

**French *laïcité*,
between national conflict and local compromises**

For an interactionist approach to the concept of political culture

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The framework of analysis presented in the introduction helps stimulate a comparative approach on the integration of ethnic-religious diversity in European countries, particularly France and the Netherlands. Instead of 'essentializing' the culture of newcomers – in this case Muslims – as a factor explaining their difficulties of integration, it shifts the focus to the political culture of the host country, which is more or less exclusive with regard to differences. It is not difference, as such, that is an obstacle to integration but the manner in which it is constructed and interpreted according to the cultural codes and the greater or lesser tolerance of the host country to accept diversity. The political concept of nationality and citizenship works, as Brubaker (1992) has already indicated, as a factor of inclusion and exclusion. The issue of the role of women crystallizes cultural oppositions.

The question here is whether political culture amounts to maintaining a culturalist type analysis, essentializing in turn the culture of the host country and, in view of its intrinsic characteristics (homogeneity, stability and its global nature), conferring on it a monocausal explanatory character. Furthermore, the theoretical framework in the introduction borrows a developmentalist definition of political culture from Almond and Verba ([1963] 1989): the older the democracy, the more stable it is, and therefore the more susceptible a country is to be open towards diversity. Therefore, it is difficult to see how the political culture of a country can change, since the cultural variable is presented as an independent variable.

However, by leaving the field of a macro sociological analysis in order to present a micro sociological approach as inspired by the field of research on the management of religious diversity in French state schools with regard to the culture of *laïcité* among teachers, it seems possible to maintain the hypothesis of political culture while making it more complex. Staying within the framework of interactionist sociology, the object of this analysis is neither the culture of the newcomers nor that of the host country, but rather their interaction. I focused on the

answers given by the French teaching body in response to students' demands concerning the expression of their religious affiliation (the wearing of religious symbols, taking days off for religious reasons, and the restriction of certain foods from the school canteen, for a description of the whole research project see Massignon, 2000). I wish to demonstrate, with the help of this example, that it is possible to illuminate the comprehensive rather than explanatory virtues of the term of political culture. Thus I depart from the developmentalist and systemo-functional assumptions that have guided the definition of political culture by Almond and Verba and the American School of political sociology, in favor of an interactionist approach to culture inspired by Clifford Geertz (1973). Culture is a structure for comprehension, a code, a system of meaning allowing a minimal congruence between actors; it is not a homogeneous whole implying similar conducts. Therefore, *laïcité*, which is a key concept in French political culture, can be reinstated 1. in its oppositions, conflicts and evolutions, and 2. by exploring the link between disciplinary practices and teachers' systems of beliefs.

***Laïcité* in the French political culture: conflicts and evolutions**

In France, *laïcité* constitutes a key concept of political culture, which can generally be qualified as universalist and monist (Wieviorka, 1996). It is founded, in other respects, on a very particular concept of politics. In fact, *laïcité*, under the Third Republic, was defined within a framework associating the autonomy of politics and its corollary, the privatization of religion. This combination was legitimized by a political philosophy affirming the superiority of the state as guardian of universal values and public interest against civil society threatened by particularisms (see the analyses of Nicolet, 1982 and Baudouin & Portier, 2001). This vision is particularly embodied by the 'Educational State'. State schools are the nodal point of socialization to the Republican ideal and national feeling. The student had to subjugate his or her allegiances to primary groups (family, religion, ethnicity, region) in order to progress, through instruction, to the universal, whose emblematic figure was the rational citizen who gave primary allegiance to the nation-state.

A French peculiarity, this obligation was not limited to newcomers from different religious, ethnic and national backgrounds, but extended to the entire French population, including the old Catholic majority. In fact, *laïcité* asserted itself in a conflictual manner that did not oppose

natives and newcomers, but rather was a rift between those holding two concepts of the Nation, each of which laid claim to representing the whole country: the partisans of France as a Christian nation (*la France fille aînée de l'Église*), and those who promoted a France which was the beneficiary of the principles of 1789 (*La France patrie des droits de l'homme*). This internal rift within French political life was able to integrate the Jewish and Protestant religious minorities that supported *laïcité*, with the promise of an accepted pluralism and a secular definition of the Nation. Later, the Dreyfus Affair, the Great War, then the split between collaborators and *Resistants*, during the World War II, helped to integrate various European migrants who came to France at the end of the 19th century, and between the two world wars. Finally, class conflicts allowed the integration of migrant workers, namely the *Maghrébins*, during the 1960s and 1970s. Even if this process was hostile to the public expression of religious, linguistic, ethnic and regional differences, French political culture and *laïcité* acted as vectors of integration and of diversity (as long as this diversity remained private) and as a means of access to citizenship for minorities. France has a long history of internal and external conflicts which prompted the integration of newcomers. This fact questions the idea of political culture as a principle of homogeneity and stability. A dialogical conception of culture allows for the understanding of this specificity.

Nowadays, the Republican model is in crisis as it is challenged by deep transformations which affect all modern democracies. Those changes affect the French Republican model more profoundly (Baudouin & Portier, 2001): globalization favors other national models that are more compatible with the "consecration of civil society" (Gauchet, 1998), hedonist individualism, the "multiculturalization" of society, the expansion of moral relativism and post-modern values, and decentralized governance in an interdependent world. As Jean-Paul Willaime underlines, there was a 'laïcisation of *laïcité*' by an internal critique of the ideals of progress, science and reason that were the basis of a secular universalist utopia, as foundation of a transfer of sacredness in politics (Willaime, 1990, p. 195). In fact, all those evolutions affect a nation-state's authority. The state is the backbone of French national unity, self-consciousness and ability to act and move. It is often said that in France the state made the nation whereas in Germany, Italy or Poland the nation made the state. It is therefore no surprise that the debate in France over Muslim integration occurs in public schools, which was the

backbone of French socialization to democracy during the Third Republic.

