idea of post-secularity there is a religio-centrism that originated during the enterprise of colonial domination.

Although Talal Asad does not directly address the debate concerning Habermas's arguments, he has critically engaged with the problems of essentialist definitions of religion. 'My problem with universal definitions of religion is that by insisting on an essential singularity, they divert us from asking questions about what the definition includes and what it excludes – how, by whom, for what purpose, and so on' (Asad 2001: 220). According to Asad, any universal definition of religion is partial, it fails to understand the diversity and complex reformulations of religion across time and space.

Asad also stresses that 'religious symbols … cannot be understood independently of their historical relations with nonreligious symbols or of their articulations in and of social life, in which work and power are always crucial' (Asad 1993: 53). These are the reasons why he argues that secularism is not a separation of religion from politics and the state, but it is a modern process of establishing a new form of normative secular power over the subject. In contrast to Habermas, Asad advocates for understanding religion and secularism together, as they are mutually constitutive discourses. Therefore, if 'the religious' is a category produced by Western colonial regimes in tandem with that of 'the secular', then consequently the post-secular needs to be post-religious (Lloyd and Viefhues-Bailey 2015).

The religio-centrism located in the post-secular is most notable when the question of religion in politics is mainly posed in terms of law (the individual right to freedom of religion, conscience, and worship). Although Habermas criticises a drift of politics excessively translated into bureaucratic, technified institutions, he does not abandon an idea of political power permeated by law and the state as a legal institution. Ultimately, for him, law is the solution to the 'problem' of 'religious revival' in the public sphere. As a result, the political dimension of religious beliefs and practices has to be translated into a language of rights, which can be positive, but the problem lies in the fact that it also hinders recognition of informal and unpredictable political negotiations between religious actors that do not belong to the legally codified idea of religion (Bugyis 2015: 33).

As a Jewish leader in Colombia once said regarding the new religious pluralism formally guaranteed since 1991, 'that pluralism which the Constitution of 1991 apparently recognises is only expressed through lawsuits in Colombia. Communities that are discriminated against in terms of religion, such as indigenous groups, can only sue in court and obtain a sentencing judgment for this pluralism to be made manifest.'[2] In a similar sense, Partha Chatterjee (1993) explains how in the colonial and the post-colonial political order in India civil law becomes the primary discourse within which the various historical and political meanings of concepts like *jāti*, for example, are synthesised into a single, univocal category. The complex subjectivities of individuals thus became a new kind of legally constituted subject.

Eurocentrism: still present?

Habermas defends post-secularity as a possible normative project to 'rectify' the political order of European liberal democracies – in crisis due to the arrival of economic migrants and refugees of diverse religious beliefs, mainly those of Islam. This reading is a way of responding to what is considered the problem of the 'other', the Muslims, inviting them to become incorporated into an already existing liberal political project. This, however, is objectionable for two reasons.

In the first place, this is because it is a covert racist discourse: 'we', the civilised Christians versus the 'others', the barbaric Muslims. Aamir R Mufti (2013) expresses this clearly in 'Why I Am Not a Post-Secularist' when he states: 'post-secular tendencies rely disproportionately on contemporary political Islam, and postcolonial societies more broadly, to make their case for a 'return of religion', a kind of 'ethnographic philanthropy' that generates a highly misleading view of political Islam as an unmediated and unproblematic return to the tradition of (Sunni) Islam, making it difficult to see that it is in fact a result of the great transformation of Muslim societies under colonial rule' (Mufti 2013: 2). And, secondly, it is objectionable in terms of its failure once again to acknowledge the European historical specificity of the phenomenon of both secularism and post-secularism (Braidotti 2008: 4).

The same criticism has been made of other authors perhaps less prescriptive than Habermas, such as Charles Taylor (2007). Although he does not use the term 'post-secular', preferring 'secular age', Taylor agrees with the overall argumentation of Habermas. He develops his own thesis of secularism by discussing the historical transformations of religion in the Western world, particularly the relationship between Christianity and secularity. But the problem is that his historical study of the genealogy of the secular is limited to the Western European experience.

