Regimes of Secularity

Citizenship, Religion and Muslimness in Rotterdam, Leicester and Marseille

Summary

Western European nation-states thought that they had solved their 'problem' with religion by opting for secularity and for a separation of spheres of influence. This equilibrium, however, proves to be fragile. As Muslim migrants have become Muslim minorities, the delicate and complex balance between religion and secularity, between private and public and between the civic and the political has become unstable once again. This is not to blame entirely on Muslim populations. In fact, the trouble with religion is partly caused by the fascination of nation-states with religion. Their interdependence forms a complex quandary and the ensuing dilemmas are reinforced by the way nation-states frame certain 'problematic' population groups and their behaviour as 'religious'.

Dealing with plurality has become an important part of everyday reality in most of Europe. Along with the growing numbers of European Muslim citizens, the accommodation of internal ethnic, cultural and religious diversity by secular liberal nation-states has become a major issue. How state authorities on the national and local level see and accommodate Muslim minorities depends on specific understandings of the role of religion in social life as encompassed in regimes of secularity, and on specific articulations of equality as implied by the concept of citizenship. Regimes of secularity, a term coined in this book, will be explained later. Because the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France are secular, when considering the situation of Muslim minorities and their collective identity in these countries it is important to ask: *When and to what effect does religion become a salient category of discourse and practice in the public and political spheres?*

While everybody seems to know to a certain extent who Muslims are and what Islam is, there is disagreement about what this implies. Furthermore, the category of 'Muslim' is used as a form of identification by others as much as a form of self-identification. These meanings and labels do not necessarily exclude each other, but together they form a field of significance to which all actors taking part in the construction of meaning contribute: a field of Muslimness. Muslimness is a concept coined in this book to cover the dialectical conglomerate formed at the intersection of discourses and practices, from the side of the communities concerned that apply the

label of 'Muslim' to themselves as well as from the side of authorities and civil society, which use the label of 'Muslim' to their own purposes. What the actors who play a part in this conundrum have in common is that they all contribute to the construction of a generic, broad category of Muslimness. This is why the second research question guiding this book is: *How is Muslimness constructed at the intersection of national and local governments and local communities?*

In order to understand the role of religion in modern liberal nation-states literature concerning the general trend of secularization has been contrasted with critical approaches towards it. Besides, literature concerned with the birth of the nation in contrast and in opposition to religion and its institutions has been consulted. As a consequence the constructed and dependent nature of the nation and of its people has been highlighted in the light of the distinction between the religious and the political. Secularity and citizenship are central concepts throughout the book. Secularity is understood and experienced today as built on the thought of secularization theory, which implies that:

- modernity causes disenchantment of religion and the triumph of rationality;
- religion and other spheres of life are functionally and structurally separated;
- religion has but a weak influence on individual and collective life.

Secularity has been understood as a concept which necessarily relates to religion and which is also dependent upon it (see also Asad 2003). Although modern society claims secularity, both its origins and its principles are inseparable in one way or the other from religion. Also, religion backs up contemporary social structures and political claims-making, crossing above and beyond the spheres of society that should contain it. Citizenship has been understood as the principle that defines the boundaries of the nation and the limits of the community of those who belong to it. As such, citizenship transforms universal ideals into civil rights and duties that are connected to the entity of the nation-state, giving them meaning, voice and substance (Arendt 1958).

The added value of this book is its engagement with etic and emic categories of what counts as being a Muslim, and implicitly what counts as being religious across time and space. On this basis a multilayered comparison has been created of how these different positions in regard to the label of Muslim change and influence each other. This book aims to contribute to the anthropology of secularity initiated by Talal Asad (2003). With that aim it combines a comparative perspective with an attention to:

- contexts and interrelations between different levels of existence;

- different frames and formations of meaning;

- various actors involved in producing discourses and practices.

