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Politicised religion and the religionisation of politics

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The dilemmas of dealing with difference are currently at the heart of our society. Among the anomalies of our age is the survival and even flourishing of complex systems of values based on religion. However, we see that mosques flourish, ethnic associations with religious undertones multiply and religion is present in the public sphere through conflicts about religion or persons believed to be religious. Islam is a much discussed topic. The line between private and public religion is as thin as ever, and I would argue so is the line between religion and politics. This can be observed at two levels. First, the invocation of religion in the political discourse, leading to the politicisation of religion and second, as the influence religion has on political life, the religionisation of politics.

Keywords: The Netherlands; Rotterdam; Muslims; religion; secularisation theory; immigration; citizenship; policy; democratic practices

The presence of Islam and Muslims in Europe, although not a new phenomenon in itself, is questioned by individual nation-states in such a way that it becomes part and parcel of the struggle for individual and collective national identity, be it in terms of secularism, democracy or citizenship. The concerns about the growing number of Muslims and the increasing importance of Islam in Western European nation-states are catalysed by imperatives making their presence felt for decades within the minority management of the contemporary nation-states. These problems were given a special twist by events such as 9/11, 7/7 and the murder of Theo van Gogh (Tilly 2006; Rai 2006; Buruma 2006; Eyerman 2008). The dynamics around the ‘new’ ‘immigrant’ religion that Islam is considered to be are an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the tangled relationship of western European secular states with religion.

Democracy and inclusive policy processes create a platform where religious institutions and actors have a public voice. Local transformations in political and civic engagement with Muslims and Islam in the city of Rotterdam are a good example of the more general change in attitude towards Muslims in Western Europe. The debates around and on the topic of Islam, Muslims, migration and integration between 1998 and 2008 point out new possibilities of engaging

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religion has made a re-entry in the political arena on the background of local citizenship policies and practices.

In this paper, I will discuss two aspects of the theory of secularisation. First, I wish to analyse the way secularism is used as a proof and measure of the modernity of the nation-state. This calls attention to the way religion is present in social imaginaries and the way it is treated in political discourse. For this purpose, I will analyse social imageries proposed by discourse around the concept of national and local citizenship and their application in practice. Second, I wish to draw attention to the unclear and porous boundary between the institutional territory of the state and that of religion, pointing out that religion re-enters the public and political sphere through its politicisation, and in turn exposes the relativity of systems of values on which the nation-state and the political system lies.

Religion, secularism and citizenship

The modern nation-state conceives itself as a secular political unit, where the power is distributed through the people within an independent state, controlled by the mechanism of citizenship (Gellner 1983; Anderson [1983] 1991; Hobsbawm 1990). This unit is also conceived as culturally homogenous (Anderson [1983] 1991; Calhoun 1994). From the perspective of the state as agent, ethnicity, cultural specificity and religion are ‘dismissed as a characteristic of “simpler”, “pre-political” societies, or of marginal groups destined to assimilate into the nation–state’ (Hutchinson 2000, 653).

As a legacy of the philosophy of Enlightenment and nationally specific arrangements of secularism, religion is seen as opposed to reason and rationality and is considered as separate from the political realm and placed into the private life of individuals. Seen as ‘the other’ of political life, religion is considered to diminish in personal as well as in social importance process called secularisation. Different factors are considered to contribute to this process: industrialisation, modernisation, rationalisation, bureaucratisation and urbanisation (Hammond and Society for the Scientific Study of Religion 1985). The question is if secularism is necessary or inevitable, if it presents the same mechanism for all religions and if it is territorially restricted to Europe (Martin 1978).

The main paradigm through which social science has studied religion is the theory of secularisation. Casanova (1994, 211) distinguished between three different directions that the theory of secularisation has taken: the differentiation of the secular sphere from that of religion, secularisation as a decline of religion (practices and beliefs) and secularisation as the privatisation of religion to its own sphere. He accepts the differentiation within the Western society, but shows that religious institutions continue to play an important role, particularly within the civil society. This is not necessarily opposed to the process of secularisation. Sengers (2005, 20) asserts that secularisation and transformation of religion can
be simultaneous. Secularisation in all aspects of society (Dobbelaere 2002) and the transformation of religion evident in the number of religious association and the way they deal with society and the number and way of working of non-Western organisations can go hand in hand.