This bias indicates two important gaps decried by post-colonial thinkers. First, it omits the relations between religion and politics among other peoples of the world, in contrast with the work of Bhargava (2010, 2011) on 'multiple secularisms', for example, or studies carried out by Bilgrami (2014), who tries to escape the religious-secular binary, attempting to imagine enchanted secularism or secular religiosity within societies outside the European geography. Secondly, Taylor does not explain the importance of the 'colonial encounter with the other' in forming Europe's own identity in the tradition/modernity, faith/reason, modern/secular binary code. Consequently, 'Taylor's focus on the European social imaginary results in reproducing precisely the repressions constitutive of that social imaginary …' (Lloyd and Viefhues-Bailey 2015: 16).

Time: the forgotten dimension in the post-secular

If the aim of the previous section was to show the colonial sediments contained in the Habermasian category of the post-secular, the purpose here is to argue that time has been excluded from the post-secular debate and that this is one of the reasons for its incapability to overtake colonial power.

Secularism: a European colonial culture of time

Rethinking the meaning of the secular in today's societies also implies addressing the question of time as a socio-historical construct underlying all political action. There is a biological time that the Greeks called *cronos*, which entraps us, with no possibility of escape, in a succession of events that extends throughout life up to the moment of organic death. But together with this, there is also an inter-subjective and imaginative time, perhaps part of what Habermas calls the *world of life*, which is not a succession but rather duration, it is not quantitative but qualitative, and it is mediated by human intention. This is what the Greeks called *kairós*, the socio-historical experience of time that allows us to reflect on time as a constituent dimension of the social, the political, and the historical.

If we recognise that modernity is a concept based on the category of time (Nanni 2012; Mignolo 2011a) and that its central ideas and institutions can be explained by attending to temporality, the secular can be explained not only in terms of practices and institutions, but also through reflection on time (Koselleck 2003; Marramao 1998). The idea of the secular in itself contains a temporal dimension due both to its formulation in modern European thought and its etymological origin in Christianity. In the origins of Christianity, the word s*aeculum* meant 'related to the century', to the mundane time of humanity in contrast to eternity or the non-time of God (Taylor 1998: 31). As recognised by many authors, this Christian dichotomy between the sacred and the mundane, time and eternity, was the starting point for the modern version that makes secularisation the master key to two important transformations (Löwith 1949; Bury 1955; Nisbet 1981; Gray 2006).

The first of these transformations is the worldliness or temporalisation of experience, which ruptures the relation between the Christian-constructed binary immanence and transcendence, understood in temporal terms like time-eternity. According to Marramao, one of the paradoxes of modern secularism is that it means a process of 'absolutisation' and 'sacralisation' of the historical world, that is to say the enthusiastic celebration of actions taking place in the secular or worldly time, refusing all possible relation with a transcendent dimension (Marramao 1998: 92).

And the second is the future-centricity that situates the ultimate meaning of life in the future, interpreted as the realisation of a linear, universal, chronological time. The German philosopher Karl Löwith was one of the most ardent defenders of the continuity between the Christian and European modern notions of time and history. In his famous *Meaning in History* (1949), he argued that the modern idea of progress unavoidably needed the linear and teleological conception of time that it found in Christian thought. Thus, the thesis of many authors like Löwith was that there is a direct historical influence of the ideas of providence on progress that puts into question the real originality of modernity.

The modern idea of progress that arose in Europe in the 18ᵗʰ and 19ᵗʰ centuries gave rise to meta-narratives that shaped the relations of power between Europe and 'the rest' for centuries. Secularism became part of modernity, and its notion of time contributed to the legitimation of colonial power – with its repertoire of violences – through discourses like the *sacred mission of the white man* towards *soulless peoples*, the *standard of civilisation*

in the 19th century, and the subsequent policy of *development* that is still in effect today. All of these encourage forms of organisation among human groups that are constructed on the basis of the past–present–future relation. They very clearly exemplify the construction of the socio-political as time.

Modern European thought has always favoured time over the dimension of space, and therefore space has been interpreted in terms of time, as explained by Doreen Massey (2012). That is, the different life trajectories of the peoples who inhabit the world (space) are not considered in themselves, but are converted into teleological history (time) by European thought. In this way, their sense of being, their ontology, is subordinated to European historical temporality.