Laïcité has always been an object of social debate. It does not function as a uniform concept. There never was a homogeneous secular culture; *laïcité* is a melting pot concept at the cross roads of various intellectual contributions: spiritualism, positivism, socialism... (Nicolet, 1982; Ognier, 2001; see also Baubérot, 1990, 1999, 2004). There are different ways of understanding *laïcité* and applying it to the educational sphere. *Laïcité* was the object of a virulent conflict of interpretation producing a scrambling effect (Baubérot, 1996) in the century-old conflict between clericals and anti-clericals, pitting Catholics against secularists, the right against the left, in what Emile Poulat called the 'war between the two France' (Poulat, 1987). During the second half of the 20th century, the residue of this quarrel was the conflict over state financing for private religious schools. During the headscarves affair, it was the secularists and the political left –far more than the right wing parties- that were divided. They were caught between the necessity to exclude veiled schoolgirls in order to maintain the principle of *laïcité* in school and negotiating the secular rule in order to protect the freedom of conscience of the students and their chance for progressive integration into French society through state schooling. The ideological debate is far from settled (Molokotos-Liederman, 2000). At first a legal line came forth from the different opinions of the Council of State (*Conseil d'État*) and ministerial circulars. According to Maurice Barbier, these texts indicate a profound change affecting French *laïcité*. France has gone from a "*laïcité* as separation", founded on the division between the public/private spheres, the primacy of politics and the confinement of religion to the private sphere, to "*laïcité* as neutrality", founded on the acknowledgement of the pre-eminence of individual rights (Barbier, 1995, pp. 84-90). The law on religious signs of the 15th of March 2004 inverted the balance, which is proof of an instability between the two visions of *laïcité*.

French political culture has therefore, in its own particular way, recorded the mutations affecting all western democracies with the decline of the reason of state and the triumph of the belief in human rights. In a period of globalization, europeanization and the transformation of the role of nation-states, it is impossible to maintain an impenetrable political culture. Furthermore, political culture cannot be conceived as a permanent fact. It is evolving. In order to demonstrate its micro sociological mechanisms, one must leave the macro sociological analysis at a

national level and examine the interaction between teachers and immigrant students in educational institutions, and more particularly the face to face relationship between teachers and students inside the classroom, between those who teach and those who are taught.

The *laïcité* of teachers: from value to action

Here we examine the situation before the law of 2004 banning religious signs from public school to show the scope for accommodations and innovations of French secular political culture. *Laïcité* is not the only principle of action that guides the behavior of teachers faced with student demands to be allowed express their religion. Some requirements are difficult to conciliate. There is the necessity to maintain peace (hold the classroom and maintain order in the institution) and uphold their secular principles, while at the same time observing the principle of equality (equality of opportunity in the education system, equality of the sexes) and the necessity to integrate newcomers through state schools. Sometimes, this results in a '*laïcité* of indifference' and religion is put aside in order to achieve equality among students regardless of their religious origin. Managing religion is then achieved through a trivialization of the religious character of student demands. For example, the demand by Jewish and Muslim students for special meals to substitute for pork in school canteens are accepted since they can be likened to medical necessities and the fact that the students have to eat. The general introduction of self-service canteen offers a practical solution to these demands. In the negotiations over the wearing of the veil, before the law of 2004 banning them from public schools, teachers ended up proposing a compromise: the wearing of a headdress that has fewer religious connotations, such as a bonnet, a turban or a small colored headscarf. Therefore, this can be viewed as a characteristic the integration model *à la française*: the right to indifference rather than the right to difference.

Religious demands are managed at the disciplinary level: the Council of State condemned incidents of the wearing of veils because they disturbed public order and because there was a refusal to engage in dialogue with the teaching body. The law of March 2004 has hardened relations. The wearing of religious signs is totally excluded from state public schools, but the circular on its application maintains the principle of dialogue between teachers, the student and her family before any

exclusion from school. What is at issue is the visibility of religious practices in the educational field. A headscarf is more visible than a small cross worn as jewelry. An empty school on the day which the Muslim feast *Eid* falls on is more visible than some Jewish students missing classes on Saturdays, in observance of the *Shabbat*, though both cases contravene the students' obligation to attend school. The numerical impact is therefore taken into account and it is unfair towards Islam in most cases, as Islamic students form the majority of the student body in educational institutions in certain suburban areas. Therefore, the number of students who observe Ramadan or wear veils introduces a relationship of force with the education authorities. However, the demands of Jewish students or those of practicing Catholics (a minority) fare better through their individual negotiations, which are facilitated by the existence of semi-official religious mediators such as the Catholic chaplain in secondary institutions or the local rabbi. Furthermore the parents of Jewish or Catholic students have a better command of the codes of educational institutions. This allows them to make their case through demands by petition or during the time of student registration at the beginning of the school year without disturbing the school order. Thus they avoid the protests and other violations of school discipline which Muslim students and their families sometimes engage in (for example, the refusal to make an official demand for the authorization of absences during Muslim religious holidays, which are provided for by the Official Bulletin of the Ministry of National Education). The codes of a democratic society weigh on the perception of religious expressions. What is troubling about veiled students is not the veil itself but rather the accompanying behavior inspired by religious fundamentalism such as the refusal for girls and boys to mix (in sports, in sex education during the natural sciences class), the refusal to accept the instruction of secular knowledge in sciences, philosophy, literature (e.g., refusing instruction on the Theory of Evolution theories, or refusal to study 'blasphemous' authors like Voltaire). Thus feminist principles condemn the veil as a sign of female submission whereas the *kippa* and the Sikh turban do not have the same sexist connotation. Feminism and *laïcité* can sometimes be used as an argument to support implicitly a mundane and acceptable form of racism, which some authors have denounced (Guénifi-Souilamas & Macé, 2006).

Laïcité in school appears here as a space of interactions and competition for the definition of what is the legitimate practice in school as a disciplinary space. The explanation through culture does not exclude an

analysis of the structures of domination of teachers versus students and of French natives versus immigrants.