Citizenship, just as secularism, is a multilayered, historically sensitive concept. Looking back to history, we can see that initially citizenship is a form of loyalty meant to transcend tribal loyalties (Pocock 1998) while eliminating magically sanctioned social divisions (Weber 1998) in order to attain free association and equal solidarity between individuals.

The construction of European nation-states implied in many cases the attribution, even forced, of a national language, national culture and national institutions. In this framework, migrants per definition were seen as the others, who by crossing the borders of the nation-state reinforced the meaning of borders. The others of the nation-state are seen as guests with a purpose (labour, leisure, etc.) and are expected to return, unless ‘naturalised’. But even when ‘naturalised’, made part of a nation, the issue of difference remains a poignant one. The same difference which is at the basis of identity is also at the basis of difference (Connolly 1991). Not to be forgotten is that citizens are often denizens, members of both universal and particular constellations of power, among which the nation-state is but one (Hammar 1986). Other constellations might be very well defined in terms of religion, which can be national or transnational in character (Roy 2004). The ‘dilemma of difference’, the dilemma of denying or affirming difference in relation to equality and plurality within the concept of citizenship, is far from being resolved (Young 1990).

Migration and minority formation pose challenges for the nation-state. In the case of migrant/minority with a Muslim background, the tension can be identified at several levels, of which I would like to point to two: the socio-economic inequalities which are particular to the process of labour migration and the challenge the revival of religion poses to the secular state. These tensions occur on the background of more general changes in the politics of integration in Europe, namely the localisation of policy making, the transformation of accommodating cities in demanding cities, the conflation of integration with immigration and finally the important role of integration agenda in party politics (compare to Guiraudon and Lahav 2006).

From the point of view of the secular state, migration presents itself as a challenge through the possibility of religious revival it may present. Religious presence may be seen as a double threat: first, as cultural pluralism and second, as a threat for the secular state. However, the matter is more complicated. At the root of this double tension is the construction of the modern state around the process of secularisation. There is a strong connection between the theory of secularisation, the ideological discourse of state formation and rationalist discourses on modernity (Hadden 1987; Stark and Finke 2000). Secularism needs a substitute for the ideological basis provided by religion and it finds it in nationalism (Anderson [1983] 1991). In the case of the accommodation of religious minorities of migrant origin,
there are two main forces which pull the reins: first, the historically determined view on citizenship, seen both as a form of membership in the nation-state and an inclusion/exclusion mechanism; second, the particular secularisation arrangements, a certain established modus vivendi between religion and the secular institutions of the state. Here, we find intertwined the presence of the nation-state and a certain mechanism of maintaining a (secular) national identity.

The interaction between politics and religion does not leave either one intact. As a matter of fact, the two have never been completely separated. While we now think of secularism as the separation of powers between the state and religious institutions, to the detriment of the latter (Berger 1967; Wilson and South Place Ethical Society 1996), as Asad points out, the secular and the religious are interdependent. He draws our attention to the historical facts behind the connection between the two concepts, namely that while the ‘secular’ was initially a part of the theological discourse (saeculum), the religious became constructed by the political and scientific discourses as the differentiation through the performance of agency of the secular from the religious (Asad 2003, 192).

In the case of migrants and minorities, religion, namely Islam, comes back as an important part of individual and collective identity. Furthermore, migrants and minorities fall under the concerns of the nation-state as the others of citizenship and of equality. Thus, when transformed into policy practice, the voice of religion is distorted by other parallel politicised discussions. Entangled in the discussion about Islam are concerns about migration and integration of migrants and their descendants, state security concerns and changes in the structure of the nation-state itself.

The differentiation of the secular sphere from religious institutions and ideas and the marginalisation of religion to the private sphere are both contested by the presence of migrants/minorities with a strong and visible religious identity. When religion becomes part and parcel of modern political debates, religious ideas influence decisions and definitions of such ideas as the aims and means of education, participation in the labour market, the structure and role of the family as a social unit and differences between genders and equality. By participation in the political process, in the political debate and by being the subject of politics, both as a subject and an object, religion contests the strict boundary between the religious and the secular institutions they become engaged with. Furthermore, by becoming a collective actor on the political scene, religion is bound to have an impact which is larger than the private sphere of the individual. As religion enters the public sphere through policy discourse, it becomes a possibly equal voice to voices representing secular institutions. Moreover, by entering the public sphere as both the subject and the object of controversy, religion is bound to attract quite a lot of attention.