Post-secularism: still a Western colonial culture of progress

The apologists of post-secularity claim they do not subscribe to the modern idea of progress that modulates a linear, teleological notion of time/history of humanity as a whole. In the debate about post-secularity, these authors do not reflect expressly on the temporal dimension of so-called post-secular societies, but some of them, like Barbato (2012), speak of a 'post-secular progress'. This would be one that does not renounce utopia as the motor force of political imagination, but rejects the idea that there is only one path to the *Good Life* or *Truth*. Ultimately, these authors affirm that there is a substantial change between the open, contingent temporality contained in the idea of post-secularity and the homogeneous, metaphysical temporality characteristic of the modern notion of secularity.

Even though this critical academic reflection on modern progress has positive effects, it is not considered sufficient here to find a political tool in post-secularity that is capable of freeing people from the suffering and exclusion motivated by the colonial time narrative of *telos*. Two reflections, presented below, make it possible to show in different ways that the colonial temporality of progress remains inscribed within this 'new' category called post-secularity.

Firstly, Habermas's arguments show that the claim to universalism is present in his proposal from the moment he diagnoses the problem (the clashes between religious–secular identities in the political sphere as an institutional difficulty) and encounters a possible solution in post-secularity (expanding the representative capacities of the democratic process to include believers through communicative reason). Habermas, in his late-modern post-metaphysical conception of the world, does not defend the existence of universal values as ultimate fundamentals. Nevertheless, he presents post-secularity as a normative project based on a mechanism of procedural justice that it would in fact be desirable to universalise.

Habermasian post-secular societies, or those that are capable of implementing the normative project of post-secularity, are necessarily those that have already experienced the project of modernity and, more specifically, have achieved a mature political order based on the rule of law. Thus, Habermas' idea is not very different far from Fukuyama's thesis of the 'end of history' (1992). That is, Liberal Western peoples find themselves at a post-historic moment in which the modern idea of progress has lost its meaning and post-

secularity is possible. In contrast, the so-called 'developing countries' are still in the margins of history. They entered into the process of historical (colonial) time approximately half a century ago and need to advance in it to discipline their rationality, their body, and their political action within the margins of the secular liberal political regime. Therefore, the binomial 'we' and the 'others', registered in terms of time, is present in Habermas' argument. He continues reproducing a time-homogenous world and, in doing so, he takes for granted that, even within the West, the processes associated with modernity are finished and complete.

In the second place, from a time perspective, we can see that many academics, being more or less critical in their theoretical approaches, converge in their interpretation of the '*revival*' of religions in contemporary global societies (see, for example: Habermas 2009; Beck 2009; Lyon 2002; Rorty and Vattimo 2005). Each with different emphasis, they argue that we live in a '*timeless time*', in the sense that everything is present (acceleration, instant, and simultaneity), a type of extensive present that eliminates the future and trivialises the past. The result is uncertainty as the characteristic note of temporality in current global societies.

Thus, the general tendency is to interpret the 'revival' of religions as a response to the uncertainty of our times. This reading implies attributing a certain culture of time to religious actors, often understood as innate to them. It is a linear, teleological conception of time that returns to the temporal sequence between past (tradition), present (pilgrimage), and future (salvation). Thus, from more or less critical and/or radical theoretical perspectives in the Social Sciences, religiosity is interpreted through reproduction of the association between religion and linear, future-centred temporality. Thus, religious actions in politics are usually understood through the religio-centrism denounced in the first section of the article. Among other reasons, this is due to the general tendency in academic and political agendas to reduce the multiple religious discourses and practices in society to fundamentalist activities.

This has two important effects in temporal terms. Firstly, there is a tendency to homogenise religious practices as the idea of a sort of '*return to the future*', i.e. as the restoration of a linear and future-centric temporality in which the divine seeps through the cracks and crevices of mundane historical temporality in a conservative code. Consequently, religion is considered the opposite of democracy because of its assumed totalised, authoritarian, discriminatory, and eschatological notion of time. Secondly, this reading hides other cultures of time in the political discourses and practices of religious actors. This can be seen by turning to concrete cases and looking at the plots of time manifested in their political action.

