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Workshop 12

Secularization, Secularism, Secular: Democracy and Religious Minorities

directed by

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Workshop abstract

The workshop aims to explore in a comparative and transnational perspective the various ways in which religious minorities, old and new, in Middle Eastern, North African and Mediterranean European countries and religious minorities from Middle Eastern and North African countries (MENA countries) in European countries have concretely played or failed to play a role in secularization and democratization. The end of the Cold War, increasing religious plurality in Europe as a result of migrations, the rise of identity politics and the general resilience of religiosity in the East as well as in the West, in the Southern hemisphere as well as in the Northern hemisphere, quite contrary to the predictions of the secularization thesis, and all the changes set out in US foreign policy with 9/11 have in one way or another underlined the necessity of rethinking the relation between religion and democracy. In rethinking this relation, minorities historically and theoretically have a prominent, but not a monolithic, place. Rather than reiterating culturalist approaches which define culture by religion, the workshop seeks to invite papers that will contextualize and put in comparative perspective self-perceptions of religious minorities - taking into account the struggles for representation within minorities, the struggles over defining minorities and the struggles for their recognition-; their perceptions by others outside the minority group in question, by majorities, by other minorities, by nation-building and secularizing elite, by the media, and by institutional arrangements which ground or impair their status as minorities. The workshop will solicit contributions in English with innovative analytical frameworks from various disciplines and approaches such as history, anthropology, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, neo-institutional analysis, social theory, political science, economics based on original empirical research.

Workshop description

The end of the Cold War, increasing religious plurality in Europe as a result of migrations, the rise of identity politics and the general resilience of religiosity in the East as well as in the West, in the Southern hemisphere as well as in the Northern hemisphere, quite contrary to the predictions of the secularization thesis, and all the changes set out in US foreign policy with 9/11 have in one way or another underlined the necessity of rethinking the relation between religion and democracy. In rethinking this relation, minorities historically and theoretically have a prominent, but not a monolithic, place. The workshop probes comparatively and historically the various ways in which “religious” minorities, “old” and “new”, have concretely played or failed to play a role, how their role has been perceived by themselves—taking into account the struggle for representation within minorities and the struggles over defining minorities—, and by others outside the minority group in question—by majorities, by other minorities, by democratizing and secularizing elite, by the media—in secularization and democratization with the specific goal of looking for alternative narratives to culturalist paradigms.

The workshop directors will particularly welcome submissions related to the following themes:

Old and new minorities

Religious minorities have been posed as the new “challenge” to secularization and democratization. Yet the prominent role minorities have played in secularization and democratization and the theoretical problematization of their role is neither new nor can it be reduced to a “challenge.” Dreyfus Affair in Third Republic France is the prototypical example of how minority issues have been a catalyst in democratization and secularization. Such role of minorities is not specific to any religious tradition. For instance, in year 2006, a member of a minority group (Alevis) in Turkey has challenged in court the obligatory Sunni religious courses in primary and secondary schools and has won the right of exemption from these courses for his son, opening the way not only for other members of his group but for every citizen who would like to see education in religious ethics as a matter of individual choice. These examples of old religious minorities as forerunners of secularization and democratization pose a contrast to the depictions of new religious minorities in Europe, Muslim minorities, who are often presented, especially in the media (Asad 2003, Tévanian 2006), as impediments to secularization and democratization. Much weight of explanation for the problems of democracy and secularization in Europe is placed on the culture (defined by religion) of minorities despite the evidence for legal- institutional, political and economic impediments to democracy in Europe, such was exemplified by the court case in Germany in March 2007 where the judge referred to the Koran in rejecting the request of a German Muslim woman for divorce on grounds of domestic violence. Dominant scholarship posits the emergence of new minorities in Europe as the result of the recruitment of workers after 1945 who have been able to secure a permanent status in spite of the original legal arrangements which viewed them as temporary workers (Soysal 1994). It is contended that the challenge they represent to European democratic polities will enhance further democratization and new norms of justice based on cosmopolitanism (Benhabib 2004). Furthermore, such analyses which present post-1945 Europe as taken by a struggle between a unitary conception of citizenship and international human rights downplay the complex legal structure of European colonial empires which were precisely based on distinctions between nationality and citizenship (Shepard 2006), colonizers and colonized, European and non-Europeans, modernity and tradition (Cooper and Stoler 1989, Dirks 1992), and the opposition between homogenous *metropoles* and heterogeneous empires sustained through ethnic classifications (Kateb