Before the law of March 2004, teachers managed the religious demands of students on a case-by-case basis, even if in the name of *laïcité* they would like to refuse all of them. This has led to an implicit hierarchy of religions, which does not correspond with the egalitarian secular beliefs of teachers. It is the result of the necessity to maintain order in school while safeguarding and teaching the values of the host society. This hierarchy combines the criteria of tradition (favorable to the majority religion and to the old and established Protestant and Jewish religions recognized by the Napoleonic *Concordat*), of integration (applied negatively mostly to Muslim students, since Buddhists are not seeking visibility of their practice in public spaces), of notoriety (applied to 'minor minorities' religions like Sikhs or Seventh-Day Adventists) and of dangerousness (applied to sects). The criterion of notoriety can sometimes work to the benefit of minor religious groups: their religious expression is considered as mostly exotic more than religious and therefore is ignored; it was the case for the Sikhs turban which was tolerated before the Law on religious signs of 2004. During the preparation of this Law by different governmental and parliamentary commission, the case of Sikhs was forgotten. They were not consulted. But they have strongly mobilized on national and above all international plan since the voting of the Law which changed the overall perception of the turban from an ethnic sign to a religious one. The criterion for integration is ambiguous because it shows the complexity in the perception of difference as well as its stereotypes. As Michèle Tribalat (1995) pointed out, immigrants from the Maghreb are rather well integrated, because they speak French in the private sphere, have mixed marriages and take part in elections, at least more than Portuguese migrants for instance. However, they are seen as less integrated into French society than Asians, even though the latter come from afar and have stronger communal ties, something that is generally conceived negatively in the French context.

The secular culture of teachers can be analyzed as an element of their perception of reality (even teachers who are hostile to excluding students are against their being allowed to wear veils, this being either a sign of Muslim fundamentalism, or, more frequently, a sign of the oppression of women). However, an explanation just referring to the strongly affirmed secular culture of teachers (Aubert, 1984; Aubert, Ozouf & Ozouf 1987; Bianconi, 1987) is not sufficient to clarify the diversity of disciplinary practices with regard to the religious demands

of students from one school to another and, sometimes even, from one class to another in the same institution. It is necessary to construct a theoretical space between long-term culture and the short-term situation by defining gradual levels of analysis: cultural systems (and their relationship to socialization), attitude systems, conduct systems and situations of interaction. The notion of culture, therefore, finds its heuristic importance as a link between the individual and the collective. It is conceived as a whole of internalized norms. The more we draw near a micro-sociological level of analysis, the more identities become individualized into conducts.

We can draw two behavioral ideal-types by going back to the Weberian classifications, leading to two visions of *laïcité* and of the relation between law and practice. There are teachers acting according to a value-based rational and developing an ethic of conviction: in the name of *laïcité*, they are favorable to the exclusion of any religious symbol from school property. For them, *laïcité* is defined substantively as a constraining value which guides their actions. In this category there are more teachers, who have been socialized solely in state schools and are often detached from religion. Indeed some are atheists, for whom school was a tool for social promotion. In the conflict over the veil they demanded a law prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols in state schools. They assimilate *laïcité* to the ideal of the Third Republic. This position can be interpreted as a defensive reflex to the crises and ongoing changes in the education system that is in the process of massification and subject to economic criteria for efficiency (for an analysis on the crisis of the concept of *laïcité* in parallel to that of the Republican school, see Dubet, 1996).

However, there are teachers acting according to rationality by finality and developing an ethic of responsibility. The manifestation of religion inside school shocks them but they are ready to define ways of compromising. In the conflict over the wearing of the headscarf, they refuse to expel the veiled students, preferring a long-term acculturation through the education system rather than an exclusion that would send the veiled young girls back to their family and community environment. These individuals are more often the school principals or the directors of secular associations or teachers' unions. Sometimes they hold religious beliefs. They attended alternatively state or private school and came from higher social and professional backgrounds. For them, *laïcité* is a procedural principle (in accordance with the procedural theories of justice of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, see Leclerc, 2001), a rule of the game

that is negotiable within certain limits, namely in respect of human rights. They are favorable to managing conflicts over the veil on a case-by-case basis and claim a certain margin of action when adapting the rule. They take into account the diverse reasons for wearing the veil, rather than those that are exclusively religious (for example: the transitory aspect of the wearing of the veil such as an adolescence crisis, uneasiness regarding representations of the body and protection from a sexist environment in their neighborhood).

This pragmatic and open attitude is difficult to maintain in the context of the identity crisis of public schools and their teachers. Confronted with globalization, a large proportion of French leaders and public opinion reassert French political culture: the so-called 'French social model', public services *à la française*, and 'cultural exception'. In the same movement of self-defense, many of them support a strict *laïcité*, ignoring jurisprudential evolutions and local regulations that occurred or were enacted in France during the last twenty years. During the parliamentary Commission Stasi (2003), French media introduced a bias in the way they reported national debates on the wearing of religious symbols in schools. They gave space to disputes over the general principles rather than examining day to day local negotiations. They gave coverage to some local and strident headscarves disputes rather than reporting complex and ordinary compromises.

The law of March 15th, 2004, forbidding the wearing of headscarves in public school, seems to be symptomatic of a reassertion of French political culture. In fact, when we examine the recent events which prompted the enacting of this law, *laïcité*, as part of French political culture, is not the explanatory variable as such, but rather bares a certain relationship to time and a particular way from which a collective entity produces its self-understanding. In times of crisis, a certain idealization of the past occurs. Developments that were the result of historical compromises and innovations are taken out of their original context, deprived of their historical complexity and became symbols of collective identity. What has been lost is the consciousness of how *laïcité* became a solution to national conflicts, while becoming a value of the social contract. This topic was examined by Jean Baubérot with his concept of *pacte laïque*. What has also been lost is the link between action and values, giving an impression of a static and rigid posture or political culture. *Laïcité* is perceived as a part of political culture when it is in crisis and no longer provides a workable framework of action connecting local conflicts and arrangements to national values. The concept

of political culture is retrospective; this is what limits its explanatory dimension. It is an idealized vision of the past, a stereotypical self-definition, where values are no longer a model of action, an explanation of the present and a vision of the future.

Conclusion: towards a negotiated and pedagogical *laïcité*

Laïcité appears to be a complex aspect of political culture, both in debates as well as in its continuous transformation. Many teachers, who are confronted with student demands for religious expression, used to make concessions between their secular values and the necessity to hold the classroom and integrate new arrivals. Between 1999 and 2000, when I studied the micro sociological interaction between teachers and students in secondary schools in the suburbs of Paris, I observed a diversity of conduct and the frequent adapting of strategies where the teachers put their personal secular beliefs to one side and where the students learned to formulate their observance of religious traditions in terms of individual rights and personal choices. Can this 'do-it-yourself'-attitude lead to overall changes in the political culture?