For example, according to Böwering (1997), in the religious practices of Islam the relation among time, eternity, centre, and origin can be explained as a circular movement that moves away from the linear conception of time and from the importance that modern temporality attributes to the linear future. The present moment is 'the point where all times are present'. The present of each person is part of a circumference of time in relation to the centre, the origin, which is eternity, the non-time, and it is through the practice of prayer (five times a day) and the cultivation of knowledge that the immanent intersects

with transcendent. 'The present is the only point of contact with eternal reality, instead of daydreaming about a past that man has no power to deal with any longer or a future that has not yet come about and in which man cannot act. Man can be, know and act only now' (Nasr 1993).

The post-colonial reading of the post-secular: introducing alternative cultures of time?

Many post-colonial authors have radically rejected the idea of post-secularity since they consider it a new tool of colonial power, more oriented to controlling the 'other' religious actors than to understanding them. The special issue 'Antinomies of the Post-Secular' in *Boundary 2* (2013) is precisely aimed at defending this position. Therefore, from the viewpoint of these authors, the post-colonial reading consists of refusing to use and legitimise the post-secular idea. Thus, re-thinking the post-secular from the perspective of post-colonial thought would ultimately be an exercise of self-colonisation.

Despite this position, which is coherent with the argument presented in this article, this section proposes to explore some of the possible limitations and potentialities of post-colonial and de-colonial thought so as to include the reflection on time in the study, if not of post-secular societies, at least of religious practices in today's global political life.

The prefix 'post–': an obstacle to understanding different cultures of time

According to McClintock's thesis, if analysed in temporal terms, the 'post-colonial' category is hardly appropriate since it ultimately gives continuity to the culture of time contained in the European colonial project. 'Yet the term postcolonial is haunted by the very figure of linear development that it sets out to dismantle' (McClintock 1994: 292). A post-colonial reading of post-secularity can contribute to the study of the connections between secularism, modernity, and colonialism in the historical relations among the peoples of the world; this equation can even include the factor of globalisation for its historical continuities with respect to colonisation. However, one must beware of a permanent temptation: to embrace the prefix 'post-' in an excessively celebratory way.

The use of the prefix 'post-' of those who denounce the European colonial campaign and insist on situating colonial violence at the centre of contemporary international political analyses is paradoxical as a critical perspective. This is because it reproduces the timescale ('pre-colonial', 'colonial', and 'post-colonial') that colonial thought created based on the linear temporality introduced by the early Christians, according to the thesis defended by Bury, Löwith, Nisbet, and Gray, as explained in section two. Thus, it makes time the focal point of the analysis, readily revealing that post-colonialism partially reproduces the discourses of power that criticise and seek to deconstruct. This fact leads to various effects.

First of all, the cultural diversity of the peoples of the world is apprehended not by what distinguishes them *positively* but by their *negative* imprint, caused by their subordination to colonial power. The diversity and wealth of religious practices around the world

thus tend to be represented not on the basis of their *situated, affirmative* understanding, but on a temporal axis that registers them in *negative* terms as actions lacking modernity with respect to an ideal, i.e. secular or the supposedly post-secular Europe. Ultimately, both colonial history/power and post-colonial counter-histories/counter-powers eventually interpret these religious identities and actions negatively – some in a code of subordination and others in a code of backwardness and irrationality.

Secondly, the use of 'post-' does not radically challenge the Western historical narrative based on binary categories (self–other, metropolis–colony, centre–periphery, black–white, man–woman, religious–secular…). The temporal semantics contained in the prefix 'post-' returns to a representation of the totalising, binary world: the colonial and the post-colonial. Time, in linear code, is an interpretative axis which thereby acquires such importance (before and after colonisation) that it can diminish the relevance of the political axis, i.e. the relations of power – not just in a single sense (coloniser and colonised), but in an intricate, rhizomatic way.

Thirdly, although the post-colonial approach vindicates *difference* and *multiplicity,* it does not totally overcome the modern European tendency to represent the social world through abstract categorisations. This is observed in the sometimes generalised use of terms like 'post-colonial peoples', 'the post-colonial other', 'post-colonial power', etc., that reduce the attention paid to the situated particularities of the subjects. These generalisations – perhaps partially justified by the fact that their common experience of violence, suffering, discrimination, oppression, and even death (Soja and Hooper 1993) – have the negative effect of reducing or erasing the political and cultural nuances of each human group.