2001). Hence, it downplays how the making of a European supranational polity took place within a colonial context (Hansen 2004) and how this colonial heritage contributes to the shaping of contemporary understandings of minorities and their categorization (Balibar 2004, Barros 2005, Bertaux under review). Such universalistic or cosmopolitan understanding is also contradicted by mandatory civic integration programs implemented throughout Europe alongside the resurrection of the guestworker system (Carrera 2006, Joppke 2007, Castles 2006). In focusing comparatively on the formation and the codification of religious minorities, old and new, and their political role in relation to claims of secularism and processes of secularization and democratization in MENA countries and Mediterranean European countries, the workshop aims to put the question of immigration and new religious minorities from MENA countries in Europe and from European countries in MENA countries in a larger theoretical framework.

Moral and Political Economy of the “Secular” and the “Religious”

The “mediating role” (Balibar 1991) played by states in recognition and perception of minorities and state codification of people, for instance via censuses, in order to define a “legible” society as object of social engineering (Scott 1998) suggest alternative venues for studying the role of “religious” minorities in secularization and democratization in challenge of totalistic approaches, such that follow Samuel Huntington and reduce religion, culture, political and social behavior all to each other. The workshop seeks to test the “mediating hypothesis” of the state: To what degree, if at all, and in what ways is the state mediating the relation of a “religious” minority to society at large or to other minorities? How such mediation is materialized, through official identity documents, institutions, or geographical spaces? Are religious minorities homogenous or are they presented as homogenous by the state or by religious elite in close relation with the state authorities? How the codification of minorities in terms of religion relates to other categorizations—such as immigrants, citizens and so forth—they are subjected to? To what degree and through what mechanisms do claims of homogeneity of religious minorities hide the heterogeneity of groups in terms of class and gender? Furthermore, in the absence of a European Union state, how are “religious” minorities defined and compared across Europe? In what ways, if at all, does the nation-state plays a role in defining, shaping, prestructuring via official discourses or its institutions the political, public or private choices of minorities? Studying the relation of the nation-state and religious minorities in a comparative perspective would present also an alternative approach to the sociological determinism and the eurocentrism of the secularization thesis and open the way for global comparison (Keddie 1997). The focus on national ideologies, hegemonies and discourses allows the pursuit of many other theoretical and historical questions on nation and religion (Van Deer 1998) through the distinctions between secularism as ideology, hegemony or discourse, and secularization as a process. Talal Asad (2003) has encouraged a whole new research agenda on secularization and secularism by drawing attention to the diversity in the "practical tasks" assigned historically and comparatively to the concepts “secular” and “religious”, calling for an anthropology of “secular” and “religious”. The commodification of both religious and secular symbols (Navaro-Yashin 2002), the practical political tasks assigned to the concepts of “secular” and “religious” by the state elite in laicization (Akan under review) demonstrate the importance of studying the moral and political economy of the secular and the religious.

Finding the Place for Minorities: Representative Bodies or Scientific Bodies?