Using Islam as a category that defines policy target groups as well as participants in the policy practice, religion becomes highly politicised, inviting both a discussion in terms of struggles of power, argumentation in the name of belief and a negotiation of religious and ethnic authority. While religion is politicised, a double process of interpenetration and hybridisation takes place between religion and politics; on the
one hand, religion becomes the object and subject of political debate; on the other hand, politics becomes religionised. The complex discussions around migration and Islam place religion in a prominent place, reopening the discussion about the limits of secularism and democracy. By the same token, discussions about topics which fall under the territory of religion in the political sphere, ask for arguments which are political in nature on issues which fall under the jurisdiction of religion. Thus, the moralisation of the discourse of citizenship can be seen as interference with religiously defined morality and virtue, leading to the religionisation of politics.

The religionisation of politics may be observed in the presence and influence that religion has in politics, to which it serves both as a subject and object. The renewed presence of religion in the public sphere and the specific constellation under which it appears as politicised religion contest the strict separation between the political and the religious sphere, the decreasing importance of religion as much for the individual citizen as for groups of people and most importantly, it questions the universality of values proposed as universal and fundamental by the nation-state. Islam allows an alternative personal and collective identification vis-à-vis the state, and to borrow Mahmood’s term, through its possibility for politics of piety presents a possible challenge to the ways of action proposed by the principle of citizenship (2005). At the same time, the Islamic ideals and values proposed as guidelines for good citizenship, thus membership in the nation-state, offer an alternative, if not radically different vision on the values claimed as universal by the nation-state.

I admit to uneasiness in coining and using such a neologism as religionisation. However, the use of this term might be excused by its added value in both pointing to the reciprocal interaction and simultaneous dependence on the realms of politics and religion. It also demasks the values of the Western liberal state as just one set of values between others. In this paper, the term religionisation has been used to describe two different kinds of phenomena related to religion. First, it is related to the lack of clear boundary between the political and religious realm (also see Martin 1978 on common goal of the two), and second, it is used as a deconstruction of the objectivity and universality of politically naturalised values. By using the term of religionisation, I would like to point out that beliefs and values perceived as natural and universal are as socially constructed, and as much a matter of social convention and belief as religion is considered to be. Moreover, nation unifying discourses use the mechanism of sacralisation in order to gain authority. As nationalist feelings increase in the population and in the political discourse, the values promoted by the nation-state acquire through ritual acts of belonging an aura of sanctity, essential for a citizens’ individual and collective identity.

In the following section, I will discuss the way religion, aided by the focus on immigration, becomes politicised. Furthermore, I will analyse the role played by religious actors and organisations in the discussion, pointing out how arguments made in the name of religion emerge and influence the civic policy agenda. Furthermore, it will become clear how events happening at the national level are shaping local happenings, but also how the local municipality may form an independent constellation of power.
Politically religion: Islam in the Netherlands

The ‘multicultural tragedy’, a term coined by publicist Scheffer in his influential article which appeared in the national media (2000), is probably the best description of how the issue of Islam and Muslims was perceived and handled. The basic assumption was that of the incompatibility between Western and Islamic values. However, this was not new in Dutch national politics. The same dimension was freely embraced by influential politicians such as Bolkestein, the leader of the liberal party Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD) already in the beginning of the 1990s. At the end of the 1990s, the link between incompatibility of cultures and a socio-cultural drama was predicted and maybe to some extent created as a possibility by the lecture of Paul Schnabel, the director of Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP), the national research agency, which was of opinion that the integration of migrants might be unsuccessful.

Although the same line of thought was already present for a while in the public discourse, its terminology changed with time. While the term ‘incompatibility of cultures’ signals the need to protect the endangered Dutch culture, with its norms and values, from a cultural invasion and a process of corruption and hybridisation, the later use of the word tragedy accentuates the urgency of the situation. These perceptions were reinforced by numbers: low scores in financial independence from the state, participation on the labour market and the lack of social cohesion and social problems such as criminality. These obvious problems ended up being blamed on the culture of migrants, which are perceived to lack in all things Dutch: tolerance, emancipation and democratic attitudes. The solution of the perceived problem is deemed simple: once the migrants are integrated into the Dutch culture, once they fully accept the nationally defined values, their social and cultural, economic problems will disappear.

