Abstract
The alleged failure of multiculturalism in Europe is often associated to fears brought about by religious pluralization and fundamentalism. Controversies over religious issues corroborate this view and seem to indicate that a cultural battlefield following secular-religious fault-lines—with attending civilizational undertones—has taken shape on the continent. However, recent theoretical re-conceptualizations of the secular-religious dyad indicate that this war-like portrayal might be hasty and irresponsible. If “secular” and “religious” are socially constructed categories immersed in, and responsive to diverse contextual settings, neither the adversarial parties in this putative “culture war” nor the terms of the debate can be defined a priori and unconditionally. Building upon this non-essentialist view, this paper asks whether “othering” and inclusive discourses are differently constructed in controversies that concern majority and minority religions, and if so, how. To this end, a critical discourse analysis of Italian governmental texts related to crucifix and headscarf debates is conducted.
Introduction: Western anxiety, Islam and Cultural Conflicts

Western societies are living in an “anxious age,” an age in which “ugly fears and suspicions” contribute to disfiguring their long-standing liberal and democratic self-image (Nussbaum 2012, 2). Right-wing extremism, intolerant and discriminatory legislation, the war on terror, the demeaning treatment of immigrants, refugees, and minorities: all of these developments evince what appears to be a forsaking of liberal and democratic forms of governance. According to Martha Nussbaum (2012), the widespread sense of insecurity and fear responsible for the emergence of such “institutionalized forms of intolerance” is related to the increasing diversification of Western societies (Ambrosini and Caneva 2012). More specifically, this “politics of fear” and its worrisome illiberal consequences are closely associated to the pluralization of religious belonging, a process whose menacing character allegedly finds corroboration in the ostensible practices and symbols of Islam, particularly in the image of veiled Muslim women—simultaneously representative of the oppressive and oppressed “other.” The prevalence of this image is not incidental.

Over the past decades, there has been a semantic slippage between originally unrelated sociological, demographic and religious categories: “the other, the different, the foreigner, the immigrant. And today the Muslim” (Allievi 2005a, 3). As a consequence, Islam—and not merely religion¹—has become increasingly visible in the West, especially in Europe, where Muslims account for approximately 6% of the total population (PewResearch 2010). In fact, in Western Europe, the alleged failure of multiculturalism² is often attributed to the seemingly insurmountable challenges faced by governments in integrating Muslim migrants, residents and even citizens (Modood et al., 2006). In light of this group's public salience, Murphy (2012, 1) suggests that the Western context is not simply a “context of multicultural anxiety;” more than that, it is a context of “Muslim-focused anxiety.” This is because the overlapping “otherness” of migrants, religious minorities, and Muslims has contributed to reawakening old fears, tensions, and conflicts on the continent (Casanova 2008; Allievi 2005).

However challenging Islam may be deemed, religious pluralization as such is a particularly intractable problem in Western Europe. On the one hand, the countries of the region have undergone broad secularization processes: substantive declines in belief and church attendance have been well

¹ As Casanova (2006) famously noted, from the 1980s onwards, religion has increasingly reclamation its place in the public square, both in the secularized West and in other parts of the world. Thus, contracting secularization theorists, who had predicted not only the privatization of but also the demise of religion, the renewed public assertiveness of religion proved that God was alive, well, and ready to resume its place in social and political life.

² Although political philosophy has contributed extensively to the debate on the meaning of, and justifications for multiculturalism, here the term is used more pragmatically: it is intended to denote merely policies devised to accommodate cultural diversity—including different identities, values and practices—, especially immigrant-driven diversity. For a general overview of multiculturalism, see: Modood (2007) and Murphy (2012).
documented, and the precept that religious sensibilities should be kept at a distance from other domains of life has been deeply incorporated into domestic institutional arrangements (Berger 1996; Casanova 2006; Davie 2006). On the other hand, newcomers are bringing into these countries their strong beliefs, as well as different understandings of how “the sacred” should interact with “secular” spheres of life (Casanova 2007; Foner and Alba 2008). Consequently, the presence of religious minorities that do not necessarily conform to the rules of secular orders has brought tensions between the religious and worldly realms to the very heart of host societies, thereby re-opening an apparently regressive debate—one that for most Europeans had been resolved a long time ago (Bader 2008; Bramadat 2009).

Allegedly dormant ever since the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the advent of liberalism, this debate (and the fears and tensions that accompany it) has not only helped to reignite pragmatic discussions about church and state relations and the accommodation of new types of cultural difference, but has also compelled Europeans to start re-thinking their identities, allegiances, and ways of approaching social and political life (Bader 2008; Beyer 2013; Bramadat 2009). This suggests that even though Islam currently serves as the main scapegoat for a range of problems in Western Europe, the state of social and political anxiety diagnosed by Nussbaum (2012) and Murphy (2012) has deeper and more complex roots, which involve, inter alia, the purported crises of secularism and multiculturalism.

In effect, together, a bundle of related transformations—including terrorism, international migration, cultural and religious pluralism, the public visibility of Islam, and the difficulties faced by secularism and multiculturalism—seem to have inaugurated a novel era of cultural conflict in Western European states or, put differently, within what had been hitherto perceived as largely homogeneous societies. In this contentious context, revivals of the concept of “culture wars” (Hunter 1991; Clark and Kaiser, 2003) and references to a putative “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1993) have not been difficult to find in political discourses, the media, and even scholarly contributions (Banchoff 2007). In this regard, it is also noteworthy that ever since the “Rushdie affair”, and especially following 9/11, it is the foreign religiosity of immigrants, particularly of Muslims, that has been making headlines and raising the most liberal and secular eyebrows in Western Europe.

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3 The “Rushdie Affair”, also known as The Satanic Verses controversy, refers to the polemic and furor that followed the publication of Salman Rushdie's book The Satanic Verses in the late 1980s. Due to the presence of several controversial elements in this book, starting by its very title, Rushdie was accused of blasphemy by many Muslims. The situation eventually led Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to proclaim a death sentence on the British author. See, for instance: Modood (1990).

4 It is interesting to notice that, in the context described, the term “immigrant” does not refer exclusively to actual international movers. Rather, the label is often used loosely in the public discourse. As a consequence, it ends up subsuming second- and third-generations of migrants, who are full citizens of the countries in which their ascendants took residence.
The growing incidence of controversies over the role of religion in social and political life appears to corroborate this view: not only do these controversies provide accessible evidence for a war-like portrayal of the political domain, but they also suggest that the battlefield is primarily divided along secular-religious fault-lines. Furthermore, the public prominence of Islam indicates that these “culture wars” easily acquire “civilizational” contours (Huntington 1993). The logic underlying such interpretations is not difficult to ascertain. “As [religious] voices become varied and more assertive...the possibility of cultural divisions and social conflict may grow correspondingly” (Banchoff 2007, 12). Inasmuch as non-European religions “challenge the state’s claim to monopolise the regulation of public life” (Brubaker 2013, 15), political actors feel the need to strike back either discursively—by engaging in rhetorical battles—or concretely—by pursuing policies designed to neutralize, regulate, discipline, and integrate foreign religions. In this light, the aforementioned intolerant/illiberal legislation takes on a new significance: such laws and policies emerge as ways of safeguarding liberalism, secularism, and democracy (Mouritsen and Olsen 2013).

Despite the plausibility and popularity of the “culture wars” interpretative framework, recent discursive and institutional developments in Western European states indicate that the metaphor may be one-sided, biased against immigrant religions, and to some extent, irresponsible. Whereas it is legitimate to claim that the diversification of societies brings about difficult challenges to the management of political communities, the argument that a war-like social dynamic takes shape in such plural contexts seems to be less defensible. A glimpse at the Western European treatment of religious and cultural diversity over the past two decades suggests that a univocal reaction to the increasing pluralization of societies cannot be discerned. Rather, a myriad of complex positions seem to be available to, and adopted by political actors. Needless to say, not all of these positions find correspondence in the “culture wars” framework.

Notably, both the notion of secularism and religion seem to be more malleable than a hasty application of the “culture war” framework would let on. To be sure, several individuals, groups and politicians approach cultural and religious differences contentiously, as though those who profess non-European religions were threats, which must be mitigated (Cesari 2009). However, others seem to choose, for example, to maintain their initial liberal commitments or to look for alternative ways to deal with pluralism. Therefore, despite the Western “context of anxiety” and the dubious character of certain policies and discourses, the war metaphor seems to be at best a partial representation of the

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5 As Banchoff (2007) points out, the “war” metaphor presupposes certain social polarizations, which have been uncritically replicated by many intellectuals and the media.
multifarious responses devised by political actors in a context of rapid social and political change.