As Mona Kanwal and Ole Waever (2012) have shown, the secularisation paradigm was translated into very diverse practices in different countries of Europe itself, such as France, Germany, and Denmark. Demonstrating this particularity and diversity in secularisation processes is also the objective of Linell Cady and Elizabeth Hurd (2010), who insist on the need to study, case by case, the articulations between religion and politics in countries with formal colonial experiences, like India, or of indirect European control, like the 19th century Ottoman Empire.

Finally, an optimistic, celebratory tone is often associated with a 'post-' way of thinking, a tendency that can disguise or conceal the interplay of continuities and ruptures of hegemonic power between 'the colonial yesterday' and the neoliberal globalisation today. This is interesting for understanding in a historical perspective the spiritual practices of women – not just in the case of Islam – and their effects in terms of both oppression and emancipation.

The voices of the 'other': a valuable tool for understanding alternative times and different political agents

The very way the reflection on post-secularity in the Western academic world has been developed responds to a colonial logic. The debate made visible in the past two decades

through books and academic articles, forums of international organisations, and reports of political advisers corresponds to the academic vision of an intellectual elite that usually thinks from the perspective of prestigious universities in the global north – as illustrated by the literature included in this article.

Although Habermas uses post-secularity to challenge laicism as a normative principle of liberal democracies and seeks to include the opinions of people with religious beliefs in political life, he proposes a theoretical formula for religious 'others' without having listened to them previously. Their voice is only heard – and partially, given the epistemic restrictions analysed in the first section – in the deliberative process. Ultimately, Habermas speaks for them, which is a form of political violence.

In this sense, Habermasian post-secularity is not much of an alternative, since it contributes to continuing the colonial tension between 'educated elites' and 'disadvantaged populations'. It perpetuates the subtle logic of the coloniality of knowledge that continues nourishing dynamics of coloniality of power and of being (de Sousa Santos, 2009; 2010). On the contrary, the epistemic revolution posed by post-colonial perspectives (Hooks 1990; Said 1977, 1993; Spivak 2010) and more accurately by the '*de-colonial turn*' (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007) have denounced this form of constructing knowledge as a political power strategy and have insisted on the need to produce knowledge *from below*, i.e. from the voices of 'the disadvantaged' (women, blacks, immigrants, indigenous people …).

Furthermore, an important contribution of critical feminist theory has been to stress the need to understand these people's discourses and practices not only as negative resistance, but also as acts of positive affirmation beyond the past and present strategies of *subalternisation*. According to Braidotti (2008), the importance of affirmative action lies in the fact that it is a form of resistance oriented towards the *dis-identification* of the subject of categorisations attributed by colonial power such as black, religious, or woman, for example. Thus, the act of *(re-)cognising* is oriented towards the subjective political agency of individuals, which consists more of multiple micro-political practices than of legal identities formally registered by a neutral state as ultimately defended by Habermas.

Then, although this epistemological turn is a feature shared generally by post-positivist theories in Social Science, there is a potential in post-colonial and de-colonial perspectives to critically rethink the colonial power-knowledge relationship and claim its production *from below*. A real effort to understand the time conceptions embedded in political actions from a religious perspective requires a critical epistemological approach. In this sense, methodologies such as Participatory Action (Fals-Borda 1991; de Sousa Santos 2001), Collaborative Ethnography, or co-Theorisation (Rappaport 2008; Lassiter 2005), highly developed by post-colonial and de-colonial researches in Latin America, could be especially useful. According to this approaches, 'the sectors studied are not understood as exotic, isolated, distant, or 'cold' worlds, but as co-participant in the construction of nation and democracy' (Jimeno 2005: 46).

As Sandra Harding has noted (1989; 2015), it is not a question of applying methodologies that simply add the 'others'. It is a matter of developing methodologies that contribute

to understanding what occurs in the social ground through the inclusion of those who have historically been excluded and underestimated as active political subjects and complex subjectivities. Likewise, co-theorisation in collaborative research means a theory-building process and 'not simply co-analysis … Understood in this sense, collaboration converts the space of fieldwork from one of data collection to one of co-conceptualization' (Rappaport 2008: 5).

Thus, according to the aim of this article, this epistemological approach can be a useful vehicle to understand the time conceptions that underlie the political claims of religious actors. This critical approach, embraced by post-colonial and de-colonial thinkers, could contribute to answering questions like the following: According to what conceptions of time do religious actors in today's world think and act? How do religious ideas contribute to the formation of particular notions of social time? How do these temporalities determine their understanding of the political? However, before trying to answer these questions in the fieldwork, it is necessary to explain the possible meaning of 'cultures of time'.

