European Culture Wars?
A Theoretical Perspective on the Role of Religion in EU Abortion Politics

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Abstract
This paper suggests using the conceptual and theoretical contributions of the American literature on religion and politics in order to study the polarisation sustained by EU morality politics. The growing politicisation of values in the European Union sheds light on the increasing salience of morality issues at EU level. Although member states remain sovereign to legislate on such topics, diverse social, religious, and political actors now consider the Union as another kind of venue to defend specific worldviews. Abortion, for example, is regularly debated through soft law instruments such as parliamentary reports on SRHR. The EU-level debates between pro-choicers and pro-lifers illustrate how religion (re)gains power as a conflict-driving force within a secular environment. The interplay between religion and politics, values and conflict, has been widely investigated by the American religious restructuring theory. Popularised under the ‘culture wars’ label, it explains how ideological differences between conservatives and liberals crosscut denominational lines and create new religious alignments with political parties. This paper considers the possibility of transposing the American theory to the European Union; how and to what extent do American culture wars provide a useful theoretical framework for studying EU abortion politics? Taking into account the cultural and institutional limits of such a transposition, I develop how to operationalise the study of European culture wars. For this purpose, the concept is given two different – not necessarily antagonistic, rather possibly complementary – meanings: 1/ a political style emphasising group differences in order to substantiate policy positions and to attract public attention; 2/ a polarising force creating new and sustainable cleavages between and within religious, social and political groups. This paper argues that EU abortion politics correspond more to a sensationalizing and absolutizing political style than to new ideological cleavages with lasting and structural effect.

I. Introduction
From the 1990s onwards, values have been increasingly politicised at European Union (EU) level, so that value politics has now become ‘business as usual’ in the EU. Value politics materialises most clearly through the issues of LGBT rights, euthanasia, abortion, human
embryonic stem cell research, etc. – so-called ‘morality issues’. Although the Union is not really competent to legislate on morality issues (member states retain their sovereign powers), the imprecise nature of EU’s competence regime offers new opportunity structures to morality political and social entrepreneurs willing to defend specific worldviews. As a matter of fact, the Union has been creeping competence into new policy fields, and issues such as abortion now appear on the supranational agenda.

Abortion has been dealt with through two main non-binding parliamentary reports, namely the Van Lancker (2002) and Estrela (2013) reports on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Both were initiated by S&D female MEPs in the context of the FEMM committee (the parliamentary committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality). The former was adopted by 280 against 240 in plenary session, after a few amendments; the latter was defeated by an alternative resolution reaffirming member states’ sovereignty on SHRHR, which was adopted by 334 votes in favour and 327 against. The 2010 and 2015 Tarabella reports on gender equality also pushed the EU to adopt a permissive (non-binding and symbolic) position on abortion. The 2012 European citizens’ initiative ‘One of Us’, by contrast, called the Union to stop funding abortion procedures in developing countries.

These few examples – not to mention the Week for Life organised in the European Parliament (EP) since 2010, or the 2017 report on ‘anti-choice lobbying in Europe’ commissioned by Greens/EFA MEP Hautala – point to the diffuse, episodic, but also constant and regular politicisation of abortion at EU level. Moral challenges related to the destruction of human embryo split pro-choicers and pro-lifers. The former defend women’s freedom of choice to decide about their own lives and bodies; the latter defend the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death and hence consider abortion as murder. These opposite stances are nuanced by intermediary positions which conflict with criteria such as the maximum duration of pregnancy beyond which to forbid abortion procedures. In all cases, the main European advocates are composed of political actors (MEPs) and civil society organizations (including religious and philosophical groups of conviction).

EU abortion politics raises questions with regard to how and why actors develop, take part in, and sustain EU-level debates on abortion: how and why has EU abortion politics been developed and sustained since the beginning of the 2000s onwards?; how and why do value-

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2 Morality issues can be shortly defined as issues ‘that are closely related to religious beliefs and moral concepts.’ (Baumann et al. 2015: 199)
loaded conflicts on abortion crystallise at EU level? While the European literature on morality issues falls short focusing on the supranational level as such, the American literature offers in-depth analyses on the role of (religious) values in politics. I suggest using the American religious restructuring theory in particular as a heuristic analytical toolbox to be transposed to the European case. For this purpose, I first review the theory formalised by Wuthnow in 1988, and popularised by Hunter in 1991 under the ‘culture wars’ label. Second, I elaborate on the socio-cultural, and politico-institutional, distinctive features of the European Union in order to set some limits to the application of an American concept in the European context. Finally, I operationalise the hypothesis of European culture wars by distinguishing between two different – not necessarily antagonistic, rather complementary – meanings, i.e. culture wars as polarisation, and culture wars as a discursive, rhetoric political style.

II. The American Culture Wars Theory
The U.S. literature on religion and politics has been particularly flourishing with regard to the emergence of socio-cultural matters on the American public and political agenda. From the 1960s onwards, the politicisation of morality issues has induced ‘political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding.’ (Hunter 1991: 42) The progressive institutionalisation of such antagonisms has led to an enduring realignment of the religiously informed American public culture. Polarisation now constitutes a permanent feature of U.S. (morality) politics.

Popularised by sociologist James D. Hunter in his seminal book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991), the theory was initially formalised by Robert Wuthnow (1988), who had more sophistically termed it the ‘religious restructuring theory.’ The next sections examine the historical origins of American culture wars; the definition of public culture and the role that religion plays therein; the double meaning of the ‘culture wars’ concept, i.e. polarisation and political style; and the criticisms facing the religious restructuring theory in academic circles.

A. Historical Origins
The realignment of American public culture is anchored in dramatic societal changes brought about by the Sixties. The expansion of higher education, mass communication, science and technology, and geographic and social mobility transformed the American society from an industry-oriented to a knowledge-based system. (Hunter 1991) The salience of pure economic concerns dropped while morality issues were pushed at the political forefront. The
liberalisation of American public culture corresponded to new freedoms and lifestyles (Layman 2001) and gave birth to a permissive ‘counterculture’, *i.e.* ‘a sweeping rejection of traditional American attitudes, values, and goals.’ (Crotty 2015a: 14–15) With regard to religion, the counterculture period involved declining levels of religious involvement and commitment. (Wuthnow 1988) In short, ‘The Sixties represented a perfect storm for American institutions of all sorts – political, social, sexual, and religious.’ (Putnam and Campbell 2010: 91)

The transition toward cultural liberalism did not go smoothly, however: significant numbers of Americans perceived the good fortunes of the counterculture as a direct offensive assault to their fundamental moral and religious views. According to them, the Sixties gave birth to a decade of moral decay which threatened traditional values and social order. The rising power of secularists and cultural liberals eventually sparked a reaction at the opposite end of the spectrum, namely the religious and cultural conservatives. This aftershock took place during the 1970s and 1980s, and triggered the political mobilisation of evangelicals in the form of the New Religious Right. (Layman 2001; Leege *et al.* 2002; Putnam and Campbell 2010)

**B. Public Culture, a Contested Object**

1. **Culture War, or Culture Wars?**

American culture wars have raged over many different morality issues, ranging from education, family, gender equality and (homo)sexuality, to science, environment and the arts. These constitute the instruments of cultural warfare and have become the symbolic fields of conflict. (Hunter 1991) Abortion is often described as the ‘consummate culture wars issue’ (Hunter 2006b: 26), the ‘most conspicuous field of conflict’, the ‘most decisive battleground.’ (Hunter 1991: 176)