This paper argues that in present-times, the functioning of the Western European political domain does not lend itself to a unique representation—certainly not to the one provided by the notion of “culture wars”. Accordingly, it asks what alternative images of the political domain and approaches to the management of (religious) diversity are in practice available to, and used by the purported protagonists of the secular-religious “culture wars.” Building upon a critical re-conceptualization of “the secular” and “the religious” as socially constructed categories which are inherently unstable, the paper examines how secularism and other frameworks for the management of diversity have been used to deal with the deepening of religious pluralism in one particular country, Italy. In more detail, this examination looks at how “othering” and inclusive discursive strategies have been constructed in controversies involving majority and minority religions (i.e., controversies said to instantiate the notion of “culture wars”). To this end, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Italian governmental texts (draft laws) related to the crucifix and full veil “battles” is conducted. Hopefully, this exercise will reveal what perhaps are less appealing, yet more inclusive ways to approach and manage diversity.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The first section revisits the notion of “culture wars” and points out the strengths and limitations of this interpretative framework. The second section contributes to this discussion by presenting a social constructivist re-conceptualization of the secular-religious dyad, according to which neither of these terms should be defined a priori and unconditionally. Drawing on these theoretical insights, the paper moves on to the presentation of the case-studies and to the analysis of the relevant textual corpus. Thereafter, concluding remarks are provided, which argue for the abandonment of the war metaphor and the adoption of a more friendly and dialogical approach to the management of cultural and religious diversity in the West.

On “culture wars,” civilizational clashes and the fear of diversity
The fear of diversity—the problem of “the one and the many”—lies at the foundation of politics (Saxonhouse 1995; Turner 2013). Whenever pervasive difference is encountered in human affairs, the world must be given an orderly pattern via political activity, lest it falls into chaos. In fact, politics and political thinking have been actuated by the same, perennial question for centuries: “can a unity be forged out of the inevitable diversity of a society that has arisen with the many?” (Turner 2013, 2). The search for unity is, however, rife with problems. Notably, it may “create a world that tries to eliminate that which is not easily accommodated into this underlying unit, a world that finds diversity so
threatening that it collapses all into one, avoids the multiplicity of human experience, and leaves us immobile and sterile” (Saxonhouse 1995, x). Liberalism is said to have provided a particularly just and enduring response to the problem of “the one and the many.” The success of the liberal solution may be attributed to its defense of the principles of neutrality, individual freedom, and equality.6

Liberalism and its history are well-known and need not to be thoroughly rehearsed in this paper. Withal, it is relevant to raise three points here. First, the Westphalian settlement—the alleged stepping stone of liberalism—was a Western solution to the problem of diversity in a Medieval Europe torn by religious dissent. Second, “religion” was defined or, as some would say, invented as a consequence of this liberal and secular solution (McCutcheon 2003; Masuzawa 2005; Asad 2006). Indeed, the term has been imbued with meanings peculiar to the seventeenth-century European context, notably the idea that violence is inherent to religion (Cavanaugh 2009). Third, liberalism is not devoid of ambiguity. There are, for example, incompatible philosophies and diverse practical answers to the problem of diversity within this tradition of thought (Gray 2000).7 Together, these points suggest that the liberal solution is less neutral and more historically contingent than purported by its advocates (Ahdar and Leigh 2005).

In fact, over the past decade or so, in the face of deep forms of diversity, especially of religious pluralism8, the liberal construct has began to reveal in practice its normative limits: liberalism as a “species of fundamentalism” (Gray 2000, 21), “illiberal secularism” (Casanova 2004), increasing “restrictions upon religious freedoms” (Ahdar and Leigh 2005, 3), “the new religious intolerance” (Nussbaum 2012), “institutionalized forms of intolerance” (Ambrosini and Caneva 2012), “muscular liberalism” and the “weaponization of toleration” (Dobbernack and Modood 2013, 2), the “diminishing space of tolerance in liberal societies” (Mouritsen and Olsen 2013, 128). These and other labels and descriptions—and the hostility they entail—indicate that the “fear of diversity” is once again pervasive in the West. As noted, whereas Western fears and anxiety are certainly related to the diversification of the social body, it should be remarked that they cannot be separated from other challenging global transformations, such as economic downturns and international terrorism (Beyer 2013).

In this volatile and uncertain context, it is interesting to highlight two intertwined developments,

6 In short, by preventing political authority from supporting particular conceptions of the good life, whilst allowing individuals to do so privately, liberal neutrality guarantees that all citizens are treated equally (Ahdar and Leigh 2005).
7 Gray (2000) identifies two incompatible philosophies within the tradition, namely pluralism and a universal modus vivendi. Whereas the former provides human beings, in all their diversity, with means for a peaceful coexistence, the latter attempts to define a rational consensus, which individuals ought to accept in order to guarantee the functioning and endurance of the political community (Gray 2000).
8 A number of authors, such as Rawls (1987) and Brubaker (2013) argue that there are forms of diversity to which the adjective “deep” may be attributed and identify religious diversity as one of them. According to Brubaker (2013), this type of diversity is considered such because religion is a comprehensive, binding and authoritative view of the world.
which have not only influenced Western European strategies for the management of diversity, but also contributed to the emergence of a scenario that resembles “culture wars” portrayals. First, over the past decade, there has been a renewed quest for primordial identities in Western Europe—by both political actors and the wider public. The European Union's search for a (Christian) soul in 2004 is probably the most famous illustration of this development, for which domestic counterparts exist in several countries of the region. These processes have led to the rediscovery of Christian traditions and heritage and to the public assertiveness of hitherto silent identities—religious, secular and otherwise. Second, there has been a tendency to define national and regional “selves” in relation to putative “others,” easily detectable at home in the superimposed social, economic, and cultural differences of immigrants, minorities, and Muslims (Casanova 2004; Allievi 2005).

Neither of these developments is surprising; for one, sociological theory has long acknowledged that one's identity can only be defined in relation to “an-Other.” Yet, these twin processes are relevant here in that it is in reference to them that the metaphor of “culture wars” appears to gain expression and force in Western Europe. To begin with, the search for a soul on the continent, particularly following the diversification of society, is in full accordance with the notion of “culture wars.” As Hunter (1991, 67) remarks, “it is out of the changing contours and shifting balance of pluralism that the key actors in the...culture war emerge” (Hunter 1991, 67). Once opponent parties are defined, “civilizational 'others' that are said to be intolerant of the liberal 'self’” are targeted by liberal and secular actors (Dobbernack and Modood 2013, 2). At this point, the belligerent conjecture becomes real. In fact, similarities between past “culture wars” and the Western European context seem to abound in present-days.

Much like in the nineteenth-century European *Kulturkampf*, the 1990s American “culture wars,” and the famous “clash of civilizations” prediction, currently, a changing social and political context, marked by increasing social pluralism, is said to have put the integrity of European cultures at stake, with the consequent emergence of a widespread conflict over values and collective practices (Hunter 1991; Huntington 1993; Clark and Kaiser 2003). In this context, the above-said search for a common identity seems to find its rationale in the hope to restore stability, predictability and order to a world whose self-evident structures are being questioned (Beyer 2013). Moreover, religion once again takes the center-stage in struggles to re-define national culture. Marriage regulations, the definition of burial sites, the construction of places of worship, the public display of religious symbols—all of these

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9 For instance, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, has recently stated that: “I believe we should be more confident about our status as a Christian country...more evangelical about a faith that compels us to get out there and make a difference to people's lives.” See more in: [http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/17-april/comment/opinion/my-faith-in-the-church-of-england](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/17-april/comment/opinion/my-faith-in-the-church-of-england).
“battles” are closely related to the religious life of citizens. Notwithstanding these similarities, it is not easy to discern two clear-cut political positions in the current European “culture wars.” Nor is it possible to identify precisely the chief adversarial parties in the conflict.

Are secular and liberal Europeans raising their rhetorical weapons against Muslims and immigrants? Or are they once again challenged by orthodox Christian voices? Neither of these appear to describe accurately the European scenario. “Culture wars” have typically involved mass mobilization and societal polarization (Clark and Kaiser 2003; Clark 2010). However, in light of the socio-economic deprivation, political under-representation, and overall vulnerability of most immigrants and Muslims living on the continent, it is difficult to conceive these individuals as the antagonist “other,” that is to say, as a group materially capable of posing serious challenges to secular, liberal and progressive Western Europeans (Cesari 2009). What is more, although the revival and mobilization of Christian identities in what is now a deeply secularized Europe is suggesting, drawing a parallel between the rediscovery of a European religious heritage and the lobby of orthodox religious groups in the United States does not seem reasonable. Overall, the difficulty in spelling out the main positions in, and the protagonists of these conflicts suggests that the heuristic power of the “culture wars” framework is limited.

Indeed, even in its original conceptualizations, the metaphor has been found wanting. In this respect, it is interesting to refer to the criticism directed toward its most notable academic advocates, namely Hunter (1991) and Huntington (1993), respectively responsible for the revival of the “culture wars” idea and for the formulation of the “clash of civilizations” thesis. Albeit assessing different levels of analysis, both authors endeavored to understand the condition of modern societies in a post-Cold War world, that is, a rapidly globalizing world in which controversies over the management of social and political life continued to escalate, notwithstanding the obsolescence of macro-structural ideologies. In order to make sense of this condition, they resorted to notions which presupposed conflict: “war” and “clash”. Precisely due to their reliance on inherently conflictual and dichotomous interpretative schemes, Hunter (1991) and Huntington (1993) have been accused of essentializing and reifying social and cultural divisions (Said 1998; Fiorina et al 2005). In other words, their theses simultaneously presumed, realized, and reinforced the conflictual potential of the social body.