Of course, there are many problems with these assumptions. Most important maybe is the essentialist view on culture, which is seen as a monolithic block of norms and values which determine the (presumably homogenous) way of life of certain groups and/or individuals. This way of seeing culture, immediately polarises, as it assumes there is an unchangeable Dutch culture and a Muslim culture which are opposed, do not communicate, and do not influence each other. As far as the majority population is concerned, it has been pointed out that indeed, Dutch population has become more culturally homogenous, bringing cultural matters to the fore (Duyvendak et al. 2009). At the same time, when there is talk about Muslim culture, first, culture is conflated with religion; second, diversity between different Muslim cultures and tradition is ignored and finally, culture and religion in this uncomfortable mixture are seen as the cause and thus explanation of inequality and socio-economic problems.

Islam as a subject of overt controversy and political debate came out to daylight together with Pim Fortuyn, the charismatic leader of the Leefbaar Rotterdam (LR), the right-wing populist party. His discourse was based on the polarisation of native Dutch and migrants, and an active promotion of Islam as the main problem,
because ‘Islam is a backward culture’ (2002). The main assumption was that (un-integrated) Muslim immigrants are the main problem of the Netherlands, their presence and attitude endangering Western achievements and enjoyments. LR’s achievement was to become the biggest party in the city of Rotterdam in the period between 2002 and 2006. After Fortuyn’s assassination in 2002, LR continued to push a political agenda with the central theme of Islam. In the following, I will look in detail at how the discussion around the problematic religion was organised.

The explicit red thread behind ‘The Islam debates’, as voiced by LR, was the tension or friction between Muslims and non-Muslims, defined as two separate, well-defined oppositional groups. This tension, based on some real frictions, was exaggerated and distorted by both media and political discourse, especially through the activity of LR. Once accepted as a problem, in order to find a solution, the City of Rotterdam’s Social Integration Project Bureau developed an action plan called *Islam and Integration*. The project started in February 2004 with a series of 25 expert meetings in order to map out the core of the ‘conflict’. The tension was loosely framed of the lack of integration of Muslims which leads to lack of social cohesion between the target group (Muslim minority in general) and the non-Muslims, the native Rotterdammers. At the basis of this assumption was the idea that religion forms the hard core of a culture which then determines all behaviour. Essentialised religious and cultural values, seen as backward and un-modern are seen as stubbornly persisting in spite of country of residence and sometimes country of birth. Behind this rhetoric lured the fearful vision of ethnic ghettos and hermetically closed communities, where people spoke another language, shared other beliefs and values besides different food, and were certainly hostile to the outside world.

The problem with Islam was defined as the tension existing between Islamic and Western values and norms and the tension between cultures rooted in traditions and cultures rooted in modernity. However, the distinction between tradition and modernity is not innocent, but is deeply enmeshed into the struggle for power and supremacy. The debate portrays that Western countries are unquestionably modern, and the Netherlands is portrayed as ‘individualist and secular’ (Gemeente Rotterdam 2004). Muslims are portrayed as maintaining their roots in religion and tradition and thus not being able to pass the threshold of modernity, which requires distance from religion as requested by the principles of secularism, and the relativisation of traditional norms and values as promoted by liberal democratic ideas.

The political debate started with invited experts and representatives of the Muslim population, who, according to democratic practices, were involved in the discussion. Although their voices might have been faint and their arguments not clear, they were heard. While not all participants were identifying themselves as Muslim believers, but as having links with Islam either as an ethnicity, culture or tradition, their voices were perceived as Muslim voices. Even as we cannot talk about a homogenous Islamic community, and thus neither can we talk about real representatives, a bit shy and a bit received on the back door, Islam and with it,
religion in general has made a re-entry in the realm of secular power as a discussion partner. We can certainly talk about a politicisation of religion and a re-entry of religion in the public sphere as both object and subject of political and policy discussion and action. The renewed presence of religion has hybridising consequences for the secular institutions and ideas it confronts, leading to a gradual religionisation of politics.

The way the expert meetings were framed did little but reinforce the perception that Islam is the cause of integration problems. Religion, along with culture, received all the blame for the bad state of affairs with integration. The internal debates ended up being filled with top-down ‘advice’ and problem definition. Moreover, by pointing out the importance of the public debates above the internal ones, the ‘stage’ was set for the performance which was considered the most important – the public interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, or autochthonous Rotterdammers. The preparatory internal, intra-community debates were considered of secondary importance and seen as a preparation towards the bigger act (Goffman 1959).