This book can also be read as an empirical test and an application of Taylor's ideas about the secular as part of the modern social imaginary (2007). Inspired by him I focus on different secular contexts as formed and interpreted both top-down and bottom-up. More than Taylor, I am drawing attention to the political context in which secularity is embedded and the use of the secular in governance.

The levels of analysis of this study are rather complex: on the one hand the formation of secularity and citizenship and their articulation into regimes take shape in their ideological dimension at the level of the nation-state. On the other hand, as a consequence of the decentralization of the state their interpretation and implementation occurs mostly at the level of the city. Finally, Muslim minorities themselves also make use of secularity and citizenship and critically engage with them through collective claims-making on religious grounds. While the opposition between the West and the East and the special negative attention given to Islam is not new but rather a permanent feature of the history of Western thought (Wheatcroft 2004), Muslims can now engage with this from the position of citizens of Western nation-states. As Muslim minorities feel the precarious and charged balance between religion and the secular: while state authorities and civil society increasingly see them as a religious group, they emphasize their religious self-identification.

These diverse contexts asked for varied types of data. First, on the basis of secondary literature I have explored changes in attitude regarding religion and Muslim immigrants in order to construct a historical perspective. Besides, I have analysed national policy documents and advisory reports for the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France. Secondly, the attitudes mentioned here are further shaped on the local level. Therefore, I have explored local approaches targeting Muslim populations directly or indirectly in the multicultural cities of Rotterdam, Leicester and Marseille through an analysis of local policies regarding the specific needs and problems encountered in an urban space. I have also given attention to their implementation, emphasising what the label of Muslim entails. The period covered is between 1998 and 2008. Thirdly, grassroots initiatives in the three cities have been identified and explored in their engagement with the field of Muslimness. This has been done through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Rotterdam, Leicester and Marseille, consisting of participant observation and interviews with local administrators, NGOs and Muslim activists.

Fieldwork findings in Rotterdam, Leicester and Marseille

Nation-states are co-producing the Muslim identity through their mechanisms of control, such as discourses and policy processes related to security, radicalization, integration and assimilation. They adjoin certain adjectives to the label of Muslim and through this they contribute to the creation of the field of Muslimness from a power-imbued perspective. Discursively, nation-states connect Muslims to their own goals, practices and populations, relating and 'forcing' Muslims to engage with them all. Muslim minorities share a field of Muslimness that reflects different forms of knowledge stemming first of all from different positions vis-à-vis power. While the nation-state expresses the ideology of the state and of its nation at the national level, the local level is more concerned with solving problems in a pragmatic way.

In Rotterdam citizenship is used as a tool to generate public commitment in the city as a whole and at the neighbourhood level. The idea of a shared local identity based on shared principles at the level of the nation-state is a tool that is supposed to invoke a sense of responsibility. Only those who endorse this idea can be considered 'real' citizens. Aspiring citizens can become involved in the polis, which is based on the principle of citizenship as equality, but those seen as not yet possessing the proper attributes that form the basis of this equality should be required to conclude a contract. This approach has met opposition from the Muslim population and representative organizations. If an agreement on the norms of behaviour and social interaction can be reached at all, the tasks and duties to achieve more involvement should be equally divided across the entire population. Only this can form a true basis for equality, Muslims in Rotterdam argue. They see citizenship primarily as a tool for inclusion in the nation-state, rather than as a pledge to a set of norms and behaviour. In their view, the principle of citizenship can be looked at from different angles: civil contribution and participation may also be called upon from the religious point of view, that is as duties of the believer. The basis of motivation for certain behaviour can differ between population groups, even if their actual behaviour may have very similar effects.

In Leicester the citizenship discourse only refers to membership in the community, while community cohesion is called one of the main goals of the city. It is the active citizen that is the dream of the local authorities, the citizen who celebrates diversity and participates in civil programs. Citizens themselves invoke citizenship when the equal distribution of resources is at stake and when Muslim colonial 'double-migrants' recall that they were citizens of the Empire. In this tradition the principle of

citizenship is not contradicted by internal diversity, rather it is meant to accommodate diversity by distinguishing between its various dimensions.