In criticizing these war-like portrayals of politics, a number of authors denounced their mythical character (Said 1998; Fiorina et al 2005; Bottici and Challand 2010). According to Fiorina et al (2005), for example, the American “culture war” is nothing but a powerful journalistic and political myth
whose origins appear to go back to Hunter's first deployment of the metaphor in 1991.\textsuperscript{10} Said (1998, 3) identifies a similar problem in Huntington's (1993) work: “journalism and popular demagoguery are his main sources rather than serious scholarship or theory.” In sum, by focusing on the views of a few actors and on the political discursive escalation, Hunter (1991) and Huntington (1993) seem to have lost sight not only of the larger social picture, but also of the human potential for dialogue and cooperation—which may be realized even under contentious circumstances.

Thus, the central problem of the war/clash interpretative framework seems to be its unilateral emphasis on disagreement, polarization, fragmentation, and conflict. Whenever the term “war” is employed in reference to a social context, divisive aspects of social life are given precedence; not only are they considered pervasive domestically and internationally, but they are also presented as the quasi-natural culmination of historical processes of societal diversification, especially of religious pluralization. As a consequence, the metaphor leads to the biased application of the terms diversity, religion, and conflict, as well as to the establishment of questionable semantic connections between them. All of these terms assume a negative connotation in the “culture wars” and “clash of civilizations” readings. More specifically, social diversity, generated primarily by religious pluralization, is approached as the engine of cultural conflict: “the truth of it is that the contemporary culture war evolved out of century-old religious tensions—through the expansion and realignment of American religious pluralism” (Hunter 1991, 67). In this brief passage, cues to a number of assumptions concerning the religion-diversity-conflict triad are discernible.

First, even though religion has historically been a source of unity as much as it has been a source of conflict (Thomas 2003), the term seems to be understood exclusively in its Westphalian ascription—i.e., as a divisive, dangerous, and ultimately violent conception of life. Second, diversity/pluralism is not considered an inherent and potentially productive feature of human societies, but is rather approached as a source of fragmentation, adverseness and chaos. Third, the notions of “tension,” “conflict,” and “opposition” are conflated with the notion of “war,” in a move that is not without important (and dangerous) semantic implications.

In respect to the last point, it is interesting to note that, in relation to cultural controversies, the word “war” may only be used as a metaphor, whereas the same is not true for the broader notion of conflict, which directly describes reality. Albeit merely representative, metaphors are never innocent;\footnote{In fact, Fiorina et al (2005) points out that, in spite of its popularity, the metaphor does not reflect the reality of American politics: neither are the political positions of Americans more polarized today than in the past, nor are citizens taking part in this political- and media-driven war.}
the usage of different metaphors in reference to social problems implies different ways of addressing these problems (Fairclough 2001). Accordingly, the recourse to the notion of “war” is imbued with a number of tacit suggestions about how to interpret, manage, and act in relation to the social context under scrutiny. In addition to generating an existential urgency to mitigate putative foes, “war” elicits a militarization of discourse (illustrated by the usage of terms such as “attack,” “target,” “assault,” and “demolish” in political speeches) which is often translated into militarized forms of thought and social practice (instantiated by the enactment of extraordinary and intolerant laws and policies) (Fairclough 1992). Moreover, the metaphor calls for entirely confrontational depictions of political occurrences, which may disguise the positive and constructive effects of political contests (Fairclough 1992). “Conflict” neither carries the same connotations nor has the same implications as “war.”

Conflict is a “form of socialization” (Simmel 1904, 490). Furthermore, it is not necessarily negative: “opposition is...a means of conserving the total relationship...one of the concrete functions in which the relationship in reality consists” (Simmel 1904, 493). Simmel (1904) argues that absolute social cohesion does not exist; “groups require disharmony as well as harmony...and conflicts within them are by no means altogether disruptive factors. Group formation is the result of both types of processes” (Coser 1956, 31). This reassessment of the notion of conflict suggests that the usage of the “culture wars” framework to interpret current controversies is limited (Clark 2010).11 Although it is certainly a powerful heuristic device, analysts should use the metaphor cautiously—i.e., they should look beyond shallow confrontational views of political conflicts.

Secular-religious dyad: a social construction

Controversies over the role of religion in social and political life easily lend themselves to interpretations based on the “culture wars” framework. However, as argued, such interpretations are oftentimes biased, partly due to the limited power of the “war” metaphor. But that is not all. Their one-sided character is likewise related to a criticism briefly mentioned in the previous section: the danger of essentializing social divisions. The present section elaborates on this criticism and introduces a social constructivist view of the secular-religious dyad.

The essentialization of cultures, religions, and civilizations is a necessary step in the construction of narratives of cultural wars and clashes. Without at least two clear-cut and overarching

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11 This is precisely what Clark (2010) does in his analysis of nineteenth-century pan-European culture wars: by recalling the positive and productive potential of conflict, the author manages to take into account both the loud discursive wars waged between Catholics and liberals and the silent “reality of compromise that underlay the polemical rhetoric of the partisan media” (Clark 2010, 203).
political groupings and positions, the narrative cannot be substantiated. Nonetheless, society is much more intricate and dynamic than such strict dichotomous views postulate; consequently, only forcefully may the social body be clearly divided along cultural and religious fault-lines. The essentializing technique serves precisely this purpose in that it reduces the multifarious and evolving characteristics of a group to a few central, stylized features, which are said to incorporate the group's putative essence (Bottici and Challand 2010). As a consequence, cultures and civilizations may be treated as though they were homogeneous groups. Moreover, the resulting representation is typically misleading.\textsuperscript{12}

When secular-religious controversies are approached as instantiations of Western European “culture wars,” not only are the identities of the alleged opponents essentialized, but the terms in which the contentions carried out are reified. The process of reification is related to the one of essentialization. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), reification happens when human beings take social products for granted, as though they were not the result of society’s ordinary practices and interactions, but rather structures naturally given in the world. Therefore, “reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and, further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 54). Essentialization and reification go hand in hand in the narrative of secular-religious “culture wars.” Whereas the latter process provides seemingly fixed and indisputable meanings to the notions of “secular” and “religious,” the former allows the belligerent parties to be continuously identified and mobilized. Over the past couple of decades, politicians, journalists, and intellectuals have resorted extensively to these techniques in discussions and analyses of secular-religious controversies.

In their discursive and institutional bids, these actors have demonstrated a common concern with the secular character of Western European political communities. In fact, the “secular” stands out in most contemporary controversies. The term is frequently used both as an adjective, which describes a putative essential feature of the continent, and as a noun, which denotes a self-standing and objective sphere of life, that of reality (Calhoun et al 2011). Hence, “secular” serves both essentialization and reification purposes. In fact, following religion's deprivatization, sociologists have seized the opportunity to rectify their past mistakes; they have refuted secularization predictions\textsuperscript{13}, and proclaimed the exceptional secular essence of the old continent—defined as it is by a “massively secular Euro-

\textsuperscript{12} Said (1998), for instance, criticizes Huntington's (1993) depiction of the Islamic civilization not only for being reductionist, but also for being negatively biased against Muslims: it is “as if what most matters about it [Islam] is its supposed anti-Westernism...you get the impression that that's all they are thinking about is how to destroy the West, bomb it and destroy the whole world really” (Said 1998, 4).

\textsuperscript{13} Here, sociologists' past mistakes are a directly reference to the secularization thesis.
culture” (Berger 1996, 5). Furthermore, the secular view of reality has been translated into a strictly secular view of the state and the political domain. In the face of a plural religious landscape, this straightforward understanding has led to the reproduction of old secular discourses and institutions. Charles Taylor (2009, 1156), for example, has described this reproduction as the “fetishization of the favoured [i.e., secular] institutional arrangements.” It is interesting to note that religion, too, has been subject to reification—a strategy that contributes, additionally, to essentializing religious groups. Throughout many controversies, religion has been described and analyzed as though it were an obvious and readily observable phenomenon, a matter-of-fact that can be clearly differentiated from the secular domain of social and political life (Fitzgerald 2011; McCutcheon 2003). Accordingly, it has typically been represented as an external and troubling influence on a predominantly secular reality—a view which supports images of “culture wars” and civilizational clashes.

However, there has been, over the past decade, a very suggestive conflation of the notions of secularity and Christianity in Europe. Needless to say, this development is related to the aforementioned quest for collective identities. Yet, this is an intriguing development not only because it takes place on a secularized continent, but also because this revived Christianity interacts in complex ways with the continent's liberal and secular essence—especially when the predominant secular understanding of states' apparatuses is at stake. Overall, this intriguing development suggests that the Western European secular-religious landscape is currently more complex than any war-like portrayal of it could let on. In fact, as mentioned, neither the terms of, nor the participants in current cultural conflicts can be decidedly and neutrally identified. Rather, they appear to be formed throughout, and to be productively engaged in cultural controversies. In this light, the adoption of a social-constructivist view of the secular-religious divide is promising: its intrinsic dynamism may contribute not only to avoiding the dangers of essentialization and reification, but also to making sense of the intricate and evolving character of current cultural contests. The basic claim of this theoretical perspective is rather straightforward: the terms of the secular-religious dyad are socially constructed.