The goal of the internal debates was to eliminate as much as possible ‘misconceptions and ignorance’ within the Muslim community (Gemeente Rotterdam 2004). The internal debates were a series of seminars and meetings meant only for the Muslim community, which aimed at clarifying the position, aims and ambitions of Muslims within the society and their views about civil contribution and participation. At the same time, the debates were directly targeted towards the ‘sensitive’ issues, also offered the view of the municipality on what the problem was and how it was to be solved. Among the sensitive issues was the position of religious institutions within society, namely that mosques, the work of imams and some self-organisations act as obstacles to integration, provoking social separatism. In other words religious organisations are perceived as possible loci for religious or ethnic communitarianism. As a solution, religious institutions, it was argued, should be open to the larger society and should also become social centres besides their religious function. Also, part of the solution was to oppose gender inequality within religious institutions and to change mosques from being the exclusive world of men, in terms of visits but also decision power (Gemeente Rotterdam 2005). In this case, we see an attempt to intervene in the social functions of religious institutions and in the social hierarchy of belief and religious organisation.

The interventionist politics of the state on the local level can also be followed in relation to the topic of emancipation. The statement ‘Muslims have to emancipate by renouncing their religion’ (Gemeente Rotterdam 2004) provoked a heated discussion. The discourse of emancipation coupled with the topic of religion is not something new in the Netherlands. As I will point out in the following chapters, one of the factors contributing to the decline of pillarisation is the successful implementation of the emancipation process which makes isolation and differentiation redundant. In the process of emancipation, differences are levelled down, differences which are important from the point of view of social
equality. From the point of view of the secular state, the important difference to be abolished is that of beliefs, norms and values which differ from those promoted by the state.

In order to understand the magnitude of the discrepancies between the local and national setting, we need to take a look at how the Dutch state positioned itself historically vis-à-vis its population of migrant origin. Through this account, I will make clear the changing dimensions of the concept of citizenship and its position towards religion and ethnic difference.

**Dutch citizenship: From multiculturalism to cultural and moral citizenship**

The renewed interest and preoccupation with religion does not happen in a vacuum. In order to understand the dynamics which brought the success of Pim Fortuyn, LR and their programme focused on Islam, it is imperative that we have a deeper understanding of the ways in which the Dutch state has dealt with both religion and migration. For this, it is important to follow the intersection of the locally specific tradition of pillarisation, with its special arrangements of secularism through the public institutionalisation of religion, and the way the nation-state’s dealing with sameness and difference through the principle of citizenship changed into time.

Despite the fact that the Netherlands’ history of immigration has started in postcolonial times, the discourse on immigration is dominated by a narrative starting from the labour migration wave, the arrival of unskilled labour migrants in the end of the 1950s, initially from Spain and Italy, later from Muslim countries such as Turkey and Morocco (Wilterdink 1998). At this point, immigration is a short-term economic solution for the nation-state struggling with the consequences of WWII. In order to accommodate them, measures are taken to ensure that migrant groups maintain their own culture as a keepsake which will make their return to their respective home-countries unproblematic (Entzinger 1984). Migrants are perceived as temporary ‘guests’, and as such their integration is not an issue. Culture is not considered a problem – the groups under concern are seen as liminal to the state. In this period, the accommodation of (ethnic) groups means recognition of self-identification and self-organisation processes.

This form of self-organisation is encouraged by the existing accommodation structure, known as pillarisation (Lijphart 1968). In the Netherlands, multiculturalism was built upon the existing institutional arrangements to subsidise political or religious organisations. Tolerance for religious practices had little to do with national integration strategies, Koopmans and his colleagues argue: ‘To an important extent, the extension of multicultural rights to minorities in the Netherlands is based on the heritage of pillarization... and was meant to accommodate cultural conflicts between native religious groups. Muslims and other minorities have made use of this available institutional framework ...’ (2005, 71). As guests, the labour migrants had the right and were also encouraged to preserve their social, cultural and religious identity, in order to facilitate a relocation when necessary. This pragmatic approach allowed a sort of cultural pluralism to develop,
in which different ethnic groups attempted self-institutionalisation through ethnic cultural and religious groups, associations and organisations. These efforts were encouraged and sustained by the so-called multicultural policies. Although scholars think that pluralism was the effect of the multiculturalist attempt to protect the identity of the guest workers (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Koopmans 2005), the result was not a Muslim or migrant pillar. Separating themselves from the Dutch population, migrants organised themselves into ethnic groups, with group-specific cultural, social and religious organisations, a fragmented and diverse plethora of social formations (Joppke 2004).