However, ‘political conflicts do not warrant the label of cultural conflicts just because of the issue at stake.’ (Leege *et al.* 2002: 253) For a specific public policy debate to be of any cultural relevance, it has to reach the broader nation’s soul level as a whole. (Prothero 2016) The abortion issue is part of a larger cultural agenda tackling the definition of America itself. (Oldmixon 2005) Should the culture wars be defined as the mere accumulation of single policy debates, they would be reduced to the ‘politics of distraction.’ (Hunter 1991: 49) Rather, the myriad controversies – culture wars in the plural – ‘with their own unique characteristics and set of combatants […] are episodes in a larger culture war [in the singular form].’ (Hunter 1991: 288)
Contenders struggle about how to order their lives together (Hunter 1991), about how to achieve ‘a commonly agreed upon moral order.’ (Oldmixon 2005: 11) People diverge over how they regard right and wrong, the good and evil, what is truth and what is error. Ultimately, cultural conflict is about power – ‘the power to name things, to define reality, to create and shape worlds of meaning.’ (Hunter 2006b: 33) The various conflicts materialize a crisis over the purpose of the nation itself. (Hunter 1991) They raise a symbolic struggle over collective identity and memory (Foret 2015), ‘over who we have been in the past, who we are now, and perhaps most important, who we, as a nation, will aspire to become in the new millennium.’ (Hunter 1991: 50)

2. A Definition of ‘Public Culture’
To be sure, Hunter is interested in the contested arena of public culture, not the private one. Culture wars are public in nature, as evidenced by the attempt to use the state in order to promote particular worldviews. (Engelhardt 2001; Iltis 2011; Oldmixon 2005) Thus, the debates are not confined to citizens’ private life; they rather involve public morality as a whole. To put it simply, the public square is not only the object of contention, but also the sphere where the contention takes place.

Conceptual and methodological individualism has long prevailed in cultural analyses defining public culture as ‘the sum total of attitudes, values, and opinions of the individuals making up a society.’ (Hunter 2006b: 18–19) In this perspective, culture is ‘little more than the personality of its individual members.’ (Hunter 2006b: 19) Hunter (2006b) distances himself from this simplistic approach, and allows a greater focus on the institutional and structural patterns of culture. These refer to those symbolic aspects which consist of ‘shared notions of civic virtue and common ideals of the public good, […] shared standards by which the actions of individuals or communities are evaluated, [and of course] collective myths surrounding the nation’s history and future promise.’ (Hunter 1991: 55) In this perspective, culture endorses a three-fold role: ‘it offers identity, it prescribes norms for behaviour, and it maintains boundaries [original emphases] for relationships.’ (Leege et al. 2002: 40)

3. Religion and Public Culture
Religion, or faith (which does not preclude secular beliefs from the analysis), is inextricably linked to culture – both public and private – to the extent that it provides communities with ‘a set of beliefs and practices on which to model their lives.’ (Oldmixon 2005: 1) It enables citizens to establish a hierarchy among different, or even competing, values. (Wuthnow 1988) These would by the way lack any powerful appeal without ‘the energizing effects of spiritual
commitment.’ (Wuthnow 1988: 60) At its deepest level, religion also provides ‘a body of values on which to ground national identity.’ (Ozzano and Giorgi 2015: 7)

The ability of religion to inform culture highlights the cultural dimension of religion. Furthermore, the public dimension of (religious) culture reaches the political realm, so that the struggle for culture – at the heart of which religion, or systems of faith, is found – becomes the essence of politics. (Hunter 1991) As Claassen correctly puts it:

‘The role of religion is to help people connect their values, attitudes, and beliefs to their political world. Partisan politics, in turn, gives voice to those values, attitudes, and beliefs, just as representative democracy demands.’ (Claassen 2015: 3)

* The basic tenets of the culture wars, or religious restructuring theory, are twofold: the realignment of religion and politics along polarised ideological divides on the one hand, and the symbolic political expression of the conflict(s) on the other hand. In the former case, culture constitutes the object of contention; in the latter case, culture constitutes the means through which politics is pursued. (Williams 1997b) Although both meanings – culture wars as polarisation, and culture wars as a political style – are not mutually exclusive (symbolic politics leads to polarisation whilst polarisation materialises through symbolic politics), it is worth clarifying each one of them separately for operational and analytical purposes.

C. Culture Wars as Polarisation
Both Wuthnow and Hunter adopt an interactive perspective which focuses on group dynamics. Group salience is central in cultural theories of politics: ‘if culture defines moral order and religion involves collective memory, politics is collective action [original emphases].’ (Leege et al. 2002: 45) When dissension between and/or within groups deepens, divisiveness becomes the defining force of society. Polarisation connotes a form of intense divisiveness to which the American political system is particularly susceptible. (Crotty 2015b)

While – structured – symbolic boundaries between social groups found the essence of social order by delineating the perimeter of a given society (Wuthnow 1988), the American culture war born out of the libertine Sixties takes shape along new and unfamiliar – restructured – lines. (Hunter 1991) ‘The contours of difference have changed’ (Hunter 2006b: 11), and categories that were previously taken for granted have now eroded. (Wuthnow 1988) Consequently, ‘the crux [becomes] to identify theoretically and empirically the relevant social
divisions in a world in flux, and to study their political formation.’ (Kriesi 2010: 675) Two perspectives offer compelling explanations, but depart from different analytical measurements of the religious factor.

1. The Ethno-Religious Theory
According to the ethno-religious theory, the causal basis of moral value attitudes lies in social groups because group membership results in similar life experiences and ideologies. (Evans 1997) When social categories are based on religious belonging, membership in religious traditions becomes the driving force of cultural and political differences. (Kellstedt and Guth 2015; Layman 2001) The basic premise is the following: ‘cohesion within and distinctiveness between religious traditions makes those traditions building blocks in [cultural] politics.’ (McTague and Layman 2009: 332) Concretely, evangelical Protestants and seculars are situated at the opposite ends of the restrictive-permissive continuum of the moral spectrum, the former adopting far more restrictive views on morality issues than the latter. (Shortell 1997)

The ethno-religious model is particularly suited to the American context if one considers that American public culture has always been fractured along doctrinal and ecclesiastical lines. Following the successive immigration flows inherent to the country’s demographic history, religion came to substitute national origin as the basis of Americans’ identity. (Putnam and Campbell 2010) It has also been progressively combined with other group-level social and cultural factors such as class, race, ethnicity and regional location. (Kellstedt and Guth 2015; Layman 2001; McTague and Layman 2009; Wuthnow 1988) However, in the second half of the 20th century, theological antagonisms started receding in importance. A greater degree of social and cultural homogeneity had progressively been pervading the major faiths3, in part because of an increased individual mobility across religious boundaries. (Hunter 1991) As Americans turned out to be ‘more prone to change denominational membership in the course of their lives, [...] the effect of denominational identity upon the way people actually view the world’ dropped significantly. (Hunter 1991: 87) The organizing principle of American cultural and religious pluralism was shifting. (Hunter 1991) The ethno-religious theory simply became outdated. (Layman 2001)

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3 With regard to the abortion issue, for example, Wuthnow notices that ‘about the same proportions in all of the major denominations expressed approval or disapproval by the late 1970s.’ (Wuthnow 1988: 86–87)
2. The Religious Restructuring Theory

Despite net qualitative modifications in the character of religion (Wuthnow 1988), scholars continued ‘to measure religious and cultural pluralism in a manner that reifies the divisions among the major religious traditions.’ (Hunter 1991: 104) Yet, although the culture wars originate with ‘differences in assumptions that are philosophical and even theological in nature, the conflict does not end as a philosophical dispute.’ (Hunter 1991: 49–50) As faith is now regulated by individuals’ own consciences and relativistic choices (D’Antonio et al. 2013; Foret 2014b), theological differences appear within religious traditions – not to mention the diverging priorities or commitments among secular people. (Iltis 2011) Because individuals put more and more emphasis on personal interpretation than on official creeds (Wuthnow 1988), all members of an affiliational group do not hold identical views any longer. (Shortell 1997) Increasingly, conflict is to take place within groups, not between them; intra-denominational polarisation is now prevailing over interdenominational polarisation. (Jelen 2009; Koopman 2009) As a consequence, analysts shifted their focus from ‘Belonging’ variations to ‘Believing’ ones; symbolic mentalities came to be considered as potentially able to take precedence over any kind of social group identities – be they based on class, race, region or religion. (Putnam and Campbell 2010; Williams 1997a)