According to this view, “the secular” and “the religious” are mutually constitutive terms, that is, twin concepts that cannot be defined and analyzed separately. These conceptions are not fixed either; they are interdependent and unsteady terms set in a state of perpetual tension (Asad 2003; Starrett, 2010). Over the centuries, politically engaged actors have contributed to the discursive construction and reconstruction of these terms. By participating in this “politics of religion” (McCutcheon 2003,

14 The crucifix cases in Italy and in Germany are cases in point in this regard.
these actors have helped to make social worlds more or less possible. If this is the case, the relationship mundane/sacred established by European states is but one of the possible ways to settle the religious/secular dispute – and one that has clearly privileged the secular side of the dyad. This demarcation reflects the specific political and historical junctures in which European states have been imbricated throughout time (Hurd 2004). Moreover, if “the secular” and “the religious” are twin concepts, whose shifting meanings depend on their social/political contexts, the presumably indisputable and neutral quality of “the secular” is untenable. Insofar as “the secular” is imbricated in historical formations, its content is responsive to political contentions that are geographically and historically specific. (Asad 2003; McCutcheon 2003; Hurd 2004). Secularism, in its multiple formats, is a political doctrine that emerged in the West and that speaks to political problems found therein (Hurd 2004). It has played a productive role in the constitution of liberal modernity, particularly in the manners devised by liberal states to manage religious diversity (Fitzgerald 2011). This perspective reinforces and complements an argument put forth previously: neither liberalism nor secularism are completely neutral frameworks to handle the problem of “the one and the many.”

As a concluding remark, it is important to stress the central role played by discourse in the (trans)formation of the secular-religious dyad. If these terms are socially constructed and shift according to political pressures over the issue of religion in society, they may be considered objects and subjects of knowledge and action historically constituted in discursive webs of meanings, which in turn define what is possible and thinkable in the world. “Discourses create the 'conditions of possibility' for beliefs about the world,” (Sapsford 2006, 262), and thus, “are strongly implicated in in the exercise of power” (Willig 2008, 172). Although other social practices also contribute to constructing social reality, discursive means of doing so are fundamental nowadays, especially in the West, where liberal and democratic procedures guide political contests. From this viewpoint, CDA seems to be an appropriate methodological tool to analyze current cultural controversies and the strategies devised by European political actors to manage cultural and religious diversity. The version of CDA used in this study is the one put forward by Norman Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2001). This is because the model is particularly “suited to the analysis of contexts of social and discursive changes” (Titscher et al 2000, 164).

**Italy, a liberal state; Italy, a Christian nation**

This paper examines one European state, Italy, and two instantiations of “culture wars” in the country,
the crucifix/Christian identity case\(^{15}\) and the full Muslim veil case. From a sociological viewpoint, Italy certainly stands out when religion is at issue. As elsewhere on the continent, a secularization trend has been well documented in the peninsula. Nevertheless, this process has been marked by a number of peculiarities, not least of which is the reluctance of Italians to abandon their ambivalent Catholic identity (Garelli 2007). In fact, even though Catholicism is currently lived in new, ambiguous and even contradictory ways, sociologists continue to observe a “diffuse Catholic sensibility” in the country, which influences the self-image of the national society as well as the ways in which the increasing ethnic and religious pluralism is approached (Garelli 2007; Pace 2007). Moreover, although Italians conceive their relationship to Catholicism in a multitude of ways—which not always accord with the wishes and guidance of the Holy See—, the Catholic religion continues to represent a source of national unity, especially in light of the country's fragmented history (Pace 2007). Needless to say, this has not been without important implications for the political realm.

Religion has never played a minor role in Italy's public life. From its very inception in the late nineteenth century, the Italian state has had to cope with the spiritual and territorial presence of a powerful Catholic Church within its borders. In fact, this was a phase of heightened cultural conflict, which opposed liberals and Catholics and—much like in present times—concerned primarily the proper place of religious inspiration and allegiance in social and political life (Papenheim 2003). Ultimately, these were battles over the nation and its collective identity (Clark and Kaiser 2003). It is interesting to point out that this nineteenth-century dispute was never (and can never be) completely settled, a point well illustrated by the different models of church-state relations which have emerged in Italy throughout time. This implies that the current institutional arrangement—the “Concordatarian” regime—can only be understood in light of this evolving, century-old dispute. As the accommodating character of this regime indicates, over time, conflict between worldly and transcendental authorities has given way to a cooperative instance, materialized not only in the Concordat with the Vatican, but also in agreements (intese) with minority religions (Ferrari 2002).

The appeasement of the secular-religious conflict did not entail, however, that the position of power occupied by Catholic authorities remained unchanged. On the contrary, the state and its institutions have been progressively secularized. The approval of legislation on divorce and abortion, the deconfessionalization of the state, and the Constitutional Court's decision to raise laicità to the rank

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\(^{15}\) The crucifix case could not be considered in complete isolation because some of the draft laws intended to respond to judicial attempts to take Catholic symbols off the walls of Italian public institutions actually concerned constitutional modifications, whose purpose was the recognition of Italy's religious—especially Christian—heritage.
of a founding principle of the Republic: all of these changes are testimony to the Church's loss of institutional power. Notwithstanding this, Catholic influence on the Italian sense of national unity has been more difficult to shake. Even though the impingement of the Roman Church on the political life of the country seems to be more circumscribed now than in the past (Donavan 2003; Diamanti and Ceccarini 2007), the Italian nation has not undergone a process of secularization akin to that observed in the Italian state (Ferrari 2008). According to Alessandro Ferrari (2008), Italy does not and cannot possess a true civic religion—i.e., civic resources which represent and evoke an idealized collective identity, capable of functioning as a cement for the social body (Ferrara 1999)—for the unifying bond of the Italian community is still an actual religion, the Catholic one (Ferrari 2009). Ferrari (2008; 2009) is not alone: Garelli (1999; 2007), Pace (2007), and Silvio Ferrari (2010) also point out that Catholic symbols, rituals, and values have long performed the role which in a Republic should appertain to a civic credo. As a consequence, the state is said to lack effective, civic integration mechanisms—a void that becomes particularly problematic in the face of social and religious diversity.

As Ferrari (2008) points out, the governance of diversity, especially of a religious type, becomes more difficult when nation and religion are intertwined: first, religious differences are necessarily approached as a perturbation in an organic body; second, if the country’s institutional means of integrating religious others—i.e., secularism—is thought of in reference to particular religious (and not civic) values and inspiration, ensuing biases may indeed surface and impact negatively the integration of foreign religions. In this context, it would be plausible to anticipate a cultural conflict between Italians—always and implicitly Catholic—and religious others, especially Muslims. The lack of an intesa (agreement) with Islam as well as the many controversies involving its symbols, buildings and practices would seem to corroborate this foresight. Nonetheless, the social-constructivist view warns analysts against taking such a premature conclusion, after all, besides not being carved in stone, secularism is always and necessarily formed in relation to given religious others. Thus, this theoretical view invites analysts to canvass ongoing cultural conflicts, with an attentive eye to its secular-religious aspects, and to pose the following question: what does the political development of these cultural conflicts indicate in terms of strategies to manage social and religious diversity?

On Crucifixes and Veils: reassessing contemporary cultural conflicts

16 The dismantlement of the Christian-democratic party (DC) in the mid-1990s is said to have contributed to revealing the mythical character of the “Catholic political unity” (Diamanti and Ceccarini 2007). What is more, the Church has recently adopted a position of “non-alignment” with political parties (Donavan 2003).
The Catholic facet of the nation has never ceased to be a source of tension in Italy. However, over the past couple of decades, this tension seems to have reached an apex. Similarly to what happened elsewhere in the West, domestic and global transformations—including social diversification, regional integration, terrorism, and economic predicaments—have contributed not only to bringing religion decisively back into the country's public squares, but also to compounding the tensions inherent in Catholicism's role as a national cement. Thus, the Italian nation seems to be once again up for grabs. In fact, the unifying role of Catholic values, symbols, and practices has recently been made quite explicit, with several public figures attempting to use religious resources to remedy popular plights, such as a diffuse sense of insecurity. Protracted disputes over the display of religious symbols in the country are perhaps the best illustrations of this renewed search for Italy's soul. Symbols are indeed powerful instruments in the pursuit of such a unity (Cardia 2012).

The term symbol possesses a paradoxical etymological constitution, which may help to explain its social strength: it is simultaneously a mechanism of union (syn-ballo) and separation (dia-ballo) (Diedi 2005). Symbols—religious or not—serve to promote social integration insofar as they convey a sense of belonging. However, they also serve to exclude those who do not recognize themselves in the symbolic representation (Diedi 2005). It is precisely due to this double social function that religious symbols are implicated in “culture wars:” they help to define “selves” as well as corresponding “others.” More specifically, religious symbols have contributed to generating two main types of conflicts in Western democracies, conflicts concerning majority and minority religions (Mancini 2006).