This approach was to be replaced, as in most European countries in the 1990s, with policies of civic integration. Following from the 1990s onwards, the group-centred empowerment strategies which were a legacy of the pillarisation system slowly transformed into objectives of individual socio-economic integration and participation. This corresponds to changes in attitude which the Social and Cultural Planning Office summarised as 'In their totality the anticipated trends amount to individualization, critical scrutiny of the authorities and declining acceptance of closed groups and traditional structures' (Lechner 1996, 525). Individual integration, the new focus, allows for the weight of responsibility which until now pressed the shoulders of the state to be transferred to the individual itself. From the point of view of the state, the individual may be classified for management purposes as an integrated or an un-integrated unit. One of the main triggers of change from a focus on groups to a focus on individuals was the criticism that the former approach encouraged the separation of migrants (Entzinger 1984), leading in extreme cases to isolation and a lack of social cohesion in society. The individualisation of the discourse went hand in hand with its culturalisation. The discourse related low education, unemployment and crime to specific ethnic groups, leading to a strong polarisation and moralisation of the discussion partners, reinforced by the unequal power balance between the two. Already ‘the underclass citizens of Dutch society’ (Ghorashi 2003), migrants got the blame for the problems, society was dealing with at the moment.

The changes in the immigration discourse and the coupling of immigration with integration had an effect on the concept of citizenship. The focus on cultural aspects lead to the culturist discourse (van den Berg and Schinkel 2009) or the culturalisation of citizenship (Duyvendak et al. 2008). This change has the consequence that economic differences are considered cultural (Schinkel 2008). Integration is seen as an individual matter, while culture is both defined as problematic and seen as the cause of other problems (Schinkel 2008). As the focus on culture slowly allows for a focus on the knowledge of norms and values of ‘Dutch culture’ and of Dutch language as a prerequisite of the integration process, citizenship acquires a moral dimension (van Houdt and Schinkel 2009).

Although from the 1990s onwards the dominant discourse in the integration debate has centred on individuals, who in their capacity of citizens are related to the state through a series of rights and obligations, the group approach has not disappeared completely. While the social, economic and lately moral
responsibilities of the individual were transformed into immigration and integration control mechanisms, in the political discourse the policy implementation strategies, namely the concepts and categories defining the target groups reinforced the group approach. However, this group approach did not deal with immigrants in general but singled out a narrow, culturally and religiously defined population. The replacement of differentiation based on ethnic marks with differentiation based on culture and religion was in fact little more than changing the tag of the policy target group. In a short time, being a Muslim became the label of religious as well as a cultural and ethnic identity.

The category of Muslims as used in policy and political discourse is closely connected with the proclaimed secularism of the state. Talking about national adaptations of the concept of secularisation, Martin defines the Netherlands as the 60:40 model, alluding to the pattern of general social organisation and particular secularisation. He sees the pillars as social structures with a double function, on the one hand defining and keeping people within the religious organisations, (churches) while on the other hand defining the world outside the pillars as secular. In this way ‘there is a polarization at the level of culture and of its meaning system which complements the lack of polarization at the political level’ (Martin 1978, 199). This balance could only be tilted by a religious revival. In his paper dealing with the historical and geographical dimensions of secularisation in the Netherlands, Knippenberg (1998) is of opinion that the increase in the Muslim and Hindu population as consequence of migration and high fertility rates will be a challenge to the process of secularisation.

However, as this case points out, the challenge to secularism brought on by the Muslim population appears through the niche carved out by the culturalisation and moralisation of the principle of citizenship and its subsequent focus on the private life of individuals. The shift towards a moralised and culturalised citizenship allowed for the formulation of policy target group and policy participant categories in religious and cultural terms, as opposed to the previous use of ethnicity. Once entitled to the private territory of citizens, where cultural and religious traits abound, the principle of citizenship found only partial agreement. The reactions of people speaking with a Muslim voice in the debate clearly contest the universality of Western liberal democratic values. The opinions which I will present in the following part, can be seen as a struggle for the redefinition of the boundary between private and public, a renegotiation of the place of individuals, families, ethnicity and belief within the nation-state and maybe an attempt towards pluralism within the framework of citizenship (compare Casanova 1994).