The religious restructuring theory basically contends that religion has been restructured into two ideological groups with opposing religious beliefs and moral worldviews. The key dividing line of American public culture henceforth opposes the religious conservatives to the religious liberals, across the whole range of religious traditions. (Layman 2001) Scholars unanimously recognize that Wuthnow’s and Hunter’s most valuable contribution is to show that conservatives of different religious denominations share more with one another than they do with the liberals coming from their own denominations. (Claassen 2015; Davis and Robinson 1997) To be sure, liberal circles within Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism display identical, indistinguishable concerns and agendas – so too do the conservative circles within the traditional religious faiths. (Hunter 1991) ‘Historically unnatural but pragmatically necessary alliances’ constitute the ‘key institutional expression of the realignment of American public culture.’ (Hunter 1991: 47; 97-98) This ‘new form of cooperative mobilization in which distinct and separate religious and moral traditions share resources and work together toward common objectives’ (Hunter 1991: 97–98) is usually conceptualized through the term ‘ecumenism.’

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Both the ethno-religious and religious restructuring models constitute ideal-types, and ‘the reality lies somewhere between.’ (Layman 2001: 66) Some researchers suggest that synthesising them provides a more accurate account of reality (Evans 1997; Kellstedt and Guth 2015; Layman 2001): ‘the socio-political significance of religion as an explanatory variable is owed to the socializing power of religious belonging and the crosscutting importance of religious belief [original emphases].’ (Oldmixon To be published) From this perspective, the ideological gap between liberals and conservatives overlaps with, rather than replaces, the denominational divisions. (Foret 2015) Fine-grained measures of religious traditions accounting for adherents’ commitments to liberal or conservative worldviews would result in a more sophisticated explanation of American public culture realignment. (Oldmixon 2005; Oldmixon 2009; Wielhouwer 2009) Following the hybrid model, one can find that Evangelical Protestants generally embrace conservative worldviews, while the liberal pole is overwhelmingly filled by black Protestants, Latino Catholics, Jews and all other faiths; mainline Protestants, white Catholics, and Latino Protestants fall somewhere in the middle of the ideological spectrum. (Kellstedt and Guth 2015)

After having described the very raison d’être – the definition of public culture – as well as the structuration – polarized ideological camps crosscutting religious traditions – of American culture wars, it is now time to turn to the substantial source, and content, of disagreement, i.e. competing conservative and liberal ideologies.

3. Conservatism v. Liberalism
According to the culture wars, or religious restructuring theory, ideological belief, rather than religious belonging, supplies ‘individuals with a set of norms and a vision of what social relationships are compatible with those norms.’ (Oldmixon 2005: 118) The nub of ideological disagreement is the locus of social and moral authority. (Kniss 1997; Wald and Leege 2009; Williams 1997b) The original labels used to name the opposing culture wars ideologies, namely ‘orthodox’ and ‘progressivism’, superpose those of ‘conservatism’ and ‘liberalism’. The latter combination takes on a specific meaning which differs from the classical political theory: ‘conservatism’ and ‘liberalism’ distance themselves from the socioeconomic kinds of positioning they usually embrace. (Shortell 1997) For sake of clarity, authors often couple both terms with the adjective ‘cultural’, or ‘religious’.

a. Orthodoxy, or Religious Conservatism
Orthodoxy, or religious conservatism, is rooted in ‘an external, definable, and transcendent authority.’ (Hunter 1991: 4) This ideology is adopted by people ‘for whom moral authority
rests in something outside of themselves and human experience.’ (Iltis 2011: 12) To be sure, the content and meaning of transcendence varies from one religious tradition to another, but conservatives share a commitment to a paramount moral source of authority. (Hunter 1991) Importantly, ‘faith in a transcendent moral authority need not reflect a commitment to religious thinking’ (Iltis 2011: 10); the orthodox side also comprises secular people.

Concretely, conservative views on morality issues rest on basic moral assumptions which sacralise both human life and the family structure. (Leege et al. 2002) As such, the conservative ideology sustains a self-labelled ‘pro-life’ camp. According to (pro-life) conservatives, human life begins at conception and abortion is murder. (Evans 1997; Oldmixon 2005) Moreover, ‘the nuclear family is the natural form of family structure’ (Hunter 1991: 122) which has to be protected as ‘a bulwark against secular encroachment.’ (Davis and Robinson 1997: 41) Eventually, ‘the human species is differentiated into male and female according to role, psyche, and spiritual calling […]; homosexuality is a perversion of the natural and created order’ (Hunter 1991: 122); and sex and pornography are responsible for family-threatening lifestyles. (Evans 2008; Oldmixon 2005)

b. Progressivism, or Religious Liberalism

Progressivism, or religious liberalism, anchors moral authority in ‘personal experience and scientific rationality.’ (Hunter 1991: 45) Science and biography become the main foundations of truth (Hunter 1991); a major task is to distinguish between reason and faith. (D’Antonio et al. 2013) This worldview finds its roots in the 18th century Enlightenment philosophy (D’Antonio et al. 2013; Wolfe 2006), and founds authority within rational empiricism as applied to, and filtered through, individual human action. (Evans 1997; Kniss 1997) This is not to say that secularists do not hold any moral commitment and ethical ideal: ‘Though oftentimes the principles are implicit and unarticulated, they do maintain and live by latent value orientations.’ (Hunter 1991: 75–76) Far from being ‘neutral’, progressive people develop a profound humanistic sentiment ‘in which human well-being becomes the ultimate standard by which moral judgements and policy decisions are grounded.’ (Hunter 1991: 75–76)

Concretely, the progressives, or liberals, stick to permissive morality stances which diametrically oppose their conservative counterparts’ (Flanagan and Lee 2003): ‘personhood begins at, or close to, birth […]; homosexuality is a way in which nature can evolve and be expressed […]; male and female are differentiated solely by biology [and so on and so forth].’ (Hunter 1991: 126) With regard to the abortion issue in particular, they value women’s right
to choose to continue or terminate pregnancy – hence their auto-referential label ‘pro-choice.’ (D’Antonio et al. 2013)

c. An Ambiguous relationship to Modernity

The division between orthodox/conservative and progressivist/liberal ideologies does not imply an implicit antinomy between religion and modernity. (Wuthnow 1988) On the conservatives’ side, ‘continuity with the ordering principles inherited from the past’ does not amount to a ‘reactionary, backward looking, or static’ position. (Hunter 2006b: 14) The question is not ‘whether to embrace or reject ‘modernity’ but how best to respond to the challenges it posed.’ (Clark 2003: 13) Conservative people do not discard modernity as such, but rather its liberal variants. They do not embrace an unequivocal celebration of all that is new either, but seek to master the challenges of societal transformations. (Clark 2003) In sum, they want ‘to seize the opportunities while averting the dangers’ posed by modernity itself. (Clark 2003: 46)

On the liberals’ side, personal and scientific accounts of social reality as the ultimate source of moral authority do not imply a denial of the existence of God (D’Antonio et al. 2013), but ‘greater room for interpretation of doctrinal creeds.’ (Wuthnow 1988: 305) In short, ‘religion need not only be a conservative force in politics.’ (Putnam and Campbell 2010: 428) The tendency is rather to re-symbolize the historical faiths ‘so that they conform to and legitimate the contemporary zeitgeist’, so that they become compatible ‘with the methods of modern intellectual investigation.’ (Hunter 1991: 44–45; 79) In Wuthnow’s terms, ‘Religion was supposed to be living, vibrant, culturally relevant, not a crystallization of the past.’ (Wuthnow 1988: 31) The ability to adapt to changing circumstances actually constitutes a remarkable characteristic of American religion. (Wuthnow 1988)