Although these cultural “battles” ultimately concern the same problem—that of ensuring the functioning and endurance of a political community in a socially diversified context—, they have been typically treated separately, both by political actors and scholars. In Italy, instances of both types of conflict are available. On the one hand, Christian symbols, notably the crucifix, appear to complement Catholicism's role as a civic religion: they serve as a way to reinforce the country's fragile social cohesion and to reassert a lost sense of collective identification. On the other hand, Islamic symbols, amongst which are the rarely seen burqa and niqab, seem to create a wider sense of separation between the host society and the immigrant community. It is noteworthy that the function performed by each of these symbols seems to be unilateral: crucifixes unite, veils divide. However, as demonstrated below, both symbols have given rise to complex controversies, which have, in turn, been pervaded by inclusive and exclusive discursive strategies for dealing with religion and social diversity.

Up until the early 1990s, the display of crucifixes in Italian public offices was considered a relic
of the past, a practice which alluded to the outdated confessional character of the state; it was, thus, a marginal issue in the political domain (Fiorita 2008). However, throughout the past couple of decades, it has been elevated to a key cultural debate, and thereby, it has become one of “the battlefields in which the revenge of the sacred or better, of the Catholic Church manifests itself...and the 'identitarian' character of the Western culture is delineated in light of the much-evoked 'clash of civilizations’” (Fiorita 2006, 232). Not even the judicialization of the contention (Annicchino 2010), evident in the many and intricate legal sentences, prevented the issue from growing into a deeply politicized matter of national debate, featured in both newspapers and political speeches (Ozzano and Giorgi 2013). In the Italian Parliament, this wide public debate has been translated into diverse legislative endeavors (see Annex A), whose main objective has been to use the letter of the law to define, once and for all, the (Catholic) character of the nation-state. In fact, politicians belonging to diverse political forces attempted to do so either by formalizing the obligation to display crucifixes in public offices or by constitutionally clarifying the secular and/or Christian soul of the state.

The full veil battle—or the burqa case—has generated similar reactions in the Italian Parliament. From 2008 onwards, a bipartisan coalition has been opposing traditional religious (that is, Muslim) clothes, especially attires designed to cover a woman’s entire face, such as the burqa and the niqab. Unlike the crucifix case, there has been no corresponding nationwide debate on the matter, a void that has earned the subject the titles of “top-down controversy” and “manifesto law proposal” (Ferrari 2012, 40-41). To be sure, the catalyst of legislative interest on the matter came from lower political levels. Since the early 2000s, and especially following the introduction of the so-called Security Package, several municipalities in the Northern part of the country have enacted local regulations (ordinances and by-laws) which targeted aspects of immigrants' and Muslims' lives, including Islamic clothing, notably burqas, niqabs and burquinis (Ambrosini and Caneva 2012). Since these prohibitive ordinances were allegedly motivated by security concerns, local authorities resorted to article 5 of the law no.152/1975 to substantiate their decisions. Approved to contrast terrorism, this article prohibits the use, without a legitimate reason, of helmets or any other means which may prevent or obstruct the identification of a person in public places or in venues open to the public.

However, in accordance with the constitutionally guaranteed right to wear religious dresses

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17 It should be noted that, unlike in the full veil case, these legislative initiatives have not been bipartisan. While some members of the left-wing coalition did support some attempts to establish the Christian roots of Italy, members of the right-wing coalition have been the main proposers of these laws.

18 “Security Package” is the name normally attributed to a large number of legislative measures approved throughout 2008 and 2009. These measures covered a highly heterogeneous set of topics, ranging from terrorism to mafia, but focused primarily on immigration. It is relevant to note here that local authorities were empowered in matters of public security.
(Caridi 2000; Pastorelli 2012), administrative courts have worked consistently to restrict the multiplication of burqa bans. In particular, the Italian Council of State clarified in 2008 that article 5 of the law no.152/1975 is non-applicable to the burqa insofar as the dress is not used with the objective of making personal identification more difficult. Rather, religious and/or cultural reasons were recognized as valid justifications for the usage of this traditional attire (Ferrari 2012; Pastorelli 2012).¹⁹

This process of legal clarification did not preclude, however, the mobilization of parliamentarians in favor of the ban. Neither did the fact that such dresses are worn by a negligible minority of Muslim women in Italy—that is to say, nationally the problem hardly exists. These oversights are made explicit in the alleged intents of the many burqa ban bills presented throughout the years of 2008, 2009, and 2010 in both houses of the Parliament (Annex A). Their main rationale is to “make clear” (puntualizzare, fare chiarezza, esplicitare, precisare) and to “improve the effectiveness” (rendere più efficace) of article 5 of the law no.152/1975.

This paper conducts a critical discourse analysis of the draft laws concerning the burqa and the crucifix controversies, paying special attention to their introductory notes (relazione). In these notes, political actors deliberately try to make sense of proposed governmental practices toward social and religious diversity. The purpose of this exercise is primarily to understand how inclusive and exclusive discursive strategies to handle the problem of “the one and the many” are constructed, especially in relation to majority and minority religions. A list of the proposals examined is available in Annex A. Needless to say, the decision to narrow down the textual material to draft laws impoverishes the analysis, especially because these texts constitute a single genre of discourse. Yet, the analysis is meant to be merely indicative of the alternative and inclusive positions available to, and used by political actors dealing with cultural conflict. Thus, findings are not to be read as a comprehensive and decisive. In fact, CDA does not allow such truth claims.

Since language cannot be grasped outside of its social context, discourse analysts pay attention to three different levels of discursive events: text, discursive practice, and social order (Fairclough 1992). As a consequence of this three-dimensional character of discourse, there is neither ready-made criteria for deciding what formal aspects of language are important, nor a correct and final interpretation of discourses (Meyer 2001; Wodak 2001).²⁰ In consideration of such difficulties,
potentially relevant textual features have been identified early on this study, based on some basic themes and guiding questions, as well as on the existing literature. More specifically, the following blocks of questions were used as starting points for the analysis:

(1) *Definition of social problems*: how are the issues addressed by the draft laws defined and substantiated? (nominalization, rhetoric devices, vocabulary features, recourse to authoritative voices, such as statistical reports, academic studies, religious authorities);

(2) *Description of social and religious diversification*: how is the process of social/religious diversification presented? Is this process considered problematic? How is religious diversity viewed? How are the social problems addressed in the proposals connected to social and religious pluralization? (vocabulary features, metaphors, intertextuality);

(3) *Inclusion-exclusion strategies*: to what extent is a “us-them” relationship constructed and relied upon? In case such narratives are used, how are the identities of “self” and “other” defined? What roles do religious symbols play in these processes of identification? What solutions for the social problems identified are deemed acceptable? Do these solutions imply inclusive or exclusive ways of managing diversity? (pronouns, metaphors, relational modality, speech acts, intertextuality and interdiscursivity).

(1) *Defining social problems*

Slowly increasing social transformations that may ultimately create dangers for both Italians and Europeans: this is the general introductory *schema* adopted by most draft laws analyzed, whether they concern the formal modification of article 5 of the law no.152/1975, the inclusion of references to Christianity on the Constitution, or the obligation to hang crucifixes on the walls of public institutions. Generally, legislators have attempted to create a sense of urgency and anxiety by resorting to textual features that convey the notion of an ever progressing reality, which is subject to structural changes that cannot be completely controlled. This scenario, then, opens the way to worrisome future conjectures—conjectures that will be materialized unless legislative action is taken.

In the crucifix and Christian heritage bills, temporal adverbs contribute to constructing the exceptional character of present times (“as never before, in recent times,” “those were certainly different times,” “the current historical moment”), whereas adverbs of frequency help to impart the

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21 Original in Italian: “mai come in questi ultimi tempi,” “erano certamente tempi diversi,” “l'attuale momento storico”
aforementioned sense of urgency ("increasingly," "constantly"). The latter adjectives are indirectly connected to unpredictable and uncontrollable global transformations, which are in turn textually presented in manners that convey an external, unruly, and unquestionable character.

The following passage exemplifies how such transformations are introduced: “the extracommunitarian migration, the Eastern enlargement of the European Union and the progressive expansion of a Islamic fundamentalism that is not sufficiently fought by governments...invoke the West” (Garagnani et al 2008). Three formal linguistic features are noteworthy in this passage. First, the transformations mentioned are the subject of the sentence. They are, thus, active, independent variables, as opposed to the passive West, which receives the action. Second, they are nominalizations, that is to say, they are social processes which were converted to nouns. Notice that by adopting such strategy, the existence and character of these processes are unequivocally assumed; they are simply given, and by implication, they are reified. Third, and related to the previous point, the usage of definite article “the” reinforces the presupposed character of the transformations. Other draft laws adopt similar textual strategies; they talk about “uncontrolled immigration,” “usurpation of popular sovereignty,” “widespread loss [of the national ethos],” amongst other troubling changes said to impact Italy, Europe, and the Western world more broadly. Interestingly enough, even the crucifix controversy as such is nominalized in some instances (e.g., Sodano et al 2002; Bricolo 2006; Thaler Ausserhofer 2009). Thereby, the controversy, regardless of its multifaceted aspects, seems to acquire the active power of wounding/hurting (ferire) the Christian culture and civilization.