Islam as a subject in the political debate

The Islam and integration debates introduced religion in the public and political debate. Through this initiative, temporary and biased, religion is given a platform, a voice in the democratic conversation and a chance of participation in the policy process. Not only is the programme launched in the name of defining and solving
a problem, but it is also constructed on the opposition between them (the Muslims) and us (the autochthonous Rotterdammers). Even so, this opportunity allows Muslims to make arguments in the political sphere in the name of religion, thus diminishing the distance between the separation of politics and religion as proposed by secularism.

The assumption behind the debates was that ethnic or migrant religion is a ‘sacred canopy’ which governs all forms and levels of social life. This assumption allowed for the line between culture and religion to be thinned down and even completely removed, essentialising and linking causally culture and/or religion with all existing social problems. This position allowed Muslim voices to take a position in the name of religion on topics which would not necessarily need to be associated with religion. In response to the topics proposed by the debate framework, voices from the Muslim community, coming from different ethnic groups, with different social, cultural and economic position and different interest in the discussion to make their own statements. Whoever the actors were, they were perceived as speaking on behalf of the Muslim community, with a Muslim voice (personal interview). Their statements can be seen as an attempt to negotiate and redefine the dimensions of the religion problem defined by the state.

The red thread along the debates was the use of the concept of citizenship both as a calling upon responsibilities, and partially rights towards the state, but also as the way of being involved in the society. Along the debates, the concept of active citizenship was constructed by civil servants in order to pinpoint a possibility of social engagement which is approved on the local and national levels. As a matter of fact, the series of debates resulted in a ‘Citizenship charter’, with its own history of tensions and conflicts.

As citizenship was the central point of all the debates, it comes hardly as surprising that it was also an important topic in the reactions of the Muslim community. Arguing that Islam and citizenship are not mutually exclusive, Muslim voices defended religion. They pointed out that besides the important function of securing belief, religion has important social functions. Religion has a positive effect as it serves both as a socially binding force and a collective social identity. In terms of citizenship, both functions are beneficial, as they include individuals in the society, rather than exclude them. This is in concordance with the idea of citizenship. Religious norms permeate social life, and they encourage social activism and conformity to a norm which serves the common good, just as the certain aspects of citizenship. Criminal behaviour and neglecting the authority of the state is also a matter of personal ignorance, Muslims argue. Young criminals with a Muslim background would do better if they were taught Islam with its values and principles, as they would be then discouraged from engaging in behaviour which is contrary to religious norms. Religious norms and laws are in many aspects similar. More than that, a religious person is more likely to be concerned with the well-being of others around him than a non-religious person.

The individualist approach central to the concept of citizenship is not foreign to Muslims either. Wearing the Islamic veil is also a matter of individual and
personal choice. The veil is not a religious rule and even less a symbol of oppression, but an individual and personal choice of signalling religiosity. Since most of the socially active Muslims are guided by principles found in their religion, but chosen as valid by them as individuals, religion cannot be banned from the public domain. Religion is part of their identity as individuals, and as such it should be respected. If the west is true to its self-proclaimed values of equality and tolerance, then religion and religious people should receive the due respect.

The Muslim participants deplore the excessive attention towards cultural and religious differences. Contrary to the argument of Martin (1978), migrant diaspora members, instead of equating religion with culture, try to differentiate between the two, making it clear that they talk from a religious point of view. Muslims define themselves against tradition, culture and against memory – in this way creating the rupture between the first and second generation of migrants (Hervieu-Léger 2002). Some argue that if there is a problem with the Muslim minority, its source must not be looked for in the cultural or religious domain, but rather in the socio-economic realm which is not being addressed. The realities of migration: lower socio-economic position and discrimination are to be blamed for the current state of affairs, but not religion. While the category of religion was used in the public discourse through the frequent reference to Islam, there is a clear conflation of culture, ethnicity and religion.

The assumed homogeneity of the Muslim community was also put under question by participants. The fragmented community was represented only through its majority blocks: Turkish, Moroccan and Somali Muslims, which are also the groups which already had in one way or another a connection with the municipality. Although Muslims are considered a homogenous group by the framework of the debates, as the discussions progressed, it became clear that the Islamic community is far from homogenous (also Saint-Blancat 2002, 140) – which presented evidence against the argument of the Muslim pillar, as it was targeted by the discourse.