In Marseille citizenship is foremost connected to a discourse of integration and participation. The essential vehicle of citizenship is considered to be partnership, where citizenship would work as the social bond promoting social cohesion. As the local government considers equal and active participation to be the key to an active citizenship that enables individuals to fulfil their duty of expressing themselves and participating, the areas of education and cultural activities have been gaining importance. Integration, a tool against social exclusion is to be achieved through the aid of intermediary associations, seen as essential tools for participation and consensual decision-making. However, this mechanism of representation based on an ideal of citizenship involves mainly elites and therefore raises issues of representativeness and diversity within the populations concerned.

All three cities call for an active citizenship based on participation and do not hesitate to involve religious organizations, religious representatives and/or religious citizens in the governing process or in policy implementation. The three cities prefer to work with representative bodies that speak for communities, often with bodies that they deem representative for 'the' Muslim community. This approach is often problematic, as heterogeneity rather than homogeneity characterizes urban Muslim communities and the process of representation is often arduous. Whole communities can be neglected and marginalized through the appointment of certain bodies as representatives, thus aggravating an already existing tension and competition between the diverse Muslim communities.

While local policies and their implementation call for an active citizenship practiced through civil participation in all three cities researched, they do have different recipients in mind. Rotterdam targets citizens, especially Muslim women, Leicester calls upon civil society to collaborate with the institutions of the local state and Marseille calls for elites to mediate between 'their' communities and the local authorities. This accounts for differences in the way citizens are actually empowered to participate and to the areas that are defined as appropriate for participation.

Several features of secularity have also been identified: a politicized secularity inspired by secularism in the Netherlands, a selective secularity in the United Kingdom and a preferential, paradoxical and Catholic secularity in France. Although each of these aspects has been discussed in relation to the specific geographic locations, they coexist in

each place, although their weight varies from one city to another. In the Netherlands we observe a moral panic caused by Islam combined with a gendered approach specific to Rotterdam. The United Kingdom displays a security obsessed view on radicalization coupled with a plural, diversity-oriented multicultural Leicester. Finally, in France, these regimes of secularity are transformed and adapted to the national and local conditions through a general blindness towards religion coupled with a wish to make Marseille a welcoming, multicultural city. At the meeting point of all these conjunctions Muslimness is shaped by regimes of secularity, but also through the agency of Muslim groups and communities living in the cities.

Muslimness in Rotterdam has been mainly reactive so far: reactive to the political and administrative context. Policies and policy frames have had more impact than initiatives that stem from the grassroots. Yet, together they form the causes of an emerging form of collective identity among Muslims, who are looking for possibilities of growth and self-expression. Muslimness as defined from the grassroots strongly emphasizes a changed religiosity, adapted to the requirements of a modern society: self-reflexivity, social activism and social engagement, and individuality in one's freedom of conscience and in one's degree of religiosity. Stigmatization, strong top-down approaches driven by political agendas and distinguishing labels are increasingly opposed to and even rejected by the Muslim minorities.

Muslims in Leicester construct Muslimness around the idea of religion as a positive social force, in spite of the secular character of society. Thus, taking religious individuals and forms of collective organization on board, different alliances are forged on different issues and in different constellations. Muslims in Leicester resent culture and religion being blamed as the causes of the problems whose nature, in fact, is economic. Careful to point out that inequality persists beyond diversity they try to fight against a rhetoric that they perceive as noxious. Muslims who responded to this study feel singled out while their religion is exposed to critiques from many angles: other Muslim communities may always question their purity, while the state may always question their moderation.