In this uncertain context, political inaction and lethargy are seemingly dangerous; in fact, the conditional tense is rarely chosen to introduce future scenarios, even though they are mere speculations. Rather, future conjectures are described in ambiguous, yet concrete manners, as though they were already or were about to become factual realities. “It is unacceptable to cancel the emblems of our identity, indisputable cement of a community; this is tantamount to depriving of meaning the principles upon which our society is founded” (Sodano et al 2002; Bricolo 2006). The usage of the present tense in this and other passages is remarkable not only for preventing debatable equivalences and conclusions from being open to question, but also for demonstrating the text producer's commitment to the truth of the proposition. Paradoxically, the metaphor typically resorted to in order to convey the idea of a

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22 Original in Italian: “sempre più,” and also “sempre maggior,” finally, “costantemente.”
23 Original in Italian: “la migrazione extra-comunitaria, l’allargamento dell’Unione europea ai Paesi dell’est Europa e il progressivo dilatarsi di un certo fondamentalismo islamico non sufficientemente contrastato dai governi...chiamano in causa l’Occidente” (Garagnani et al 2008).
24 Original in Italian: “risulta inaccettabile cancellare gli emblemi della nostra identità, collante indiscusso di una comunità; ciò significa svuotare di significato i principi su cui si fonda la nostra società” (Sodano et al 2002).
threatening, value-less and culture-less future is that of a country or continent without a “soul”: “a Europe that renounces its own soul is destined to die” (Cota et al 2009). Used in the present tense, many of these utterances acquire a subtle performative character: there are actual threats, which can only be mitigated by reasserting either discursively or symbolically the Christian character of the state. In the face of such imminent threats, the legislator is called upon to defend Italian founding values, and thus, the state and the society as a whole.

Draft laws concerning the burqa ban are seemingly more formal in the articulation of the problems they purport to address. In fact, their initial paragraphs are marked by the abundant use of judicial language and quotations from expert reports and legal documents. This is not surprising insofar as the declared purpose of most of these draft laws is the technical modification of an article of a particular law. Still, the recourse to legal language and sources lends legitimacy to the text: the bills are apparently technical, objective, neutral, in short, they seem to address a real social/legal problem. However, a closer examination reveals biases in the legal narratives of most proposals. In their intertextual references, the instrumental selection and usage of courts' decisions and expert opinions is evident: these sources are emphasized when they support the legislator's arguments/intentions and overlooked when they do not. The proposal by Sbai and Contento (2009), for example, goes as far as adding to article 5 the nonexistent sentence “the prohibition also applies to clothing.”

These legal narratives, then, give way to the social and political definition of the problem. By and large, draft laws assume the existence and the increasing incidence of Muslim women who wear the burqa and the niqab (other dresses are rarely cited) in the country, despite the lack of statistical support for these claims. Again, adverbs serve to create a sense of urgency, whilst the usage of a scientific-like language helps to lend objectivity to the problem: “more and more often, we observe people, generally women, in public places with their faces covered due to allegedly traditional or religious questions” (Malan 2009). Legislators also assume that this phenomenon constitutes a problem, which is currently debated in society. Whereas some bills use silence to convey such assumptions (the necessity of a law presupposes the actuality of the problem), others state them outright: “the debate on the use of the veil...that has been opened in Italy, and that has seen [as] protagonists especially the Muslim women, needs examination.”

25 Original in Italian: “un'Europa che rinuncia alla propria anima è destinata a morire” (Cota et al 2009).
26 Original in Italian: “il divieto si applica anche agli indumenti” (Sbai e Contento 2009).
27 Original in Italian: “sempre più spesso, si osservano persone, generalmente donne, in luogo pubblico con il volto coperto per presunte questioni tradizionali o religiose” (Malan 2009).
28 Original in Italian: “‘Il dibattito relativo all'utilizzo del velo,...che si è aperto in Italia e ha visto protagonisti soprattutto le donne di origine musulmana, necessita di un approfondimento” (Binetti et al 2008).
nominalization and the usage of two subordination clauses contribute to constructing a given, commonsensical reality. This “reality” is further corroborated when other headscarf controversies are brought up, as though a debate/ban in France generated a popular and legislative need in Italy.

Notwithstanding the public security inspiration of article 5, it is never completely clear why the Islamic dresses are a problem. In fact, their problematic character does not seem to be confined to the fact that they obstruct the immediate identification of the user. More than that, the *burqa* and the *niqab* seem to stand for, and to encompass large-scale modern dangers, particularly those derived from uncontrollable global transformations. Immigration, terrorism, religious fundamentalism and the violation of human rights (especially of women): all of these are somehow attributed or related to the dresses in question, often in complex, contradictory, and scattered ways (textual features observed: unusual paragraphic divisions, long and complex sentences, clear narrative breaks). It is interesting to remark that in banning these dresses, the type of security allegedly ensured is not merely public, but also (and above all) private: the Muslim woman is said to be freed from oppression. Of course, few proposals acknowledge from the outset that their motivation goes much beyond what the modification of article 5 is capable of achieving. Yet, the reader is led to believe that article 5 must be clarified, given precision, made clear, lest terrorism, intolerance, and rights violations become pervasive.29

(2) *Description of social and religious diversification*

As the preceding section briefly announces, the issue of “one and the many” is usually considered problematic, even threatening. Social diversity, especially of a religious type, is not generally approached as a inherent characteristic of human life. Nor does it seem to be generated from within the Italian/European/Western community. As the troubling global transformations mentioned previously indicate, the process of diversification is attributed first and foremost to immigration from outside of the West (as though Italy and Europe constituted homogeneous bodies). Nevertheless, religious diversity is constructed in complex ways, both in bills concerning the crucifix/Christian heritage and in those concerning the *burqa* ban. Despite the dominant character of this negative approach to diversity, there are also draft laws that do not touch upon the issue at all, that do so in ambiguous ways, and that adopt a primarily positive view of diversity.

In regard to the crucifix/Christian heritage case, proposals that discuss the issue of diversity by and large take a negative perspective. Paradoxically, this perspective is complemented by a similarly

29 The proposal presented by Vassallo et al (2010) is the only one that poses the question of whether the *burqa* prohibition may be effective, later reaching the conclusion that it does not.
negative view of the homogeneity promoted by secular liberalism. On the one hand, the notion of “laic culture” (*cultura laica*) interacts in complex ways with the idea of a soulless political body: “the image of a Europe without cultural passion, a Europe 'without a soul,' which considered finding the lifeblood of its values exclusively in convenience and not in conviction...a Europe with a negligible cultural breath, defined 'by markets and bankers’” (Biancofiori et al 2008).30

As this passage illustrates, most draft laws contain long and intricate sentences which create equivalences as well as relationships of subordination between ideas that, on closer inspection, are questionable. As a consequence of these constructions, a neutral and secular political body may be considered equivalent to a soulless body—a body that promotes a “unified life style,” an “indistinct amalgam,” and “relativism,” which, in turn, lead to hedonism, materialism, and individualism. On the other hand, the neutral and general “laic culture” is said to “sin” for bringing together heterogeneous values, which are a source of conflicts. The origin of such threatening heterogeneity is, however, mostly external: when Europe becomes soulless, the continent is exposed, open to external attacks, to Islamic fundamentalism, to cultures and religions that are stronger that the void European ones. Here, two points are interesting. First, the interdiscursive construction of the argument manages to unite in an apparently logical manner criticisms to liberalism and multiculturalism, as though they were the same or as though the former framework to manage diversity led to the latter. Second, illustrations of sources of diversity are almost exclusively made in reference to Islam, fundamentalism, and Muslims.

The *burqa* ban draft laws are more ambiguous in their approaches to diversity. Negative views of diversity are found in several of them, especially in those prepared by members of the right-wing coalition. These views resemble those encountered in the crucifix proposals: diversity is deemed external (immigration poses the problem of integration) and Muslim. The text by Reguzzoni *et al* (2010), in particular, creates an extremely alarming (and patently false) scenario that reconstructs the Muslim community as foreign—as though there were no Muslims who are Italians—, intrinsically incompatible with Italy, and actively engaged in opposing the Italian rule of law and culture. A careful interdiscursive analysis of this bill would certainly find parallels between its text and tabloid news.

Conversely, some draft laws adopt a resolutely positive perspective of diversity (Binetti *et al* 2008; Amici *et al* 2009; Vassallo *et al* 2010), and lean either to the multicultural or to the liberal view of society. Such positive attitudes toward diversity are noticeable not only in vocabulary features that

30 Original in Italian: “l’immagine di un’Europa senza passione culturale , di un’Europa « senz’anima » che ha ritenuto di trovare la linfa dei suoi valori esclusivamente nella convenienza e non nella convinzione... Un’Europa con un respiro culturale irrisorio, un’Europa definita « di mercanti e di banchieri »” (Biancofiori *et al* 2008).
convey ideas of openness, reciprocity, and dialogue, but also in intertextual references to comments/speeches of members of the Italian Muslim community. In fact, following the investigation (Indagine Conoscitiva) conducted by the Commission for Constitutional Affairs of the Deputies Chamber, intertextual references to Muslim sources became quite popular amongst legislators. However, the adoption of such positive perspectives does not imply that diversity is not considered problematic: “these moments of opening and exchange are likely to be also those of greatest conflict and mutual misunderstanding, particularly problematic when there are religious symbols or cultural traditions that find expression also in an outer and public dimension” (Amici et al 2009).\(^{31}\)

In this passage, the symmetry between subject (moments of opening and exchange) and complement (those of conflict and misunderstanding) supports the formation of meaningful pairs of concepts—opening-conflict, exchange-misunderstanding—, which convey the idea that engaging with “the other” is a potentially positive, yet menacing practice. Needless to say, this menace requires the legislator to take action, that is, to reign over diversity. Another point to note in the passage is the aggravation of the problem of diversity by religion and its ostensible public character, which replicates a well-known liberal and secular view of the public and political realms. Paradoxically, it is difficult to understand the reference to religion's “outer and public dimension” in light of the crucifix controversy and the public character of Catholicism in Italy. This puzzle is apparently solved when legislators clarify that the Christian character of Italy finds expression in its liberal and democratic principles—a construction that besides raising eyebrows, raises questions about inclusion-exclusion strategies.