4. Institutionalisation and Politicisation Processes

Hunter (1991) contends that culture wars have undergone an institutionalisation process through different kinds of social, religious, political, and institutional structures. Indeed, the diminishing relevance of traditional affiliational groups does not mean that the emerging ideological camps – the liberal and conservative cultural warriors – could not be anchored in some organisational structures at both social and political levels. (Claassen 2015)

At the social level, non-denominational organisations take the form of parachurch organizations (Hunter 1991) whose purpose is uniting ‘specific fragments of the religious community who now shared common interests.’ (Wuthnow 1988: 317) These special purpose
groups have proliferated over time and embody today a large variety of organisations, from religiously inspired groups to think tanks, journals, professional unions, or education structures. (Caplan 2010; Flanagan and Lee 2003; Wuthnow 1988)

At the political level, the culture wars theory contends that the restructured religious divisions have been translated into a partisan cleavage. (Layman 2001) Cultural conflict has transformed into political conflict (Layman 2001); ideological polarisation has led to political polarisation. (Kellstedt and Guth 2015). The Republican Party now gathers the cultural and religious conservatives (evangelicals and observant Christians), and the Democratic Party hosts the cultural and religious liberals (secular Christians, non-Christians and non-believers). (Kauffman 2002; Layman 2001) The growing salience of cultural ideological distinctiveness between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party constitutes a major realignment of American party politics. Many scholars attribute this realignment to the emergence of the abortion issue on the political scene, when the 1973 Supreme Court landmark Roe v. Wade decision legalised abortion during the first two semesters of pregnancy.

The New Religious Right phenomenon perfectly illustrates the incremental institutionalisation and politicisation of American culture wars. Primarily focused on sexual morality and gender roles (Joppke 2015; Wilcox and Fortelny 2009), it is composed of a cluster of prominent evangelical individuals and organisations which began to take an active role in the GOP platform from the moment they formed an alliance with the Republican leadership in support of the Reagan administration. (D’Antonio et al. 2013; Hunter 1991) Although the New Religious Right achieved only mixed political results, its influence and resourcefulness finds no equivalent in the Democratic camp. No ‘Religious Left’ provided any decisive support to the Democratic Party or galvanised Democratic voters’ passions in such a decisive way. (Wilcox and Fortelny 2009)

**D. Culture Wars as a Political Style**

Polarisation materialises through a symbolic style of political expression. Hunter puts discourse at the core centre of its analysis and studies the symbolic rhetorical tools through which cultural wars are waged. The ‘grammar of public discourse’ (Hunter 2006b: 15) he depicts emphasises both the substance, the content of public discourse, and its temper, its style. On the one hand, culture wars denote a type of argumentation relying on fundamental values. (Leege et al. 2002) Positive constructive reasoning, though, is put under stress and

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4 Carmines and Stimson’s concept of ‘issue evolution’ highlights the process through which an issue leads to the realignment of political parties and becomes their key distinctive feature. (Adams 1997)
might prove to be insufficient as ‘each side operates out of a fundamentally different conception of moral authority and employs a markedly different kind of moral logic.’ (Hunter 1991: 136) Defining one’s adversary as the negation of one’s values (Clark 2003) uncovers ‘a strategy of public ridicule, derision, and insult.’ (Hunter 1991: 136) The next sections examine the balance between both the inward- and outward-looking faces of the discursive conflict.

1. **A Positive and Substantial Style of Argumentation**

Cultural warriors’ discourse seeks to legitimate the foundational values from which derive specific morality issue attitudes, be those attitudes inspired by conservative or liberal ideological beliefs. Legitimation discourses rely on scientific and/or transcendent rationales. (Leege et al. 2002) Scientific rationality is autonomous, self-grounded, and self-sufficient. (Hunter 1991) Transcendent rationales, by contrast, lead to an emotional, overtly passionate style of politics, which is chiefly mobilised by the conservative camp. (Evans 2008; Layman 2001) Over time, however, religiously defined arguments have lost their persuasive power. In order to mainstream their language and to reach a broader audience, religious conservatives ‘have moved beyond theology and doctrine’ (Vinson 2009: 464), and now translate their message in pragmatic, secular terms. (Oldmixon 2005; Wuthnow 1988)

The language of ‘rights’ so became a ‘powerful tool of persuasion’. (Hunter 1991: 310) It supplies efficient code-words that resonate as universal principles. (Leege et al. 2002; Wuthnow 1988) But on closer scrutiny, universally accepted arguments may encounter moral pluralism. (Engelhardt 2001) In the abortion dispute, the ‘rights’ frame is available for both conflicting sides: pro-choicers’ (women’s) right to choose is contrasted with pro-lifers’ right to (foetal) life. (Jelen 2009) At the end, Hunter fears that ‘the rhetoric infused in public discourse by each side is so similar that without identifying the object of derision and aversion, it is nearly impossible to distinguish which of the two coalitions is speaking.’ (Hunter 1991: 152) Such a confusion reminds us that even if ‘People share a consensus on the principles of public life […] [they] fail to agree on the practical everyday political meaning of those principles.’ (Hunter 1991: 315) In other words, ‘all moralities […] may be concerned with the good. It does not follow that all moralities share the same understanding of the good.’ (Engelhardt 2001: 251)

2. **A Negative and Symbolic Style of Argumentation**

The grammar of culture wars is also a grammar of mutual hostility, where both sides try ‘to undermine each other’s credibility and legitimacy.’ (Hunter 1991: 142) Sustained efforts at
social categorisation and identification discredit the opponents as alien, or ‘the other.’ The conflict coalesces around a binary opposition between ‘us’ v. ‘them.’ (Leege et al. 2002) Such a demarcation process feeds an adversarial kind of politics (Wuthnow 1988), a politics of cultural difference which Leege et al. define as a ‘campaign rhetoric that creates anxiety and fear through scapegoating, assigning blame, and outgrouping.’ (Leege et al. 2002: 267) The ideological labels ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ endorse the role of identity markers. (Williams 1997a)

Drawing boundaries between insiders and outsiders strengthens one’s identity. (Hunter 1991) Pinpointing a common enemy, being ‘united by a shared political foe’ (Claassen 2015: 29) increases in-group consciousness and cohesiveness. (Hunter 1991; Leege et al. 2002) In martial terms, ‘cultural warfare depends on the ability of the soldiers to identify clearly which side they are on.’ (Olson 1997: 238) Moreover, ‘an idea, a group, a movement are not inherently meaningful but rather take on significance in relation to their opposite.’ (Hunter 2006b: 33–34) The concept of ‘relative deprivation’ points to ‘the tendency of people to judge their condition not by some absolute standards but by making comparisons between their situation and that of other groups.’ (Hunter 1991: 75)

3. The Performative Effect of the ‘Culture Wars’ Metaphor

Some observers point to the tendency for cultural conflict to lead to a gradual process of rhetorical radicalisation which ends up in absolutist politics. (Clark 2003; Kaiser 2003; Oldmixon 2005) Public discourse has lost its complexity and nuance. (Hunter 2006b) It relies on simplified, black-and-white frames (Putnam and Campbell 2010) instead of covering the various ‘sensibilities found in culture.’ (Hunter 2006a: 95) Rhetorical radicalisation and absolutisation add some force to the polarising process which is already at work. Simplistic dichotomist representations of power relations feed a Manichean vision of the world which plays out dialectically. (Clark and Kaiser 2003; Hunter 2006b)

Both the media and politicians have helped conveying conflictual and bipolar mental pictures of cultural reality. The former amplify the public debate, capitalise on sensationalism, publicise antagonisms. The latter make strategic use of morality issues ‘as a party political resource useful when building distinctive positions.’ (Foret 2015: 178) One of the most quoted discourses in the culture wars literature is actually Pat Buchanan’s speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention. The former presidential candidate famously declared: ‘There is a religious war going on in this country, a cultural war as critical to the kind of
nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America.’ (quoted in Fiorina et al. 2005: 1)

Eventually, culture wars have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Hasenclever and Ritterberger 2000; Wuthnow 1988) They involve ‘out-of-control and self-reinforcing’ processes which result in ‘an autonomous dynamic of struggle.’ (Williams 1997a: 284; 292) However, this ‘does not mean that the conflict is somehow artificial and inconsequential.’ (Hunter 1991: 157) Like with the chicken and the egg, defining which of the polarisation or rhetoric inflation comes first becomes an inextricable story.