Post-colonial and de-colonial thinking offer interesting conceptual tools to approach that idea of 'cultures of time'. In the first place, for these conceptual perspectives, time is understood in relational terms; i.e. time is a social construction that inevitably permeates all political processes. It is not something natural, objective, and exogenous with respect to social interaction, as defended by the Cartesian perspective. Moreover, time is understood by the de-colonial approach as one difference's dimension, historically shaped by coloniality (Mignolo 2011b). This is the reason why time must be an important part of the de-coloniality of knowledge, power, and cultural identity. In the second place, regarding the idea of culture, post-colonial and de-colonial perspectives approach it recognising its ambiguous nature. On the one hand, culture is the result of a colonial European construction and was one of the main strategies of power-knowledge to control the peoples of the world for centuries. However, on the other hand, culture has been historically a discourse associated with the political identity of difference, resistance, and emancipation of those marginalised and excluded.

It is usual to relate culture with difference, reading difference as a question of identity. As defended by this article, a conception of time is always engaged in all forms of social identity. Thus, if the aim is to apprehend these conformations of social time, it can be useful to take into account the reflection on culture, difference, and identity of post-colonial and de-colonial thinkers like Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. According to Hall (1996), there is no essential identity and we should instead speak about identification processes. But identification is not understood like a finished and complete process. It is contingent, conditional, and subsumed in a continuous process of social interaction and change.

'Actually, identities are about using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we come from", so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities … relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself: not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with

our "routes'" (Hall 1996: 4). As highlighted by Bhabha (1996, 2004) in his famous thesis about 'the third space of culture', cultural identity is a discursive terrain of perpetual incompleteness and syncretism. And for Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in a similar way, culture is a discursive universe of meanings and the 'incompleteness of cultures' is a necessary condition for an intercultural dialogue based on his 'diatopic hermeneutics' (2010). Moreover, as stressed by Laclau (1990), any identity needs the different 'other' for its constitution. In other words, the 'other' is always its 'constitutive outside'.

Therefore, what is at stake in the political action of religious actors is not simply whether they interpret the political project in linear or circular temporal terms as a primary cultural feature, but how religious actors create temporal forms of identification and how they negotiate the fluid boundaries of their constituencies among religious groups themselves, as well as between the religious and secular identifications.

In order to illustrate this approach, I would like to show the close relationship between time, politics, and spirituality within some indigenous communities in managing the armed conflict resolution and peace building in Colombia. The indigenous people of the Andean world have a cosmological referent in which the course of history goes from the present to the past, fulfilling the principle that 'it is the duty of men to follow the footprints and to be in the feet of our ancestors' (Ospina 2013). The temporal mark is manifested here as a 'turning around'. This spiral or umbilical movement from inside to outside and from outside to inside gives all their action, including the political, a particular spiritual sense. This is because they interpret facts as part of a constant process of going and coming. Taking this indigenous culture of time into account makes it easier to understand the actions of the Nasa people before their peace negotiations with the FARC in 1996 in Colombia. In accordance with their culture of time, peace is part of the struggle for them. Therefore, through the logic of the spiral, the question of peace is reviewed, discussed, and returned to again and again in reiterated form. It is thus in this *turning* of the spiral that time permits the achievement of transcendence. In this particular case, the political utopia is in the transforming *turn*.

In a similar sense, the case of the confinement of the Awa indigenous community in Nulpe Medio río alto San Juan in 2013 revealed the importance of their spiritually conformed culture of time to understanding forms of reparation like 'historical memory'. The Awa indigenous people suffered for nine months a confinement of 2,800 persons (520 families) in 2013, given the clashes between the national army and the FARC. This experience meant for them the death of the *Katsa Su*, the 'Big House': their territory. The approach to the idea of reparation was complex, since the question was who could intervene and how it was possible to do so with respect to damage like the loss of their collective being. They considered spiritual healing to be an internal affair of the people to be resolved through their rituals and, following these acts, their decision was to not speak of what had occurred, to not relive the experience again through memory. Thus, they vindicated a right not to remember, but rather to forget. The cosmological idea of Awa´s Four Worlds and the centrality of the spiral in their social practices raise a complex conception of time

that breaks the linear Western narratives of time and challenges the components of the internationally institutionalised Transitional Justice.