Looking back at recent evolutions, it must be acknowledged that the gathering of local situations and functional agreements between secular rule and the religious prescriptions of students have not led in return to a global change in the meaning of *laïcité* and more generally French political culture. This symbolic 're-codification' of reality was only partially achieved and imperfectly distributed. Local practice did not develop into a general vision of the new situation leading to the formulation of renewed principles. In the late 1990s, I observed, on the one hand, a disconnection between common sense, media constructions and the political analysis of veil affairs, and on the other hand, the complexity of the field. Both pieces of the jigsaw remain separated.

What was occurring in French *banlieues* has too often been perceived as an external problem, whereas it is a crisis of the integration system. Descendants of immigrants are also actors in the national collective history. The October 2005 riots were a forceful wake-up call. The focus, central in this volume, on the national political culture of a host country corrects the current reasoning that too often attributes the difficulties of their integration to new arrivals themselves. This is especially evident when blame is attached based on the assertion that Islamic faith is incompatible with western values. Integration has to be conceived as a

process of interaction between the cultures of the host country and those of the immigrants. The challenge is to define a minimum of shared understanding and of shared methods and values, in order to resolve problems. A 'negotiated *laïcité*' is needed. A change in the political culture requires a diffusion of field work and comparative studies. Unfortunately, the century following the enactment of the 1905 law proved largely consensual and retrospective rather than prospective. It would appear that the rich vein of international academic debate and research on *laïcité* has not reached the general public. However, in the vision of Condorcet and Jules Ferry, *laïcité*, and more generally democratic politics, have always been a matter of long term pedagogy.

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Dutch way of dealing with religious difference

Peter van Rooden

Introduction

The history of the Netherlands offers a rich field for analyzing concepts dealing with the relation between religion, religious groups, and political authority. There are two main reasons for this. In the first place, since their emergence as an independent political entity in the 1570s, the Northern Netherlands have been characterized by religious pluralism. Next to the state sponsored Reformed church, Mennonites, Catholics, Lutherans, Jews, and Arminians set up their own organizations and held their own religious services. Secondly, the political management of this religious diversity underwent marked changes over time. Any kind of Whig interpretation of these changes fails. Dutch religious history cannot be adequately interpreted as the development of toleration or the growth of religious liberty (see Hsia & Van Nierop (eds.), 2001). Huge shifts that have taken place in the way the Netherlands have dealt with religious difference.

I want to illustrate these difficulties by analyzing the concepts used over time to express religious difference. To analyze the way the relations between the various religious groups and political authority have been conceptualized over time, I have looked fairly systematically at legal texts (collected by De Visser, 1926-1927). Next to these legal sources, I have looked, much more loosely, at the way the various religious groups described themselves and others. The main conclusions to be drawn are threefold.

1. There have been indeed different periods marked by different ways of conceptualizing the relation between religious bodies and political authority in Dutch history. It is probably not justified to speak about different 'discourses', however. Charles Taylor's concept of 'social imaginaries' (Taylor, 2002) might be a better term, as,
2. in no period a clear-cut terminology to express its characteristic way of conceptualizing religious bodies existed. Even in the legal texts of the nineteenth century, supposedly produced by rational bureaucracies, we meet, sometimes within a single law, with widely different terms to denote the same phenomenon. What we deal with are not so much concepts, but common understandings, shared by large groups of people,

which do not primarily exist in theoretical or abstract form, yet enable social practices and confer a sense of legitimacy, precisely what Taylor considers social imaginaries to be. Consequently,

3. in the different Dutch social imaginaries of religious difference, the nature of the body politic always plays an overwhelmingly important role.

These social imaginaries of religion were always an integral part of the social practices, which gave them their meaning. The following argument does not rest simply on discourse analysis. Knowledge of the actual way religious diversity has been managed in the Netherlands over time is necessary to understand the meaning of the terms used to express religious diversity. In the following, I will, all too briefly, describe the different periods that I propose to distinguish, constructing their social imaginaries of religion, briefly discussing the terms used, and linking these with the prevailing nature of the body politic.

Reformation (1572 – 1579)

During the Dutch Revolt, political opposition to the authority of the Habsburgs and the introduction of the Reformation became intertwined, clashing and reinforcing each other (Parker, 1977; Israel, 1995). The leader of the revolt, William of Orange, desperately tried to keep together his motley coalition of cities, estates, and nobles, only some of which wanted to introduce the Reformation. Attempts to evade the divisive potential of the religious question always involved proposals for a religious peace, which would allow ‘the public exercise’ of both the reformed and catholic ‘religions’ (De Visser, 1926-1927, pp. 155-156; Spaans, 2001). What was at issue was exactly this. The religious question concerned the public presence of religion, the institutional and liturgical aspects of Christianity. In these negotiations ‘religion’ did not mean a group of persons, or a separate organization, but the religious part of the politically controlled public sphere. In the course of the revolt, all attempts to divide this religious public sphere between Catholics and Protestants failed. Even so, the Union of Utrecht of 1579, the treaty which established what would become the Dutch Republic, allowed for the Estates of each province joining it to determine for themselves the kind of religion which would be ‘publically exercised’ (De Visser, pp. 170-176). In fact, all provinces joining the Union upheld the Reformed religion. The word *religie* in Dutch had been traditionally used to mark

just this external, visible aspect of what we would call religion, being used, for instance, for ‘religious duties’, or the different practices of the religious orders.

Article 13 of the Union of Utrecht added that “every particular person will be allowed to be free in his religion, and no-one may be searched or inquired for the sake of religion”. In these years, this meant no more than ‘no Inquisition’, but soon, already in the early seventeenth century, this principle was called ‘freedom of conscience’. Right after the Synod of Dordrecht, in 1619, when the Arminians were repressed, it was extended to the private household, where families, if there were no strangers present, were allowed to ‘read, sing or admonish’ (*voorleesen, singen of vermanen*). This was explained as ‘freedom of conscience or of particular feelings’ (De Visser, 1926-1927, p. 244). No word was used making clear that what these people would be doing while ‘singing, admonishing or reading’ was religious.

The social imaginary of the social place of religion of the reformation years rested upon the notion that religion was part of a politically controlled public order. Conflicts concerned the nature of this order. The rule that people would not be persecuted for their personal beliefs and private conduct actually strengthened the notion that religion is predominantly embedded within a public order. The reformation period ended with an established Reformed church, recognized by a political entity which was highly decentralized, and had no clear locus of sovereignty.