E. Criticisms
The religious restructuring theory – especially the popularised version of culture wars – has been reviewed in academic circles on three main aspects: the elites/masses (dis)connection, the pathological nature of conflict, and the role of religion in the public square.

1. The Elites/Masses (Dis)connection
Numerous scholars doubt about the existence of polarised masses. (DiMaggio et al. 1997; Kniss 1997; McTague and Layman 2009; Wald and Leege 2009) Most individuals would be ‘non-combatants’ (Foret 2015: 181), ‘moderate in their views and tolerant in their manner.’ (Fiorina et al. 2005: 5) Culture wars would constitute an elite-driven phenomenon (Demerath III and Straight 1997; Fiorina et al. 2005; Fiorina 2006; Foret 2015; Oldmixon 2005), which ‘has always existed more in the minds of journalists and political activists than in the lives of ordinary Americans.’ (Wolfe 2006: 42) Yet ‘if there is to be culture “war”, it must involve the public as well as elites. There must be soldiers as well as generals.’ (Olson 1997: 237) But researchers point to the ‘tendency of the American people to cluster near the center on most issues.’ (D’Antonio et al. 2013: 7) As they lean toward the centre, their attitudes would have become more unified. (DiMaggio et al. 1997; Foret 2015; Layman 2001; McTague and Layman 2009; Oldmixon 2005; Putnam and Campbell 2010) Fiorina et al. consider that this even applies to abortion – ‘a supposedly touchstone issue in the culture war’ (Fiorina et al. 2005: 77) – but others confirm the exceptional conflictual and polarised nature of that morality issue. (D’Antonio et al. 2013; DiMaggio et al. 1997)

2. The Normative Implications of the Culture Wars Theory
The second strand of criticisms animating the culture wars literature takes on a normative dimension and is animated by two main debates: first, the pathological nature of conflict with regard to the democratic process; second, the role of religion in the public square. The first
debate questions the dialectic between conflict and compromise; it deals with ontological pluralism as an intrinsic feature of culture. The second debate questions the dialectic between unity and diversity; it deals with the grammar of public discourse.

a. The Pathological Nature of Conflict
According to Hunter (1991), conflict is not only inescapable, but also unresolvable. On the one hand, cultural conflict is inescapable because ‘Culture is, by its very constitution in social life, contested.’ (Hunter 2006b: 33) Without doubt, ‘moral pluralism characterizes the human condition’ (Engelhardt 2001: 244), and ‘conflicts among groups [...] must be taken as a corollary of human nature.’ (Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000: 650) In this perspective, ‘the term culture war is redundant. Culture is by its very nature, contested – even when it appears most homogeneous.’ (Wolfe 2006: 103) On the other hand, cultural conflict is unresolvable inasmuch as ‘what faction views as a vital threat, another views as entirely legitimate.’ (Hunter 1991: 322) The ideological differences between both camps are so deep, and the normative stakes are so high, that the conflict becomes intractable, and compromise impossible. (Crotty 2015b; D’Antonio et al. 2013; Oldmixon 2005) As a result, there is ‘no grey zones, [...] no choice but to take sides.’ (Kaiser 2003: 75) Moral and cultural debates are framed in terms of ‘either/or’ (Ozzano and Giorgi 2015), i.e. in a non-negotiable perspective which can result in nothing but a ‘clash of absolutes.’ (Ferree et al. 2004)

The permanence and intractability of American culture wars have spread a debate over the viability and sustainability of the democratic process. Both factions’ inability and unwillingness to reach a reasoned compromise could challenge the tolerance, consensus and stability required to any political system. (Eisenstein 2009; Wilcox and Fortelny 2009; Wolfe 2006) On the contrary, one can highlight the constructive role of democratic conflict. Far from being pathological, conflict becomes intrinsic to politics in the way pluralism is inherent to culture. (McCrea 2009) To a certain extent, ‘the persistence and expansion of the culture wars is [...] evidence of a thriving democracy and a vibrant public square.’ (Prothero 2016: 247) Hunter himself does not seek to overcome the conflict, but to find ‘a public agreement over how to publicly disagree.’ (Hunter 1991: 318) However, before authentic debate becomes a virtue, one must clarify the grammar of public discourse through which ‘normative consensus may coexist with factual disagreement.’ (DiMaggio et al. 1997: 92)

b. The Role of Religion in the Public Square
As long as culture wars are about religiously-based ideological struggles, the issue is to determine how religion is to be expressed in the public sphere. We are here concerned about
the form of the debate, not its content. Iltis (2009) identifies three different ways of coping with religious arguments. The first option – the exclusion option – avoids any religious consideration and relies on secular reasons only, ‘in the hope that it will supply the necessary neutrality to overcome disagreement and controversy.’ (Iltis 2009: 221) Nonetheless, no rationality is essentially neutral, and every reason – even secular reasons – is somehow morally informed. Reversely, the second option – the accommodation option – consists in deeming religious views as relevant, if only because it is impossible to dismiss from public discourse ‘insights and principles that grow out of our deepest religious and normative commitments.’ (Iltis 2009: 229) The point is to allow liberals and conservatives to share the discursive field equally. Last but no least, the third option – the translation option – as suggested by Rawls and Habermas ‘allows the commensurability of the demands.’ (Ozzano and Giorgi 2015: 11) Moving from the private to the public sphere requires religious reasons to be translated in rational political ones so that they become universally intelligible and accessible. (Iltis 2009; Ozzano and Giorgi 2015) Once religion ‘resonate[s] politically’ (Wald and Leege 2009: 147), not only is it allowed to inform public debates, but it is required to do so. (Iltis 2009)

By showing ‘simultaneous commitment to both diversity and unity’ (Hunter 1991: 307), pluralism and consensus, the translation option parallels the national motto of the United States of America – E pluribus unum. The coexistence of multiple worldviews constitutes the basic dilemma of contemporary societies. (Evans 1997) EU abortion politics is bound to face comparable challenges.