(3) Inclusion-exclusion strategies

Inclusion and exclusion (“othering”) discourses are articulated along the lines of “us-them” relationships. The bills examined rely extensively upon such formulations, especially with the intent of making sense of the changing social and political context. However, there seems to exist manifold ways of conceiving this relationship, and thus, the putative protagonists of contemporary “culture wars” in Italy cannot be rightfully identified. In other words, definitions of “self” and “other” seem to fade away and to be reassembled unceasingly. Furthermore, in line with Diedi's (2005) arguments, religious symbols directly contribute to this process of identification/differentiation. However, the role they perform is as complex as definitions of “self” and “other.” Throughout draft laws, both crucifixes and

\(^{31}\) Original in Italian: “questi momenti di apertura e scambio rischiano di essere anche quelli di maggior conflitto e incomprensione reciproca, con particolare problematicità quando vi sono interessati simboli religiosi o tradizioni culturali che trovano espressione anche in una dimensione esteriore e pubblica” (Amici et al 2009).
full veils are emptied of their religious character (not always, at given points) and used instrumentally to demarcate boundaries between social/religious groups. Since no single “selves” and “others” can be unproblematically identified and defined, table 1 attempts to bring together the manifold constructions encountered in the draft laws. In doing so, especial attention was paid to the use of pronouns and metaphors (examples: “our country,” “our story, our culture, our traditions,” “civilized living,” “Italian and European culture,” “the history and traditions of our peoples”).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 – Untangling “us-them” relationships</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“Selves”</strong></td>
<td><strong>“Others”</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Crucifix case:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Crucifix case:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Italians, Christian civilization</td>
<td>- Immigrants, extra-communitarian,</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Europeans, European Union, Christian</td>
<td>minorities, Muslims</td>
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<td>Europe, Eastern European Christian</td>
<td>totalitarianism and fundamentalism,</td>
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<td>countries;</td>
<td>Islamic fundamentalism and integralism</td>
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<td>- liberal and democratic state, secular</td>
<td>- extreme secularism, laic culture, non-</td>
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<td>state,</td>
<td>believers, secular and soulless Europe,</td>
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<tr>
<td>- monotheist religions, moderate Islam</td>
<td>confessional regime, cultural relativism,</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Full veil case:</strong></td>
<td>extreme leftist groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Italy, Europe, the West, civil and</td>
<td><strong>Full veil case:</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>developed states, France, Belgium, Great</td>
<td>- Immigrants, ethnic and religious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Britain, Denmark, Germany</td>
<td>others, Muslims, minority Muslim groups,</td>
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<td>- Liberal and tolerant state, secular</td>
<td>- Women, immigrant women, Muslim women</td>
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<td>state,</td>
<td>- Islamic and Arab states</td>
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<td>- Secular Arab states, Turkey, Morocco,</td>
<td>- Tribal customs, chauvinism, sexism,</td>
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<td>- Western women</td>
<td>extremism, extremist culture, jihadism,</td>
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<td>- Muslims, secular Islamic culture,</td>
<td>terrorism, Islamic terrorism,</td>
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<td>Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, extremist</td>
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<td>theocratic regimes</td>
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The information assembled in Table 1 is difficult to process, not least because relational identities may only be understood in light of specific social and situational contexts. Notwithstanding this, the table does contain insightful facts about identity construction in the two controversies at issue. To begin with, it is striking to observe that, whereas the “self” assumes a fairly consistent identity (Italian-European-
Western-liberal-secular), “the other” takes on an extremely multifaceted one (immigrant-female-religious-Muslim-terrorist-secularist-leftist). This imbalance is evident across controversies and suggests that the identity of the opponent is by and large externally imposed. In fact, “the other” is typically voiceless in these alleged instantiations of “culture wars,” a fact that differentiates them from past cultural conflicts (see Clark and Kaiser 2003). If the opponent is silent, no social interaction, no negotiation of identities between putative adversaries can possibly have taken place. What seems to occur is a one-sided, subtly orientalist construction of “others,” especially of Muslim women with an immigrant background. To be sure, this is not equally the case for both controversies.

Although “othering” strategies are also complex in the crucifix/Christian heritage case, it is in the draft laws concerning the burqa prohibition that the aforesaid patronizing attitude appears to gain force. Two facts lend support to this hypothesis: first, no nationwide societal debate on the matter has taken place; and second, Parliamentary agreement on the need to ban such attires is bipartisan and far-reaching. The passage below illustrates the terms in which such discourses have been articulated:

“To wear clothing such as the burqa and the niqab, which have nothing to do with the culture of the majority of immigrant women living in Italy, but is rather an obligation imposed on women by extremists from Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries where the extremist culture and the legacy of inhuman customs and of silent family violence prevail is unacceptable, both in principle and, in particular, if the women [concerned] live in civilized countries” (Sbai and Contento 2009).

In this passage, drafters depict “the other” in a complex and multifaceted way, which incorporates many of the identities cited in Table 1. However, for this depiction to hold, it depends on many tacit assumptions: first, only foreigners are Muslim; second, there is a shared immigrant culture in Italy; third, only immigrant Muslim women would wear such dresses; fourth, neither the burqa nor the niqab are religious clothes; fifth, their usage cannot reflect the individual choice of the woman; sixth, the states mentioned (including the elusive “other countries”) are not civilized, whilst Italy is. Moreover, it is noteworthy the extent to which the identities of “others” are essentialized—even when putative “others” do not constitute factual social groupings. In effect, their disgraceful characteristics seem to be sequentially listed with the purpose of creating a shocking contrast with the essential characteristics of the civilized world—liberalism, democracy, tolerance, respect for human rights.

32 Original in Italian: “Indossare indumenti come il burqa e il niqab, che nulla hanno a che vedere con la cultura della maggioranza delle donne immigrate che vivono in Italia, ma che costituisce un obbligo imposto alle donne da estremisti che vengono dall’Afghanistan, dal Pakistan e da altri Paesi dove prevalgono la cultura estremista e il retaggio di costumi disuman e di violenze familiari inaudite e inammissibili sia in linea di principio sia, in particolare, se le donne vivono in Paesi civilmente evoluti.”
This contrast legitimizes exclusive discourses and legislation, while closing up in advance any accommodating possibility. Without civilized others with which to interact, coexistence is not conceivable; that is, diversity cannot be handled, it must be surmounted. In fact, it is based on this negative depiction that multicultural and dialogic approaches to the management of diversity are foreclosed in many of the draft laws; after all engaging with uncivilized others would be tantamount to “tolerat[ing] ideologies of death and of negation of human dignity” (Mantini and Tassone 2009). All of this is to say that the war metaphor does seem to find some space in current cultural conflicts. While this is more evident in the burqa draft laws (perhaps due to the unambiguous foreign nature of perceived “others”), reiterated calls for the “defense” of Italy's cultural identity indicate that the metaphor has some explanatory power in the crucifix controversy as well (militarized discourse).

Although these controversies resemble “culture wars” and civilizational narratives, the silence of one of the adversarial parties discredits such portrayals. Rather, the securitization framework appears to be more adequate to interpret the exclusive strategies used by political actors, in that these strategies rely on discursively constructed threats, which generate a sense of urgency and a consequent need for extraordinary action—regardless of the threat's actuality (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde 1998). What is more, as mentioned in passing, exclusive discourses are not omnipresent in the bills assessed. Rather—and especially when religion enters the picture—, several instances of inclusive strategies may be discerned in bills' texts.

On a closer look, Table 1 signals the existence of such inclusive strategies: secularism, religion, Muslims and Islam occupy positions on both sides of the table. This dual placement indicates that none of these terms may be defined *a priori* and without qualification. Religion and secularism are outstanding in this respect. These concepts interact with the larger cultural and situational contexts in complex ways. On the one hand, when discussions concern the crucifix or the Christian heritage of the country (i.e., majority religion), secularism is demeaned. On the other hand, when controversies regard minority religious symbols and practices, religion is to be tightly controlled by a strong secular and liberal state—especially if the religion in question is Islam. Still, this scenario does not seem to capture entirely the complex discursive treatment given to the terms religion, secularism, and Islam in the bills. For one, Islam is the subject of both inclusive and “othering” discourses. In trying to untangle how inclusive and exclusive strategies are discursively constructed in relation to religion and religious diversity, it is helpful to attend to the usage of adjectives, which qualify each of the terms concerned.