Confessional state (1579 – ca 1750)

The highly fragmented and politically decentralized nature of the Dutch Republic opened up spaces for the organization of dissident religious groups. This did not happen everywhere. In some parts of the Republic the political reformation took the form which was usual in the German Empire and led to confessional homogeneity. In several areas in the core of the Republic, however, both in the countryside and the cities, organized groups of religious dissenters emerged. Lutheran and Jewish communities were mainly the result of immigration. Although Catholic communities were strengthened by immigration too, they were mainly, like the Mennonites and Arminians, indigenous. Conflicts about the amount of liberty such groups were to be allowed played themselves out in different local settings and had different results (for a nice, late exam-

ple Spaans, 2004). Still, by the last quarter of the seventeenth century the religiously mixed areas of the Dutch Republic had converged onto a similar pattern. Dissident religious groups had become part of the patronage networks by means of which the political authority of local elites was exercised. Their communities were governed by laymen, took care of their own poor, and were circumscribed by well-defined borders (Spaans, 2001). They also occupied a lower social space, symbolically expressed by their less visible church building, which were not allowed to intrude upon public space. Only the immigrant communities of Jews and Lutherans in Amsterdam could build magnificent churches and synagogues, which are still landmarks in the Amsterdam cityscape, even if they are today mainly used for different purposes.

The social imaginary of this religiously mixed society rested upon the contrast between a Reformed public order and various tolerated dissident groups. At the *Great Meeting*, the convocation of the different Estates of the United Provinces in 1651, convened to make sense of the Dutch Republic when the Eighty-Years War had ended, this social imaginary was perfectly expressed. The Estates decided, on the one hand, that all provinces would “maintain and preserve the true Christian Reformed Religion, as this today is preached and taught in the public churches of these countries...”, and on the other that all “sects and denominations (*gezindheden*), which are secluded from public protection and whose existence is simply connived at (*geconniveert*), will be kept in all good order and quit” (De Visser, 1926-1927, pp. 280-304). Note that this declaration opposes a publicly taught religion to different groups, an opposition which rests upon different applications of political power. There is no overarching concept to describe what the Reformed and the dissenters might have in common. In general, in official discourse, the different dissenters are sometimes described as ‘sects’ or ‘denominations’ (*gezindheden*) but more usual as members of their particular group. Catholics are called ‘*Papists*’, ‘*de Paepsgezinde deser landen*’, ‘*roomsgezinden*’, ‘*personen van de paepsche godsdienst*’, ‘*personen van de roomse gesintheit*’ (persuasion), ‘*roomsgezinde ingezetten*’, ‘*de rooms-catholieke ingezetten*’. In a similar way Mennonites could be called ‘all those who are of the feeling or persuasion of the Mennonites’ (*alle degene die van ’t gevoelen ofte gesintheit der mennoniten zijn*), ‘*menno gehesinde*’, ‘*mennonieten*’. The Jews are ‘those of the Jewish Nation’, while the Lutherans are ‘those of the Augsburg confession’ or mostly simply ‘Lutherans’. All of these groups could thus be referred to by terms which made for a different mark of respect: ‘Ana-

baptists’ versus ‘Mennonites’, or ‘Papists’ versus ‘Roman-Catholics inhabitants’. Arminians and Mennonites referred to themselves as a brotherhood or society, not claiming to be a church.

The main contrast here is with the Reformed, the members of the public church. They are hardly ever defined as a group. Even in the – fundamental – rule that dissenters were excluded from the exercise of political power, what was actually forbidden was the membership of a sect. The one reference to the Reformed as a group that I stumbled across, was a plea by the Estates of Zeeland for a stricter repression of the dissenters, because this would strengthen the allegiance of ‘all true patriots’ (De Visser, 1926-1927, p. 281). There did emerge, in the course of the seventeenth century, a notion of ‘God’s people’ (*Gods volk*), but this was a term used by more or less radical pietists within the public church, to define the truly pious over against other Reformed, not to distinguish between Reformed and others.

The word ‘Church’ (*Kerk*) was quite common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, yet it was not used to distinguish between different religious groups. It was always part of the social imaginary of the political community. The expression *Staat en Kerke*, ‘State and Church’ denotes the political and religious order of society, which stands over the subjects of the Republic. The Republic is depicted as a disciplined society. Its authorities uphold a public order, which has a political and an ecclesiastical aspect. ‘Church’ is used to denote the latter aspect of this public order (Van Rooden, 1999a). This early modern Dutch social imaginary of religion opposed a public religious order to various dissenting groups, and did not find it necessary to employ a single concept to denote what we might think that this order and these dissenting groups had in common. This social imaginary made it possible, both for contemporaries and present-day observers, to describe the religious order of the Dutch Republic as an instance of the early modern confessional state as well as an example of ‘toleration’ (Van Rooden, 2001). Even Reformed ministers could live with the existence of Mennonites or Catholics, provided they were kept in their place. Conversely, Mennonites and Arminians could praise the Dutch Republic because it left individuals free to pursue their own religious interests.

The notion of the Dutch Republic as defined by a public order led to a spate of historical writing. Religious histories mainly focused on the Synod of Dordrecht of 1618-1619, which was considered to be the basis of the religious order of the Republic (Van Rooden, 1998).

Enlightenment and Revolution (ca 1750 – 1815)

The main change in the social imaginary of religion in the Netherlands took place within this period. For the first time, terms like 'religions' (*godsdiens*) or 'churches' (*kerken*) emerged which made it possible to subsume the public church and the various dissenting bodies under overarching concepts, and to describe them as doing similar things. Ideologically, in terms of the history of ideas, this shift can be described as a confluence of pietist, Enlightened and republican currents. In the last half of the eighteenth century, the conceptual relation between political authority and citizens on the one hand, and public religion and piety on the other hand, changed decisively. The concepts were fused. Political authority was no longer depicted as a hierarchy, upholding order, but as an instance fostering a moral community of virtuous citizens. Religion was considered to be a force which created moral selves, committed to the public good. The new political and religious imaginaries could easily be integrated. The virtuous citizen is a pious believer, and religion is the source of the civic virtue which makes any nation strong. Accordingly, magistrates and ministers were no longer above all required to represent and uphold a public order. They had to foster moral selves committed to the national community. The contribution of other religious groups to this endeavor could be recognized (Van Rooden, 2004a).