If the purpose is to understand the political nature and effects of religious practices in our world, it is important to understand the diversity of cultures of time in which these practices are conceived, interpreted, and legitimised for the actors involved. For this purpose, post-colonial thought has a useful political tool: knowing the cultures of time from the voices and experiences of those called the religious 'other' by colonial thought.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this article has been to critically rethink the post-secular academic category from the standpoint of the question of time. If, as many academics have argued, this category clears the way to understanding the articulations between religion and politics today and to propitiate democracies that are more inclusive of the religious 'other', the temporal dimension must inevitably be part of the debate.

Nevertheless, it appears that, on the contrary, after more than two decades of reflection in and among different disciplines of the Social Sciences regarding the post-secular, time continues to be the forgotten dimension. Thus, the main conclusion of this article is that the exclusion of time from the academic debate about politics and religion is one of the clearest signs of the colonial power politics contained in the post-secular. Therefore, this idea, developed mainly since its formulation by the philosopher Habermas in the 1990s, is a way of colonialism by other means.

The very academic nature of the post-secular reproduces the colonial tension between an educated elite, habitually prepared in the universities of Europe and the United States, and ordinary populations, especially those represented as 'disadvantaged' or 'vulnerable' (women, indigenous people, blacks, migrants, homosexuals, religious minorities, etc.). Thus, the post-secular concept is a Western academic creation that, as exemplified by Habermas' discourse, exerts a form of political violence as it arrogates to itself the power 'to speak for others' and to seek 'what is good for them'.

Likewise, the Habermasian proposal of post-secular societies does not give up the modern, enlightened pretension of universality either. Even though it criticises the postulates of the modern secularisation paradigm, it nonetheless defends *communicative reason* as a formula to be worldly extended. Although he argues that we live in a world that has renounced the 'great narratives' and the quest for 'truth', he does not abandon either the linear, evolutionary, temporal logic among peoples – that societies capable of undertaking the post-secular project must have previously experienced modern secularisation – or the pretension of universalisation – of a state under the rule of law founded on the basis of deliberative democracy. Therefore, the post-secular is not a really transformative 'turn' in the way of understanding religious practices in politics. On the contrary, it is merely a lukewarm, partial 'turn' with greater continuities than ruptures with respect to the modern colonial secularisation model.

If it is understood that the post-secular involves surpassing the modern paradigm of secularisation, then silencing the temporal grammar of the (modern European and Christian) concept of secular is a political decision that determines forms of inclusion and exclusion. From a socio-historical approach, time is translated into cultures of time that are contingent and structure the behaviour of actors in society. For the moment, concealing the temporal dimension in the post-secular has the effect of totalising the cultures of time of religious actors by associating them with conservatism and with a linear, teleological, eschatological conception of time. This tendency reproduces the colonial reading of the religious 'other' as opposed to reason, plurality, and democracy, just as it inhibits other forms of political subjectivity through people's religious and spiritual expression.

Finally, the article inquires into the possibility of a post-colonial reading of the post-secular. Is this current line of thought capable of including time in understanding political religiosity in our times? In this sense, the article concludes that post-colonial thinking is controversial with respect to this task, but it is nonetheless not completely unproductive. The use of the prefix 'post-' imprints a continuance of colonial modern linear temporality that greatly disables it for apprehending the cultures of time of religious 'others' in a situated and affirmative way. Nevertheless, the radical 'epistemological turn' vindicated by post-colonial and de-colonial thought can positively contribute to apprehending in a comprehensive way the cultures of time that underlie the political actions of religious actors today.

Post-colonial and de-colonial perspectives can therefore deepen the understanding of temporality that structures religious practices in the field of politics. To do so, however, it does not need to adopt the language of post-secularity since, as almost everyone admits regarding this 'new' category, 'the anticolonial impetus of the post-colonial is obvious, but the antisecular impetus of the post-secular appears ambiguous' (Lloyd and Viefhues-Bailey 2015: 19).

Notes

1   Raghuramaraju, 2000: 20.
2   Interview with a leader of the Jewish of converts in Barranquilla (Colombia) on 8 June 2013.

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