III. Religion in the European Union
The operationalisation of the study of European culture wars requires some clarifications with regard to the extent to which the American theoretical toolbox may be transposed to European morality politics. Indeed, the blind application of borrowed concepts from one political context to another may be detrimental to the analysis. (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2008) America displays similar institutional structures as Europe ‘without sharing the same cultural background.’ (Woll 2007: 461) As a result, ‘the claim is not to develop a comparison term to term and to produce fresh knowledge on the United States, but to rely on existing expertise on the American case to “test” Europe.’ (Foret 2015: 5) The purpose of this section is to review the social, cultural, institutional, and political features which condition how EU morality politics gives birth to its own kind of culture wars.
A. European Culture and Identity

1. The Secularisation Thesis

A widespread cliché opposes religious America to secular Europe. (Berger et al. 2008) (Western) Europe has been characterised by the progressive privatisation and de-politicisation of religion, entailing the secularisation of both the social and the political. (Brubaker 2015; Foret and Itçaina 2012a) A process of ‘disenchantment’ has weakened the significance of religious beliefs, practices, and institutions at both individual and social levels. (Willaime 2006)

a. Differentiation, Privatisation, and Decline

At the institutional level, secularisation brings about ‘a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres [...] from the religious sphere.’ (Joppke 2015: 42) Durkheim’s functionalist theory of differentiation focuses on the institutional and social roles performed by religion. (Norris and Inglehart 2011) The empowerment and emancipation of distinct spheres of activities freed from ecclesiastical oversight reduces the Church to a ‘sector-based institution’ deprived from its former all-encompassing influence. (Portier 2012: 93) The differentiation of various spheres of activity with distinct logics and ruling principles ultimately resulted in the separation of church and state, relegating religion to the private realm. When separation took place in a conflictual context involving the radical exclusion of religion from the public space – most notably in France – one speaks about laïcité. (Foret 2007; Willaime 2006)

At the social level, churches are losing their grip on the European population, which shows increasing indifference toward religious matters. The loss of faith eviscerates the social meaning of denominational identities, attendance at services has declined, and people’s lifestyles escape the religious creeds and teachings. In sum, secularisation involves dropping numbers of religious members, as well as declining levels of religious collective practices and individual beliefs. (Berger et al. 2008; Casanova 2003; Davie 2006; De Vlieger 2011; Norris and Inglehart 2011)

b. Criticisms

The prevalence of the secularisation theory in the study of religion in Europe has progressively been put into question, if only because of its internal variations within the continent. Besides, recent developments question secular Europe as a whole. The dramatic growth of Muslim people since the second half of the 20th century is now fed by the immigration crisis animating the continent. The important presence of Muslims encounters
the ideas both of a secular and of a Christian Europe. These international and domestic challenges have prompted the creation of new concepts, such as de-secularisation (Berger), post-secularism (Habermas) or re-enchantment of the world.

The most dramatic critique came from Casanova’s notion of ‘public religion.’ The author dismisses the existence of a neutral public square and asserts that religion continues to assume a public role. (Berger et al. 2008; Brubaker 2015; McCrea 2010) The main Christian denominations, while accepting the separation of church and state, reject the privatisation of religion (De Vlieger 2011; Ferrari 2012; Martin 2005), so that ‘by the mid-twentieth century, the Western vision of a fully privatized religion has proved chimerical.’ (Brubaker 2015: 99) Roy explains that ‘there is no ‘return of the sacred’: there is no return to a previous situation, but a reconfiguration of the relationship between society and religion.’ (Roy 2016: 2) The secularisation theory is about religious change, not about religious decline. (Willaime 2006)

Changing circumstances have reduced religion to a living memory; a strong, and active historical, mnesic trace; a latent, inescapable, and authoritative cultural matrix. (Foret 2007; Foret 2015) Davie’s notion of ‘vicarious religion’ points to the residual public utility of religion (Berger et al. 2008; Foret 2014c), which is ‘performed by an active minority on behalf of a much larger number who not only understand, but clearly approve of what the minority is doing.’ (Davie 2006: 24) Davie also contends that Europeans are less secular than unchurched, resorting to the phrase ‘believing without belonging.’ (Casanova 2003; Norris and Inglehart 2011; Willaime 2006; Willaime 2007) However, the resilience of religion as a cultural raw material pinpoints ‘an implicit, diffused, and submerged Christian cultural identity’ that pervades even the most secular societies. (Casanova 2006: 65–66) As a result, Hervieu-Léger characterizes the European situation as ‘belonging without believing’, thereby turning Davie’s phrase on its head. (Berger et al. 2008; Casanova 2006)

Last but not least, while many authors consider that secularisation is inextricably linked to modernity, and that modernity is incompatible with religion (Martin 2005), Willaime (2006; 2007) notices that modernity itself is undergoing a secularisation process which desacralizes, and relativizes the secular and modern institutions of politics, education, family, and work. If modernity was characterised by the transfer of the sacred from the religious to the secular realm, ultra-modernity is characterized by the secularisation of the secular itself. The ultra-modernity theory highlights the de-ideologisation of politics, which stops constituting an
alternative to religion. With the hyper-secularisation of ultra-modernity, religion becomes a symbolic resource countering widespread relativism.

c. Secular Europe v. Religious America

Americans contrast with Europeans with regard to their rates of religious belonging, behaving, and believing. (Putnam and Campbell 2010) The pervading power of religion in the United States is historically anchored. When the first pilgrims arrived on the continent in order to escape from religious persecution in Europe, “freedom to believe” opposed to “freedom from belief” became a foundational principle.’ (Berger et al. 2008: 28) As a result, the secularisation theory has long considered the U.S. situation as the religious exception in the modern, democratic, and secular West. However, ‘America is too big a society to fit comfortably under the maxim that the exception proves the rule.’ (Berger et al. 2008: 141) A global perspective sheds light on Europe’s exceptionalism. (Foret 2015; Norris and Inglehart 2011) Secularisation would be ‘a European phenomenon with a European explanation.’ (Berger et al. 2008: 33) According to Casanova, Europe’s exceptionalism lies in ‘the triumph of secularism as a teleological theory of religious development.’ (Casanova 2006: 85) When ‘secularisation is both noted and promoted’ (Martin 2005: 8), it gives way to secularity, a self-fulfilling prophecy which transforms the modernity-secularisation nexus into an irresistible teleological endpoint. (Berger et al. 2008; Casanova 2006)

Besides, the secularisation theory structurally links modernity to the decline of religion, identifying a systematic causal relationship between both phenomena. (Berger et al. 2008; Foret and Itçaina 2012b; Willaime 2006) Yet, the U.S. is as modern as religious. (Willaime 2006) The fact that America puts religion and modernity into ‘the same providential and progressive package’ (Martin 2005: 101) shows that modernity is extrinsic rather than intrinsic to secularisation. (Berger et al. 2008) The absence of convergence around a unique paradigm of modernity led Eisenstadt to develop the concept of ‘multiple modernities’ – Europe and America represent different, but equally valid, versions of modernity. (Berger et al. 2008; Brubaker 2015; Haynes 2012; Katzenstein 2006; Willaime 2006)

Finally, American religion’s flexibility is attested by the fact that people nowadays choose their religion rather than simply inheriting it. (Putnam and Campbell 2010) ‘Congregation shopping’ – or ‘religious switching’ (Putnam and Campbell 2010: 162) – sends us back to Hervieu-Léger’s term ‘bricolage spirituel.’ (Berger et al. 2008; Foret 2003; Foret 2007) Religious individualism, subjectivism, and voluntarism replace taken-for-granted traditions, converting a culture of obligation (imposed) or duty (inherited) into a culture of consumption
or choice. (Berger et al. 2008; Davie 2006) In Europe, by contrast, ‘residual membership of the historic tradition remains the norm.’ (Berger et al. 2008: 98) ‘Expressive individualism’ is gaining ground though, as ‘the subject constructs his own ‘religious biography’.’ (Mouzelis 2012: 216) Religious individualisation is closely related to a deinstitutionalisation process (Foret 2015); Europeans refuse their churches’ menu in favour of a religion à la carte. (Willaime 2007)

2. Whither European Identity

a. The European Christian Heritage

Collective identity founds the demos that any democratic polity needs to generate citizens’ support for, and compliance with, its institutions and rules. (Castoglione 2009; Nelsen and Guth 2015b; Risse 2010) However, the European identity has remained ‘shallow’ (Nelsen and Guth 2015a: 8), ‘lite.’ (Risse 2010) At best, citizens add the European component to the multiple identities they already hold, notwithstanding the metaphor used to account for this – either nested Russian dolls or marble cakes. (Castoglione 2009; Cerutti 2008; Katzenstein and Checkel 2009; Massignon 2007; Nelsen and Guth 2015b; Nelsen and Guth 2015a) Yet, no polity can be viably sustained without coupling its functional and procedural aspects with some substantial and symbolic dimensions. (Massignon 2007) Religion provides symbolic cultural raw material likely to strengthen a Weberian kind of legitimacy.