This new cultural and religious nationalism — every citizen has to be a moral person, because he is a member of the national community, and this morality presupposes personal piety — was fostered from the late 1750s onwards by part of the political elite, by different groups which were instances of a new, enlightened sociability, and by enlightened and pietist currents within both the public church and the tolerated religious groups. It was deeply determined by the perceived decline of the Dutch Republic from its seventeenth century great power status. During the Seven-Years War, the Republic had been a very minor player indeed. Till the late 1770s, the new nationalism was markedly apolitical, in the fundamental sense that it did not lead to conflict. The catastrophic defeat which the Dutch Republic suffered in the Fourth English War (1780-84) led to a sudden political use of the new religious nationalism. Clearly, the defeat of the Dutch state was due to it not being a virtuous republic, a defect for which the government could be held accountable. The subsequent piecemeal democratic revolution, which developed very slowly,

precisely because there was no clear centre in the Dutch Republic, was suppressed by Prussian troops in 1787. Eight years later, invading French revolutionary armies re-installed the defeated revolutionaries, who embarked on a radical overhaul of the Dutch state, in close dependence on French examples and support. They separated church and state, centralized the Dutch republic, and set up a strong central bureaucracy (Schama, 1977).

The social imaginary of religion and politics which made possible and legitimized these revolutionary acts had been prepared since the 1750s. Religion was no longer located in a religious order, but only in individuals, making all religious groups, including the public church, alike. Even conservative opponents of the revolution spoke, after their victory in 1787, about 'the true reformed religion (*godsdiens*)', opposing it to the 'tolerated religions (*godsdiens*)' (De Visser, 1926-1927, p. 4). The Enlightened novels of Wolff and Deken of the 1780s had already used the word 'church' (*kerk*) to characterize both the public, and the dissenting churches. Reformed ministers in the late 1770s had taken care to point out to imagined audiences of dissenters that their church, too, was inculcating piety and creating virtuous citizens. Within this new social imaginary, the main forces working against true religion were intolerance, especially the intolerance of an established church which fostered hypocrisy by rewarding a shallow outward conformity, and superstition, defined as a lack of education, resulting in a slavish following of imposed conceptions and rituals (Van Rooden, 1999a). During the revolutionary period, this social imaginary made the separation of church and state possible. Everyone agreed that religion, in general, was the source of individual piety and thus of civic virtue. That was why no particular church ought to be privileged by political authority.

If we look at the terms used to legislate religion in the rapidly following different constitutions between 1795 and 1816 (there were six of them), including their different drafts, we find a bewildering variety of concepts (De Visser, 1926-1927). The principle of the separation of church and state could be expressed as 'there will no longer be a privileged or established church in the Netherlands', but also as 'the separation of religion (*godsdiens*) from the state', or as the disestablishment of the 'established religion' (*heersende godsdiens*). It might also be formulated as 'the church is separated from the state, and the confession of any religion (*godsdiens*) does not entail any civil advantages or disadvantages'. In this formulation, religion could also be described as 'ecclesiastical doctrine'. Although occasionally it seems clear that the use of

certain terms indicates allegiance to particular politico-religious currents, in general one has to say that this terminological confusion was the result of the problem of having to express a new social imaginary in legal language. The new imaginary distinguished between (1) the essence of religion (inculcating personal piety and virtue), (2) the social organizations by which piety and virtue were inculcated, and (3) the doctrinal and liturgical aspects which distinguished these social organizations from one another. The term 'religion' (*godsdiens*) could be used for all or each of these three aspects. The social aspect could also be expressed by the terms 'church' (*kerk*), 'ecclesiastical society' (*kerkgenootschap*), 'religious society' (*godsdiens* *genootschap*), 'religious community' (*godsdiens* *gemeenschap*), or 'denomination' (*gezindheid*). No discourse here, or a profitable mine for *Begriffsgeschichte*. As this disturbingly confusing terminology makes clear, the origin of the new Dutch social imaginary of religion is not to be found in a single theory, philosophy, or ideological current. It was the result of the practices of the Dutch confessional state before 1750, which had integrated all religious organizations into the local political bodies, of the Enlightened interpretation of the international decline of the Dutch Republic as a consequence of the loss of ancestral virtue, and the wide penetration of pietistic conceptions in eighteenth century Dutch religious life.

In the period leading up to 1795 and during the radical phase of the Batavian Republic, till 1801, the opposition of true religion to intolerance and superstition was turned mainly against the former public church, although even during this period there was a persistent undercurrent of a modern form of anti-Catholicism, focusing on the supposed backwardness and moral degradation of this religion (Clemens, 1995). When the Batavian Republic, following its French masters, took a right-wing turn after 1801, anti-Catholicism became much stronger. In 1806, the new constitution, following the French law of 1802 'relative a l'organisation des cultes', allowed the government to regulate the organization and exercise of all cults (*erediensten*; French: *cultes*) (De Visser, 1926-1927, pp. 93-94).

In the two centuries following the revolutionary period, quite radical changes in the social place of religion have taken place in the Netherlands, yet the constitutional development of church-state relations stayed within the range of the various terms laid down around 1800. The huge changes in the actual position of organized Christian groups within Dutch society of the nineteenth and twentieth century were hardly re-

flected in formal legal concepts. During the revolutionary period a social imaginary of religious bodies as organizations of religious and moral selves had become established. During the last two centuries, the Kingdom of the Netherlands has thrown up different social constellations which can be based upon this fundamental social imaginary. These different constellations were not reflected in legal concepts, but at best in vernacular discourses, which are much harder to reconstruct.

Protestant nation (1815 – 1888)

After the fall of Napoleon the Netherlands were reorganized as a Kingdom, which included the former Austrian Netherlands, present-day Belgium. The new Kingdom was highly authoritarian and centralized, taking over the centralized bureaucracy built up during the revolutionary years. It exercised its revolutionary powers to the full, using the law of 1806 to restructure all Protestant groups in the North so that they would become nation-building organizations. Its heavy-handed attempt to do the same with the Catholic Church was one of the main factors driving the Belgians to revolt in 1830. The various constitutions of the new kingdom show the same terminological confusion which had characterized the revolutionary years. Religious bodies are called 'religions' (*godsdiens*), 'churches' (*kerken*), 'denominations' (*gezindheden*), but also *gezindten*) and 'ecclesiastical societies' (*kerkgenootschappen*).