Muslimness in Marseille remains private, even in its collective forms. Regarding faith, conditions are imposed once religious practices become visible. In the example of the Mosque of Marseille we have seen that it is the magnitude of the project that is considered the biggest problem, followed by the nature of religious institutions, which should resemble secular institutions as much as possible. The competition and rivalry between Muslim communities allows for a conflicted Muslimness to develop, on the one

side influenced by the struggle for social and political legitimacy between different groups, while on the other side formed by politicized local interests. While some grassroots groups struggle for local visibility and influence, other Muslims feel that their initiatives are hijacked and transformed into political projects. This leads to mistrust among communities, and also between communities and the local authorities.

Conclusions: Citizenship, secularity and Muslimness

Under the influence of world events reflected and interpreted through national and local circumstances Muslims have been increasingly targeted in terms of their religiosity by authorities and civil society. This means that almost all aspects of these population groups have been seen as an expression of their religion. This has made it difficult to deal with these groups and their demands for accommodation, given the secular nature of the nation-states in which they have acquired membership, often on the basis of (legal) citizenship.

In this book I argue that regimes of secularity and citizenship, both rooted in the modern social imaginary, are essential to understand the position of European Muslims today. Muslimness, I insist, is an appropriate term to capture the wide variety of positions that different actors construct regarding Muslims and being a Muslim, and the multitude of possible positions towards these constructions. Most importantly, the insights of this book present a window of opportunity to rethink and re-evaluate the role and place of religion in modern society. The findings inform us about the immanent struggle in which religious minority groups are caught up, while the importance of their relationship to transcendence decreases as a consequence of this.

Western European nation-states look at religious migrants or minorities through two paradigms of subjectivization, first by defining Otherness in terms of religion and secondly, by filtering Otherness through the paradigm of citizenship. One of the insights of this book is that a focus on citizenship and secularity as two separate entities is not satisfactory. Citizenship and secularity are both articulated in a field of power and used for the purpose of governance. In the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France religion is understood and governed through regimes of secularity. Regimes of secularity, a term coined in this book, are normative systems built upon a separation between immanence and transcendence, religion and the secular. This distinction is a historical construct that stemming from the specific relationship between religious institutions and the state in each of the three countries studied. Besides, regimes of secularity have a

political side. As secularity is at the basis of the nation-state, dealings with religion within the state necessarily take place in a field of power.

Besides affecting the attitude towards religion in general and the studied group in particular in an overarching and rather abstract way as part of the modern social imaginary, secularity and also citizenship work as instruments of governing. However, citizens not only are the recipients of different methods of governance but also respond to these with different practices and discourses, thus giving way to diverse articulations and interpretations of citizenship, secularity and religion. Once more, it is through the continuous meeting and negotiation of citizens as subjects and objects of the nation-state and through the state's engagement with their religiousness that (part of) religion is shaped as a field of significance. Within this space many actors, among which the state (at different levels) and religious citizens themselves, articulate and conjugate what it means to be religious. More importantly, secularity, religion and citizenship are three concepts that can never be reconciled with each other, as they are born in opposition. While secularity and religion depend and define each other, they are also in an indirect relationship. Citizenship at its turn defines the relationship between the individual and the (secular) nation-state and proposes the nation as an exclusive recipient of loyalty and membership. By proposing an immanent order citizenship, calling upon secularity, formulates two important points of tension for religious citizens.

The same mechanism that produces subjects is also the starting point of subjectivity and agency - discourses and practices that name the subject are the same as the discourses and practices which are incorporated in the subject's self-construction. This dialectic process of identification and identity formation points out that while identity formation is influenced by discourses and practices that define, identification with the given discourses and practices is not a passive process. Religious citizens are neither passive receivers, nor victims of their environment, but they actively create their identity and reshape the discourses and practices that affect them. In the process of self-formation and construction they use labels, names and categories acquired top-down, while they creatively relate and intersect these with bottom-up labels, categories and names. These different positions necessarily influence the way in which social worlds are constructed and explained, but each of them throws light on a different aspect of social reality.