The 2009 Lisbon Treaty established in its Preamble a definition of EU collective identity which takes into account the multiple components of the European confessional landscape. The purpose was to reach a balance between the ‘religious, cultural, and humanist inheritance’ of the continent. Discussing the multifaceted European spiritual experience has proven deeply divisive though. A direct reference to Christianity was first mentioned in the ill-fated Constitutional Treaty, causing the rejection of the document by French and Dutch public referenda in 2005. (Castoglione 2009; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009; Eriksen and Fossum 2004; Katzenstein 2006; Medrano 2009; Risse 2010) Foret reads this failure as a ‘proof of the symbolic predominance of national identities and differences.’ (Foret 2015: 18)

b. ‘United in Diversity’, the European Civil Religion?

The spiritual ‘balance’ compromise institutionalised by the Lisbon Treaty echoes the official motto of the European Union, namely ‘United in Diversity.’ Diversity constitutes ‘the brand of European specificity’ and ‘is celebrated constantly as a core European value.’ (Foret and Littoz-Monnet 2014: 19–20) At the same time, however, the EU seeks to overcome national cultural, religious, and linguistic differences by way of compromises. (Massignon 2007) The
tension between uniformity and pluralism consists in managing ‘to coherently advance a universal yet locally applicable conception [of European identity and values].’ (Caplan 2010: 79) This becomes even further crucial in the context of the development of an increasingly diverse and multicultural environment. For example, the ‘Muslim problem’ highlights ‘the European failure to integrate religious diversity and consequently to promote the American model of handling spiritual minorities.’ (Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015: 1094)

The most striking difference between the European Union and the United States with regard to the management of multi-confessional identities pertains to the notion of ‘civil religion.’ First coined by Bellah in the late 1960s, it refers to ‘the religion, with its rituals and beliefs, shared by one people (or nation, or state) beyond its allegiance to a given church or faith.’ (Ventura 2009: 947) It endorses the Durkheimian function of a ‘civic glue’ (Putnam and Campbell 2010: 517) creating ‘unity and cohesion in society.’ (Joppke 2015: 18) American civil religion has neither partisan nor denominational overtones. (Putnam and Campbell 2010) It is materialised by the maxim ‘In God We Trust’, which entails the existence of constant interactions between religion and politics while strictly maintaining the constitutional separation between Church and State. (Berger et al. 2008; Joppke 2015; Massignon 2007) In a sense, ‘being religious is a prerequisite for being a “good American’” (Putnam and Campbell 2010: 541), the concept of civil religion expressing a ‘faith in faith.’ (Joppke 2015: 90–91)

B. The Institutional Rules of EU Political Game
Religion operates at EU level in three distinct ways: as an object to be dealt with through the subsidiarity principle; as an active agent of civil society likely to participate in the policy-making process; as a symbolic discursive resource mobilized by political entrepreneurs. (Carrera and Parkin 2010; Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015) Religion as a policy object is constrained by specific legal patterns; religion as a policy subject relates to the structure of religious interest representation in the EU; religion as a discursive resource must comply with the culture of compromise of the Eurospeak. (Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015) Before detailing the legal, advocacy, and discursive framework of EU religious politics, some political characteristics are also worth mentioning if we are to apply the culture wars theory to the European context.

1. Political Framework
American politics is organised along a bipolar cleavage opposing the culturally conservative Republican Party to the culturally liberal Democratic Party. European politics does not easily lend itself to such a clear-cut scenario. Socio-economic concerns separate right-wing from
left-wing parties, to which the Greens, largely absent from American politics, are usually associated. Cultural concerns are increasingly complicating the picture by pitting the proponents of a modern, liberal, and cosmopolitan Europe against those nationalists – not necessarily Eurosceptic – who defend a fortress and exclusionary Europe on the basis of an essentialist understanding of the European Christian heritage. (Kriesi 2010; Risse 2010)

As long as religion is concerned, whereas ‘no clear link to any institutionalized historical conflict around religious values’ structures the American political system (Studlar 2012: 162), Christian Democratic parties have traditionally represented Catholic cultural and political interests in Western Europe. (Nelsen and Guth 2015b) However, they now often carry demands not related to confessional politics. (Katzenstein 2006) Even the internal components of the European People’s Party (EPP), whose resilient identity is marked by Christian Democracy, ‘are unequal in their proximity to the Christian heritage.’ (Foret 2015: 192)

In conclusion, multiple cleavages organize European political life according to economic, social, territorial, and political variables on which religion exert a secondary and conservative influence. Nationality, by contrast, constitutes a transversal determinant and the main factor of discrimination. (Foret 2007; Foret 2014a; Foret 2014c)

2. Legal Framework
In 1999, the Amsterdam Treaty established that the Union has no explicit competence to deal with religious matters, over which the principle of subsidiarity prevails. (Carrera and Parkin 2010; Katzenstein 2006; Massignon 2007) This principle ‘requires that matters that can be effectively addressed at the national level should be so addressed, without EU intervention.’ (Berger et al. 2008: 80) This is not to say that the EU has not been immune to religious debates. Over time, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has come to play a prominent role in creating ‘a normative environment that requires religious actors and public authorities to respect fundamental rights.’ (Foret 2012: 49)

If the subsidiarity principle protects the sheer diversity of national religious policies, it also prevents the European Union from interfering in the various regimes of state-church relations. The literature sorts out national arrangements into three distinct groups: the first group entails collusion between church and state, which officially embraces a single religion (United Kingdom, Greece); the second group experiences a conflict between church and state, and embraces official secularism (France); the third group adopts an intermediary, hybrid position
in order to manage coexistence between church and state, and comprises both concordat (Germany) and pillarization (Belgium, the Netherlands). (Foret 2015; Massignon 2007; McCrea 2010; Roy 2016)

Some have considered the EU ‘laboratory’ to be similar to the cooperation model. (Doe 2011) The Union does indeed recognise the positive social role performed by religions while constantly searching for a balance between religious and humanist convictions. (Massignon 2007) Willaime (2006), on his part, perceives the emergence of a European kind of laïcité which guarantees the independence of the governance structures as well as individuals’ liberty and autonomy. The emerging European laïcité prevents religion from exercising a widespread and powerful influence over social and political life – negative neutrality – but also recognises its value as a spiritual, ethical, cultural, or even political resource in the context of plural democracies – positive neutrality. (Massignon 2007; Willaime 2006) Such an approach respects and synthesizes national traditions (Foret 2012; Massignon 2007; McCrea 2010) so that ‘it is not possible to trace back a unique national blueprint.’ (Foret 2014a: 316)

3. Advocacy Framework
Religion is not only dealt with as a regulatory object; it is also actively associated with the European decision-making process as one component of civil society. (Massignon 2007) The inclusion of civil society organisations in EU governance is expected to strengthen its input legitimacy and to reduce its democratic deficit. (Doe 2011) Religious actors, in return, recover some role in the public square despite their shrinking social and political influence. (Foret 2003; Foret 2015; Foret and Schlesinger 2007) The most institutionalised venue to weigh on EU politics consists of the ‘open, transparent, and regular dialogue’ set up by art.17 of the Lisbon Treaty and originating in 1992 Delors’ will to ‘give a soul to Europe.’ (De Vlieger 2011; Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015; Leutsean 2011)

Overall, the dialogue has only achieved mixed results, depending on the president in office. (Massignon 2007; Nelsen and Guth 2015b) It does not constitute the preferred venue of faith-based organisations (FBOs) either. Actually, ‘religious groups are much more effective when they […] are simply lobbying the EU like other Brussels interest groups.’ (Nelsen and Guth 2015b: 307) ‘Classical lobby work (or advocacy, to use the term preferred by religious

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5 Massignon (2007) suggests the ‘laboratory’ metaphor in order to describe the informal, moving, uncertain, and composite aspects of EU religious politics.