The social imaginary of religion in these years is still basically that of the revolutionary years, primarily because the new Kingdom of the Netherlands imagined its subjects as members of a moral community as well. Yet the social imaginary had drifted significantly to the right. The members of this moral community need to be educated and morally informed, a task which can only be undertaken by nationally organized bodies which are recognized by the government. The moral community of the nation is something which has to be produced, and which might be broken by actions of uninformed common people, or of foreign-directed Catholic priests. The former public church was now often called the national or patriotic (*vaderlandse*) church, even when the former Protestant dissenters were assimilated to it, their ministers being educated at the same universities, their prominent laymen becoming part of the political elite. The new Kingdom celebrated the centenary of the Reformation (in 1817), instead of that of the Synod of Dordrecht (in 1819). In general, the newly emerging historical genre of church history

described Dutch religious history as the growth of the nation (Van Rooden, 1999b).

This new celebration of Protestantism (a term which only became common in the nineteenth century) also justified the way in which the Dutch state treated the overwhelming mass of its subjects not as citizens, but as objects to be improved and transformed. The nation is a moral community, yet only a small part of the citizens are truly moral selves. Religion was the most important means by which this educational relation between the state and its subjects was expressed. The legitimation of political inequality was based as much upon practice as upon ideology. During the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, the Dutch Protestant churches, supported by the state-sponsored primary education system, engaged in an unprecedented process of religious education, which raised religious knowledge all around, even as it confirmed the processes of cultural class-formation which formed the basis of the new Dutch nation state. The main others of this social imaginary were lower-class secessionists of the former public church, claiming to be truly Reformed, and, of course, Catholics, which made up some 35% of the population of the Netherlands after the revolt of Belgium. In general discourse, the opposition between 'roomsen' and 'Dutch' seems to have been the most important.

Political conflicts within this period focused on authoritarianism, the extent to which the executive was to be able to get its way. The liberal victory of 1848 loosened the links between religious bodies and the state. The new constitution (still using the same old mish-mash of terms) eased life for the lower-class dissenters and made possible the reintroduction of a Catholic episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands, an event which was opposed by one of the largest mass-movements in Dutch history (Vis & Janse (eds.), 2002). Yet this liberal loosening of control did not involve a rejection of the notion of the 'Protestant nation'. It was just a fight about how to achieve this. The political and social imaginary remained that of a single moral community of individual citizens, committed to each other and to the nation. Implicitly, this nation was still considered to be Protestant. An opposition between Protestants and Catholics, even when not expressed in legal or political terms, was always implied by this social imaginary. The recognized Protestant churches were seen as the main mechanisms by which citizens were produced. In these years, a historical lexicon offering short biographies of ministers, could be called 'The Protestant nation' (*het protestantse*

vaderland), expressing quite nicely the educationalist and elitists aspects of this notion of Protestantism (Langeraad & Visscher, 1903-1918).

The pillarized society (1888 – ca 1966)

With the introduction of mass-politics in the Netherlands in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this elitist Protestant version of the modern social imaginary of religion was broken. Abraham Kuyper, a minister who was also a stunningly capable mass-politician, split the Protestants. He led a right-wing secession from the former public church and created the first modern mass-political party in the Netherlands. His main attraction to his (mainly lower class) followers was his claim that they were not lacking in knowledge, but had preserved it. They still upheld Calvinist (a new term, introduced by Kuyper) doctrine, while the upper levels of church and state had been usurped by liberals. This notion radically subverted the educational paternalism on which the nineteenth century Dutch state had rested. Kuyper's second claim was that the Dutch nation had always been made up from three different *gezindheden*, liberal-humanists, Calvinists and Catholics, currents which he described both as persuasions and as groups (Van Rooden, 1996, pp. 185-190).

This notion of the Dutch nation as made up, not of individuals who were to be educated into members of the moral community of the nation, but of different groups characterized by their peculiar religious convictions, justified the political alliance between orthodox Protestants and Catholics. From 1889 onwards, this coalition managed to win about half of all elections. After the introduction of general suffrage, in 1917, the absolute majority of the coalition was assured till the mid 1960s.

The political power which was acquired in this way was used to build up staggering dense and complex social worlds, starting with separate educational systems but spilling over, eventually, in almost all aspects of social life: you would be a member of Catholic trade-union, play table tennis as a Catholic, breed goats as a Catholic, live in a house build by a Catholic state-subsidized corporation, use fertilizer provided by a Catholic farmers' organization. The same went for the orthodox Protestants.

This huge shift in the social place of religion in the Netherlands happened without any notable change in the legal and political terms used to denote churches. A commission set up in the early 1920s to review the

several laws concerning religion clearly did not like the term 'ecclesiastical societies' (*kerkgenootschappen*) which had become the most common concept to denote religious bodies, because it seemed to imply that churches were like secular societies (which they are not in Dutch law). Yet they did not want to use the term 'churches', because the concept 'church' might lead to theological controversies between Protestants and Catholics. All laws set up to make possible the social expansion of the Protestant and Catholic movements, for instance those regarding education, avoided references to religion as far as possible. In general, in Dutch society in the twentieth century, the existence of very strong religious minority movements within society, who together held an absolute majority, yet defined themselves over against each other, and has led to a very secularized public sphere. To denote themselves, the religious/social groups used terms defining themselves as groups made up of individuals: 'we, Roman-Catholics', 'we, Calvinists' or 'we, anti-Revolutionaries'. The different sections could be described as *volks-groepen* or *volksdelen*. The social imaginary had shifted decisively. The Dutch nation was still considered to be made up of individuals, but these individuals were thought to belong to different groups, and their allegiance to the nation could only be expressed by means of the membership of these groups. In effect, religion had become ethnicized (Van Rooden, 1996, pp. 169-199).

As was the case with the emergence of the modern social imaginary in the mid-eighteenth century, this new view of the place of religion in Dutch society had been prepared by earlier social practices. The educational drive of the nineteenth century Dutch state and churches had produced the possibility of religious mobilization amongst the Protestants once mass-politics were introduced. Its persistent anti-Catholicism had laid the basis for religious-political Catholic mobilization. The split amongst the Protestants ensured that the ghetto-builders would form a clear majority.