The workshop also seeks to attract papers on the role of commissions, scientific councils and representative bodies in finding a place in public, political and economic space for religious

minorities. The growing number of reports by various commissions and councils such as the Commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de laïcité dans la République, the Netherlands Scientific Council for government policy, the Minority Report in Turkey, and newly found representative councils such as the French Muslim Council (CFCM), the British Muslim Council and the House of Dialogue under consideration in Netherlands, call for a renewed attention. A sociology of commissions and councils—how they have changed or failed to change the life of religious minorities and if they did change, in which respects and in what direction—, not only would raise new issues and open new debates on questions of secularization and secularism and minorities, but would also open a whole set of questions on the “rule of experts” (Mitchell 2002) in minority matters. How representative are these institutions? How do they define their public, political, economic tasks? How do they figure in the general state and religious institutions relations of their national context? Are they the rule or the exception? Another subcategory is looking at the institutions of the nation-state—those regulating religious matters and minority matters—in comparative historical perspective (Stepan 2001), and how these institutions shape or do not shape the choices of religious minority groups (Amiriaux 2001, Soysal 1994, Kastoryano 2002). Exploring the variety in the current institutional arrangements between state and religious institutions in detail within Europe, Middle East and North Africa and comparing these institutional arrangements across different religious traditions as well as including the past of Europe, the concordat regimes which existed in most places, some of which still exist, and including the new institutions in Europe in the comparisons would be among the kind of in-depth analysis this section of the workshop seeks to encourage.

Transnational Approaches and Comparative Perspectives

The workshop's final focus is how politics by or over religious minorities in a given national context is affected by politics in another national context or is constructed and perceived as such. The workshop seeks to attract papers which raise questions on the interdependence of the contexts of Europe and MENA countries (i.e. the spill over effects of Caricature Crisis, Headscarves Affairs in MENA countries). How new international discourses such as the recently emerging Alliance of Civilizations Project play out in specific contexts, or the context-specific manifestations of the global politics of distinguishing “Bad Muslims and Good Muslims” (Mamdani 2004), or how Turkey's candidacy to the European Union effects the politics by and over minorities in Europe and in Turkey are among the issues this section of the workshop will address.

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Directors' individual paper abstracts

Moderating European Integration: Moderate Islam or Moderate Secularism?

Murat Akan

The paper presents a parallel analysis of European politics and Turkish politics of secularism through a close reading of the debates in Turkey and in Europe over Pope Benedict XVI.'s visit to Turkey in November 2006. Through a comparison with debates and media coverage of the previous papal visits by Pope Paul VI in 1967 and by Pope John Paul II in 1979 to Turkey, the paper contextualizes and evaluates the level and the precise terms in which the recent visit was politicized. Then, in the next part, the paper presents an analysis of events surrounding the visit—public debates and social movements against the visit—in Turkey and shows how these event and debates were dictated by the immediate political context of the Alliance of Civilizations meeting and the publicization of the European Union Progress Report on Turkey both early in November 2006. In a third part, the paper puts the public debates over the visit in the more general context of the changing terms of European integration and

secularisms in response to “new” minorities in Europe, and also in context of the Turkish legacy of secularism against its “old” minorities.

A Postcolonial Approach to France: From “French Muslim” to “Muslim French”

Sandrine Bertaux

With the emergence of Muslim as a political category, statistical accounting for the number of Muslims has become a major task. One dominant way of defining Muslims, in a European context of competing definitions, is to conflate it with the category of immigrant. In that perspective, those individuals and groups labeled as Muslims are those immigrants coming from Muslim-majority societies, including at times, their Europe-born offspring. Although scholars admittedly avow dissatisfaction with such accounting, they also rule out the possibility that self-declarations concerning religious faith would be more accurate than their preferred ascriptive definition of “sociological Muslims.” Demographic projections based on such accounting forecast that Muslims will outnumber any other group in some Western countries, such as France, by 2050. The thesis that Europe will soon become a Muslim continent rests upon such ascriptive categories which enable population forecasts based on fertility rates and estimate future immigrations. In a first part, the paper explores the return in Europe of a revisited “population problem” formulated in terms of quantity and quality. In a second part, the paper focuses on the French case. It explores the emergence of a “Muslim French” category in relation to the former colonial category of “French Muslim.”