6 The humanists have contested religions’ representativeness (Foret 2003; Foret 2007; Foret and Schlesinger 2007), and denounced the ‘good governance’ discourse of the EU ‘as a disguised attempt to forge a new alliance between spiritual and temporal powers.’ (Foret 2015: 19)
actors)’ consists in building trans-sectoral coalitions, pressuring MEPs and European civil servants, publishing policy papers, etc. (Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015: 1099)

Concretely, Christian organisations benefit from the symbolic and material advantages that come with the ancient role performed by their traditional churches. The Catholic Church in particular enjoys considerable financial and organisational means which give it a head start in the European advocacy game. (Foret 2003; Foret 2012; Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015; Foret and Schlesinger 2007) Its unitary and hierarchical structure finds no equivalence on the part of Protestant and Orthodox groups, whose federated national organisations often struggle to achieve some consensus on key (morality) issues. (Foret and Schlesinger 2007; Massignon 2007) Jewish, Islamic, and humanist lobbies, on their side, were established later in European integration history. They still strive to get some visibility and have contributed little to EU policy-making. (De Vlieger 2011)

4. Discursive Framework
For FBOs to legitimately participate in EU governance, they must meet the requirements of the Eurospeak (Massignon 2007), i.e. rationality, expertise, and compromise. (Foret and Littoz-Monnet 2014) Adjusting to one’s discursive environment is conceptualised as ‘institutional isomorphism.’ (Boswell 2009) Religious actors’ key challenge becomes translating religious ideas into neutralised, secularised, universally accessible demands and policy proposals, ‘so that God becomes ‘business as usual.’ (Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015; McCrea 2009) Accommodating the grammar of the Eurospeak has not always appeared as a self-evident option though. Foret (2009) explains that religious organisations have been hesitating between the ‘Let it be’ option, which endorses institutional isomorphism and enables religions to reach a broad audience, and the ‘Watch your mouth’ option, which ‘demand[s] the accurate interpretation and a respectful treatment of sacred traditions and beliefs.’ (Foret 2009: 46) The latter option runs the risk of ‘limiting the social scope of the discourse to those who are already convinced.’ (Foret 2009: 47)

EU decision-making largely operates on functionalist and technical grounds which contrast with the normative, symbolic load of American politics. (Bendjaballah 2016) European technicisation calls upon scientific and procedural arguments; American ethicisation, or dramatization, revolves around interest- and value-based arguments. European public discourse rests on law and expertise, rather than on theology and morality. (Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015) As a community of law, the European Union defends human rights through various resonant labels: non-discrimination, democracy, equality, etc. (Ozzano and Giorgi
2015) These rhetorical devices ‘are framed as “secular”, independent from any religious norms.’ (Roy 2016: 7) ‘The core idea guiding religious advocacy in this field is the notion of human dignity – a concept strongly anchored in Christian theology.’ (Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015: 1100) Expertise constitutes the other key characteristic of EU governance. (Littoz-Monnet 2015; Robert 2012) It is both omnipresent and polymorphic – various kinds of actors, various kinds of knowledge. (Robert 2010; Robert 2012) Religious and philosophical organisations put forward not so much a technical, but a practical expertise in values and ethics. (Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015) Such an expertise in humanity ‘cannot take the form of an authoritarian discourse.’ (Foret and Mourão Permoser 2015: 1095) The 2001 White Paper on Governance ‘recognise[s] religious bodies as particularly important elements of civil society, […] [as well as] the particular nature of their contribution.’ (McCrea 2009: 93)

The lexicon of law and expertise creates a rational environment which is particularly congruent with the European Union’s culture of compromise. Compromise lies at the heart of EU integration and contrasts with the politicisation and polarisation characterising American ‘gangster style’ (Woll 2007: 461) political life. (Bendjaballah 2016; Crotty 2015b) As a matter of fact, ‘European integration is a school of moderation, requiring control of collective and individual passions and beliefs and flexibility of boundaries.’ (Foret 2015: 280) Such a philosophy is being challenged by EU morality politics, which does involve the confrontation of distinct values and actors. Exploring the hypothesis of European culture wars requires us to take into account the multiple checks and balances resisting the politicisation trends leading to polarised conflicts.

IV. European Culture Wars?
The religious restructuring theory offers a useful heuristic toolbox which enables us to understand how EU abortion politics has been taken place from the beginning of the 2000s onwards. Both meanings of polarisation and political style provide some clues to operationalise the hypothesis of European culture wars. Here are some guidelines likely to direct research on morality issues at the European supranational level more generally.

The polarisation component of culture wars identifies the emergence of a bipolar ideological axis – conservatism v. liberalism – which, in the American case, parallels the political cleavage between the Republican and Democratic parties. In the European context, the abortion issue is also raised by social and political entrepreneurs looking for building
advocacy coalitions. A key concern consists in identifying both the religious and political nature of morality coalitions as well as the strength of these alliances. First, do we observe a conflict between religions, within religions, or between religious and secular actors?; does the conflict clearly split left-wing and right-wing parties? EU abortion politics is likely to produce an even more complex picture given the importance of nationality in the European political and cultural landscape. Moreover, coalitions may be flexible, contingent, whereas American bipolarisation organises U.S. political life in a structural way.

The political style component of culture wars is divided itself into positive/substantial and negative/symbolic processes of argumentation. At the substantial level, American culture warriors conflict over value-based concerns, religious issues, ideological arguments. The Eurospeak, by contrast, relies on law and expertise. Such a technicisation process – as opposed to ethicisation strategies – neutralise contention and eases practical agreements. Does EU abortion politics testifies institutional discursive isomorphism, or does it break the rule of rationality because of the very raison d’être of morality politics? At the symbolic level, the gangster style of American politics challenges the European culture of compromise. To what extent is ‘United in diversity’ put under stress by the increased politicisation of morality issues at EU level?

Four different scenarios (table 1) emerge from the various combinations between the polarisation and political style components. First, a true culture wars scenario combines strong, structural ideological coalitions between social and political actors defending their worldviews through value-based arguments. Second, social and political actors may combine the creation of strong ideological coalitions with technicisation strategies in order to mainstream their message and maximise a successful policy-making process. Third, social and political actors maintain traditional religious, political, and national alliances, and ethicisation strategies enable them to gain visibility for campaigning purposes, for example – this is the position-taking scenario. Fourth, morality issues are nothing but business as usual: social and political actors engage in morality politics through classical alliances and technocratic arguments.
Table 1. The four scenarios of EU morality politics

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<th>Polariisation</th>
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<td>Strong ideological coalitions</td>
<td>Ethicisation</td>
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<td>Traditional/weak ideological coalitions</td>
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<td>Policy-making</td>
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<td>Position-taking</td>
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<td>Business as usual</td>
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We hypothesise that EU abortion politics balances between policy-making and position-taking dynamics. Traditional alliances do converge toward ecumenical coalitions which are heterogeneous in both religious and political composition; however, they are unlikely to exert a lasting and structural effect, or to reorganise EU politics as a whole. From a discursive point of view, ethicisation and technicisation strategies are not mutually exclusive but operate in complementary ways, depending on issue, time, and venue.
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