The new social imaginary and its practices were fiercely contested. Kuyper was truly hated for breaking up the unity of the nation and delivering it to Rome (Van Rooden, 1997). After the Second World War, when there was a common surge for renewal, the former public church allied itself with the new welfare state and, though less explicitly, with the Socialists, which had shed their German orientation and looked instead towards the modernizing British Labour Party. In a dizzying surge of renewal, it enthusiastically embraced social engineering by the state and modern American management techniques as a way to overcome

the inefficiency and non-Christian character of the divisions within Dutch society (Ruitenbergh, 1956; Van der Linde, 1995). Its not-so-secret hope was to put the Catholics and neo-Calvinists in their place. Theologians of the former public church involved with this movement coined the term *verzuiling*, pillarization, which has become the standard social science concept to describe Dutch society in the twentieth century.

Dechristianization and the coming of Islam (ca 1966 – 2000)

It was not the reorganization of the former public church which ended the period of pillarization. The orthodox Protestants and Catholics had spoken to their members as if they were the disenfranchised. After half a century of Christian Democratic political rule, and the tremendous social upward mobility of their members, this conceptual strategy did not reflect any social reality. The modern Dutch welfare state, build up in the 1960s, broke the hold of the religious organizations over their members. Most importantly, the cultural revolution of the 1960s, with its stress on consumption and individual self-fulfillment clashed radically with the unreflexive and authoritarian character of the religious practices of pillarized Dutch Christianity (Van Rooden, 2004b). As public discourse had become secularized during the twentieth century, the new version of the modern social imaginary of the Netherlands did not involve religion at all. The Netherlands were considered to be made up of individuals, who were tolerant of each other's choices as expressed in their consumption and life-styles. It was probably the very success of the pillarized movements to define religion as a total commitment to a group which made it impossible for the Dutch churches to thrive in this new environment. People still define organized religion as something which imposes a total social identity, which they do not desire.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, large numbers of Muslims emigrated to the Netherlands (Rath et al., 1996). They find themselves in a strange situation. On the one hand, legal opportunities to organize themselves religiously and as a subculture abound. The legal framework which made pillarization possible is still in place. On the other hand, they are quite often used as the Other to express the new social imaginary of a nation of tolerant individuals. They are interpreted as an instance of the religious past which the Dutch have discarded. In a recent speech, a Dutch cabinet minister explained to Muslim clerics that precisely because Dutch society is tolerant, they had to change their

ways and religion. In a mirror image of the ideal of the expressive self, toleration is considered to have to do mainly with questions of gender, especially the acceptance of homosexuality and female emancipation.

The present-day attitude towards Muslims is an almost perfect parallel to the way in which the nineteenth-century Kingdom approached the Catholics. The Catholics were, ultimately, integrated into the Dutch nation by pillarization. Yet this mechanism does not seem to be viable for Muslims. The success of pillarization rested upon the existence of several ideological groups, who together organized a majority of the population. The combination of legal structures making it easy to organize yourself as a subculture, persistent views of the Muslim as the Other of the myriad individual life style projects which the Dutch are supposed to have embraced, and the contemporary world-wide Islamic revival, seem to make it highly probable that Muslims in the Netherlands will become a clearly marked minority.

Concluding remarks

Religion, in the history of the Netherlands, always has been the main boundary marker between different groups, and the historical process of Dutch state formation always has exercised tremendous influence on the way these boundaries were upheld. Yet the nature of the conflicts and of the public space in which they were resolved, as well as the solutions adopted to deal with them, show huge differences. They cannot be subsumed under a single master-narrative, describing the Dutch way of dealing with religious difference.

The concept of political culture is used in the introduction of this book to draw attention to the way in which the treatment of religious newcomers is determined by long-term characteristics of the nation-states where they settle. Yet it seems doubtful that the concept can help circumvent the radical discontinuity which characterizes the Dutch history of dealing with religious difference. There is a long-standing interpretation of Dutch political life as essentially a rule by committee, averse to authoritarian or violent policies, and skewed towards compromise, negotiation, and inclusion. This political style would have characterized the exercise of political authority in the Netherlands since the days of the *regenten*, the magistrates of the cities of the Dutch Republic. Quite apart from the question whether this is an accurate description of the nature of political authority during the Dutch Republic, this descrip-

tion of Dutch political culture seems too thin and shallow to offer rich contributions to historical understanding. A tendency towards compromise and negotiation can easily lead to the exclusion of those who are supposed not to know the rules and whose requests or wishes therefore need not to be taken seriously. Even a political culture of compromise and inclusion can change decisively, when the ground rules defining legitimate difference change.

Assume for a moment that the mass immigration from Turkey and North Africa to the Netherlands had taken place in the 1950s. The new immigrants would immediately have been considered to be a religious, and not a cultural group. Their traditional sexual morals could not have become a marker of difference. This religious difference might have led to popular prejudices and discrimination, yet the political system and culture was well geared to deal with such problems. Muslims would not have been considered subjects to be transformed, before they could be accepted, but as a community whose leaders would have to learn the Dutch way of reaching compromise. Muslims as a group would not have become the Other of Dutch identity. In the 1990s, however, while the culture of compromise and toleration was still in place, the practical meaning of this culture had changed decisively. What had to be tolerated, and about what subjects compromise could be reached, was no longer the same.

I would plea for a much shorter time span to analyze and explain the reactions of nation states towards religious newcomers. The slow but inexorable dying of Dutch Christianity since the 1960s is much more important for understanding contemporary reactions to Muslims than the practical multi-culturalism of the pillarized society, let alone the religious regimes of the Dutch Republic or the early nineteenth-century Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The opposition between secular and religious definitions of the nation state does not seem to be so fundamental as argued in the introduction. Secular definitions have strong religious consequences. The Dutch Protestant nation of the nineteenth century proudly proclaimed its tolerant virtue and its upholding of religious freedom, yet these secular achievements simultaneously kept the Dutch Catholics in their place. The dechristianized Dutch nation at the beginning of the twenty-first century does not find it at all easy to deal with religious difference. Secular definitions of the nation are not by definition better, or more tolerant. Dutch religious history is a perfect illustration that there is no 'solu-

tion' to the problem of religious difference: there are just different ways of managing diversity and living together, some better, some worse.

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