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33 Original in Italian: “tollerare le ideologie di morte e di negazione della dignità umana” (Mantini and Tassone 2009).
In the crucifix case, it is not secularism as such that is deemed problematic, but rather a “laic,” “extreme,” “Jacobin” type of secularism, which allegedly endeavors to ban religious traditions from the public sphere. While this open view of secularism resonates with multicultural, “Habermasian,” and constitutional ideas on the matter, it often seems to apply exclusively to Catholicism. In line with Ferrari’s (2008; 2009) concerns, then, the majority religion is said to deserve public standing not for its spiritual inputs, but for its role as the backbone of Western culture. The crucifix, in fact, is said to be “not only” a religious symbol, “but also, and above all” a cultural one. Notice, however, that the crucifix and Catholicism are emptied before arriving at the public square, that is, they lose their religious soul in order to become the soul of Italy, of Europe, of the West—in other words, Christianity is to assume the role of a civil religion. Overall, then, although this open secularism is seemingly promising due to its amicable attitude toward religion, most legislators do not take full advantage of this potentially inclusive framework. Rather, they prefer to pose as theologians, historians, and anthropologists, trying to determine what is religious, what is cultural, and what is simply unacceptable. The crucifix receives its ruling, as does the *burqa* and other Islamic dresses.

Full Muslim veils are, similarly to crucifixes, distanced from their religious substance. However, the *burqa* ruling is even harsher than the crucifix one: full veils are said to be exclusively cultural attires. Nearly all the draft laws make this claim and, thereafter, specify that the cultures to which these attires belong are extremist, fundamentalist, sexist, violent, amongst other pejorative adjectives. Here, the identity-building role of symbols, as well as the theological role played by the legislator are evident: when drafters demarcate the cultural character of full veils and relate it to fundamentalist regimes, they simultaneously distinguish both from the “real Islam,” from “moderate Islam,” and from “secular Islamic countries.” Ultimately, this is a type of Islam that does not require women to cover their faces, a civil religion compatible with the West.

Italians are open to discussing accommodating strategies with this religion—within the established constitutional limits. Therefore, although legislators clearly overstep their functions in the *burqa* law proposals (by acting as theologians, for one), they leave some space for dialogue and cooperation between different communities. This is an inclusive strategy. To be sure, this inclusive strategy is not without its negative counterparts. First, it seems to require minority religions to resemble Catholicism. Second, it excludes any possibility of dialogue with those women who chose freely to wear the full veil. Thus, in case the consolidated text of the bill had been approved, it would certainly be one of those intolerant and illiberal legislation to which Nussbaum (2012) referred, motivated
primary by “the fear of diversity.”

Conclusion
This paper has argued that “culture wars” and “clash of civilizations” are neither the sole nor the best representations of ongoing controversies in Europe. This argument was put forth and substantiated in two steps, a theoretical and an analytical one. In the first part of the paper, well-known criticisms of the war/clash frameworks were revisited, and subsequently, a social constructivist view of the secular-religious divide (i.e., the main war front) was introduced. Together, these theoretical inputs suggested that religious controversies may be approached as more than cultural battlefields; they may also be seen as loci in which political actors (re)negotiate their identities, (re)define terms of dialogue, and conceive a range of political positions and concrete ways to handle the problem of diversity. Therefore, the war metaphor, albeit powerful, should be used cautiously. In short, this metaphor is typically too extreme and static to capture the possibilities inherent in the political realm. This implies that in order to understand cultural conflict, it is necessary to examine the actual political dimension of the phenomena in question, that is to say, the dynamic repertoire of ideas that contribute to constructing the political strategies devised by actors and their identities. The second part of the paper undertook this task.

The analytical section looked at two instantiations of contemporary cultural conflict in Italy: the crucifix controversy and the full veil case. A general question guided this exercise: whether, and if so, which alternative images of the political domain and corresponding strategies for the management of diversity have been available for actors involved in these putative wars. A critical discourse analysis of several draft laws concerning the two cultural conflicts suggested prima facie that the war metaphor retains some explanatory power, especially when political actors adopt exclusive discursive strategies (meant to segregate, control, and in some instances, eliminate “the other”). Although some textual features substantiate a war-like portrayal of the controversies, the silence of belligerent adversaries and the existence of inclusive discursive strategies in nearly all the bills indicate that an exclusive reliance on the war framework may blind analysts to the wider social picture. In this respect, two alternative ways to interpret the management of diversity in Italy have been suggested: first, one that focuses on the securitization of migrants, religious others, Muslims, and Islamic countries; second, one that recognizes the dialogical possibilities inherent in multiculturalism and liberalism.
References


Papenheim, Martin. 2003. “*Roma o morte*: culture wars in Italy.” In *Culture wars: secular-Catholic


Annex A – List of Draft Laws Examined

**Crucifix Case**

- Sodano et al (1717 from September 19, 2002): “Disciplina per l’esposizione del Crocifisso nelle scuole e in tutti gli edifici pubblici”
- Izzo (174 from May 4, 2006): “Modifica dell’articolo 2 della Costituzione in materia di riconoscimento dei valori cristiani come principi ispiratori della società”
- Bricolo (955 from May 31, 2006): “Disposizioni per disciplinare l’esposizione del Crocifisso in tutti i pubblici uffici e le pubbliche amministrazioni della Repubblica”
- Izzo (320 from May 5, 2008): “Modifica dell’articolo 2 della Costituzione in materia di riconoscimento dei valori cristiani come principi ispiratori della società”
- Biancofiori et al (1483 from June 15, 2008): “Modifica all’articolo 7 della Costituzione, concernente l’inserimento del riconoscimento delle radici culturali giudaico-cristiane”
- Garagnani et al (1809 from 17 October, 2008): “Disposizioni per la valorizzazione dell’identità culturale cristiana nella scuola italiana”
- Cota et al (2374 from April 9, 2009): “Modifica all’articolo 8 della Costituzione, concernente il riconoscimento della tradizione giudaico-cristiana quale fondamento civile e spirituale della Repubblica”
- Mussolini et al (2457 from May 20, 2009): “Modifica all’articolo 1 della Costituzione, concernente il riconoscimento delle radici cristiane della civiltà italiana”
- Thaler Ausserhoffer et al (1856 from November 4, 2009): “Disciplina per l’esposizione del Crocifisso nelle scuole e in tutti gli uffici della pubblica amministrazione”
- Scandrolio et al (2905 from November 10, 2009): “Disposizioni concernenti l’esposizione del Crocifisso e del ritratto del Presidente della Repubblica, quali simboli della tradizione e dell’unità della Patria, nelle scuole e negli uffici pubblici”
- Caselli et al (1900 from November 18, 2009): “Disposizioni in materia di esposizione del Crocifisso nei pubblici uffici e nelle pubbliche amministrazioni della Repubblica”

**Full Muslim Veil Case**

- Binetti et al (627 from April 30, 2008): “Modifica dell’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, in materia di utilizzo di mezzi, anche aventi connotazione religiosa, atti a rendere irriconoscibile la persona”
- Sbai and Contento (2422 from May 6, 2009): “Modifica all’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, concernente il divieto di indossare gli indumenti denominati burqa e niqab”
- Malan (1650 June 30, 2009): “Nuove norme in materia di travisamento in luogo pubblico”
- Cota et al (2769 from October 2, 2009): “Modifica dell’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, in materia di tutela dell’ordine pubblico e di identificabilità delle persone”
- Mantini and Tassoni (3018 from December 3, 2009): “Modifica all’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, concernente il divieto di indossare gli indumenti denominati burqa e
niqab”


- Spadoni Urbani (2343 from September 23, 2010): “Modifica all’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, concernente il divieto di indossare gli indumenti denominati niqab e burqa”

- Amici et al (3020 from December 4, 2009): “Modifica dell’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, in materia di tutela dell’ordine pubblico e di uso di indumenti indossati per ragioni di natura religiosa, etnica o culturale”

- Lanzillotta (3183 from February 8, 2010): “Modifica dell’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, concernente il divieto dell’uso di indumenti indossati per ragioni di natura religiosa, etnica o culturale”

- Vaccaro et al (3368 from February 7, 2010): “Modifica dell’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, concernente il divieto dell’uso di indumenti o altri oggetti che impediscono l’identificazione nei luoghi pubblici o aperti al pubblico”

- Vassallo et al (3205 February 11, 2010): “Modifica dell’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, in materia di tutela dell’ordine pubblico e di uso di indumenti indossati per ragioni di natura religiosa o etnico-culturale”

- Reguzzoni et al (3715 from September 17, 2010): “Disposizioni concernenti il divieto dell’uso di indumenti che impediscono l’identificazione nei luoghi pubblici”

- Galagnani (3719 from September 21, 2010): “Modifica all’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, concernente il divieto di indossare indumenti che rendono difficoltoso il riconoscimento della persona, in luogo pubblico o aperto al pubblico”

- Bertolini (3760 from October 11, 2010): “Modifica dell’articolo 5 della legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152, concernente il divieto di indossare indumenti che rendono difficoltoso il riconoscimento della persona, e introduzione dell’articolo 612-ter del codice penale, in materia di costrizione all’occultamento del volto”