As I have pointed out with the examples above, during the debates the representatives of the Muslim community readily accepted the collective given to them in advance. Moreover, they defended religion from confusion with tradition and culture, and pointed out the common values of religion and citizenship. However, besides the discussion of values, the absolute truth was also once mentioned: ‘we are responsible towards Allah and not towards each other’ (Geemente Rotterdam 2004, 15). This statement provided some space for reflection on the ultimate goal of targeting a harmonious society, of adhering to certain norms and values. If, for the religious person, the struggle with the problems of the here and now makes sense in the perspective of the dialogue with the creator, how can the values of the liberal democratic state and the way of dealing with the here and now, be accounted for?

The politicisation of religion, even if temporary, allowed arguments given in the name of religion, from people who were representing or perceived as representing a religious group to become heard in the public and political sphere
on a range of topics, of which but a few fall under the secular jurisdiction of religion. Through the process, facilitated both by the democratic practices encouraged by the nation-state on the local level and the changes in the understanding of the concept of citizenship, religion became politicised. The politicisation of religion allowed for the interpenetration between the spheres of religion and politics which are understood as necessarily separate by secularism.

Conclusion

Religion, according to secularisation theory is increasingly marginalised to the private sphere and loses its social relevance. However, through its presence in the political arena, religion receives public and political attention and moves towards the centre of the public sphere again. This attention is due to the changing attitudes of the state and the city of Rotterdam towards its population of migrant origin and/or a different religious background. This can be easily seen as an inversion of ‘the pillar of stability, the centre of gravity’ of a certain historical moment (Tambiah 1990). As most of the regulation and accommodation of religion is complexly mixed with the principle of citizenship and issues of minority accommodation, the process of revitalisation of religion can be seen as a strategy of constructing a national, cultural and religious ‘other’. Through polarisation, the other helps construct a national identity and a corresponding concept of citizenship.

Integration and immigration come to the fore as the concept of citizenship acquires a culturalist and moralising dimension, where norms and values are compared to each other. The secular state is concerned most of all with those aspects of culture which seem to contradict in some way its paradigms and balance of power. Islam is seen by the nation-state as a possible threat, especially so since by being visible and public it contradicts one of its core principles, namely secularism. However, the democratic principles which are also at the heart of the liberal nation-state and the importance of migrant/minority integration on the political agenda offer a possibility for religion to become visible within the public and political domain. In this process, religion is politicised, acquired public aura and becomes a subject as much as an object of policy processes and discourses.

The religionisation of politics, the effect of religion of politics, can be followed at several levels. As religion moves to the centre of the political debate, institutions and actors which speak in the name of Islam or are perceived as doing so become discussion partners. As religion is conflated with culture and ethnicity, religious arguments enter discussions which do not necessarily fall under the domain of religion, but which are social, economic or political in nature. By participating in discussions about topics which do not necessarily fall under its jurisdiction, arguments are made or heard as being made in the name of religion about a wide range of topics, such as aims and means of (religious) education, participation in the labour market, family structure and gender roles, just to name a few.

Furthermore, the values and norms which are presented in these arguments are likely to differ from the norms and values which are promoted by Western liberal
democracies, and which are at the basis of the formation of the European nation-state. These alternative systems of reference pose a challenge by relativisation of the taken for granted liberal norms and values and offer a critical view towards their implementation in practice. Religious arguments and ideas are present in the political sphere and have the opportunity to make an impact on decisions which are political in nature.

Finally, the culturalisation and moralisation of citizenship and the interference of politics with areas of individual life which belong to the private sphere such as family, children and education, belief and loyalty further blur the difference between the private and the public and between politics and religion. This *ad hoc* influence on each other politicises religion while it religionises politics, making the differentiation of spheres not as neat as secularisation theory would wish for.

Religion is re-entering the public sphere through the opportunities given by changes in the regulation of migration and integration processes, and by the reshaping of citizenship models. As a consequence of the public interaction between religion and politics, both actors are influenced by each other. While religion is politicised, politics also becomes religionised. Religion is protecting its own rights and by this reshapes the discussion about the hegemony of the state in one which contests the universality of the Western liberal democratic values.

**References**


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