

## Abstracts

### Theme 5: Religion and Politics

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## 1. Koen Docter

### **Secularism and media representations of Muslims and Islam: a historical comparison between France and the Netherlands (1880-present)**

While the past decade has seen a particularly intense Islam debate in the European media, the origins of present-day representations of Muslims date back to at least the era of imperialism. Media play a key role in the creation, diffusion and conservation of stereotypical images of Muslims and Islam. The starting point of this dissertation is that media representations of Muslims are historical products and that the perspectives of the media are strongly influenced by their national contexts. France and the Netherlands are two remarkably contrasting cases. Both have been liberal democracies for over a century, championing human rights as a core value. However, the relation between the state and religious groups in general and Muslims in specific has developed in a very different way in both countries. The French policy has been characterised by state interventionism in religious affairs, Republicanism and *laïcité* (militant secularism). The Netherlands in turn developed a non-secular interpretation of state neutrality, of which religious pluralism and *verzuiling* (social pillarisation) were the dominant features.

This dissertation links the distinctive elements of French and Dutch *secularism* to the development of the newspaper representations of Islam during the period 1880 to present. A large-scale quantitative content analysis of newspaper articles will be combined with a qualitative discourse analysis of specific cases. This dissertation also looks at the continuity or discontinuity between the *colonial* and *post-colonial discourse* in the framing of several Islam-related key events, e.g. the colonial wars, the construction of the first mosques, the arrival of the first labour migrants. In short, this dissertation attempts to show where present-day media representations of Muslims come from.

This paper will present the most interesting outcomes of the first phase of the PhD dissertation: theoretical and methodological considerations and also the first findings from the empirical study.

## 2. Leonard van 't Hul

### **Religion renegotiated: The Dynamics of State-Religion Interlocution in the Netherlands since the 1960s**

Secularization theory, once the proud flagship of modernization theorists, finds itself in troubled waters. Paramount to the myriad of critiques is the notion that secularization is not an inevitable and self-propelling process, as has long been assumed, but is highly influenced by political and legal actors (Casanova, 1994; 2011; Hirschl, 2010, 2011; Ventura, 2013; Wohlrab-Sahr, 2011). Scholars working on the state-religion interlocution stress that legislative and judicial bodies function as 'important secularizing agents' and that (constitutional) courts have emerged as the sites where the position of religion in contemporary societies is (re-)negotiated (Hirschl, 2010). Given the profound secularist 'epistemology', 'interpretive logic' and 'impressive religion-taming track record' of legal bodies and constitutional jurisprudence, the result of such renegotiating process is much to religion's disadvantage (Hirschl, 2011: 2; Benson, 2013; Reuter, 2009: 16; Sullivan, 2011).

It is notable that the diagnose above implicitly retains secularization theory's universalist claim of religion's impending and inevitable demise in Western societies. This is problematic, since it is also observed that attempts to expel religion from the public domain may rather lead to a 'return of the repressed' (Rosenfeld, 2013: 46), or 'cancellation of the secularist truce' by religious actors (Achterberg et al., 2009, see also: Berger et al., 1999; Butler et al., 2011). A recent case in Amsterdam, for instance, intriguingly shows that 'religiously blind' social policy measures forcefully, unexpectedly launched religion into the public domain. Here, subsidies for social care programmes that were allotted to religious organizations such as *Youth for Christ*, induced heated debates on the role and responsibility of the state in matters of social care and religious freedom.

Cases such as these show that debates over the proper position of religion is far from settled, even in the Netherlands - a country that allegedly is one of the most secular societies in the world (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). Recent legal studies indeed indicate that the freedom of religion and religious association is increasingly restrained (e.g. van den Brink & Ten Napel, 2013), yet systematic knowledge over the changes and continuities in the state-religion interlocution over the last decades is lacking. The last endeavor dates back to 1946 (Diepenhorst, 1946), whilst studies that do touch upon the subject tend to do so only in passing (cf. Maussen, 2006).

Having only just begun my research project, I shall offer the first contours of my sociological-historical examination of Dutch government policy toward religion and faith-based organizations. This examination can be utilized to uncover the sometimes subtle and unpredictable ways in which religion has been accommodated in the public square by governmental bodies, and to understand how the claims of these groups were weighed by for instance the Council of State and in the parliaments. The question of how this issue can be assessed empirically and systematically, will be a central point of discussion in my presentation.

### 3. Ion Josan

#### **Politics and Spirituality – Khomeinism between Transcendence and Immanentization**

Modernity brought with itself an unprecedented technological progress which had a profound impact on society facilitating the rise of standards in material prosperity. The technological achievements linked the World in a communicational net that provided human beings all over the Globe with access to education and innovation. But all this came with a price and a temptation – because the hyper technologization of the world provided the tools for the “Political” to control and manage every aspect of human life. What started as a project of “Entzauberung” of the World was continued as a process of emptying the World of its transcendental, mystical dimension. By this, the World has been transformed into an object that can be managed and modified according to man's will and desire. This new managerial “Weltanschauung” which appeared in history as a western, European phenomenon, had the capacity to entangle the whole Globe creating a universal framework that would connect and influence even the most remote parts of the World. This autoreferential anthropocentric vision of the World created a circular articulation of

legitimacy, a will to power based on will, a will to will. By this, the new world is enclosed in a mechanic reality that entraps everything in itself. As a response to this gigantic phenomenon, pockets of dissident epistemologies tried to maintain their self as a way to “differ”. In our case, the Iranian Revolution and Khomeini as its avatar constitute a form of epistemological dissidence because they humanize politics by creating the space for the un-rational to manifest itself. The Iranian Revolution is an historical phenomenon that builds its legitimacy on spiritual fundamentals re-actualizing in contemporaneity a mythical ethos. Khomeini is a historical figure that mobilizes masses in a way only a man with charisma can – because the Charismatic authority rejects the world as a mechanism striving to meet the “spiritual” needs of humanity (detaching the human being from its everydayness). Charisma is a major revolutionary factor, an element that prepares a moment of *kairos* – where the divine and material meet for an instant. But the moment of this convergence is ephemeral. In this paper, I will try to analyze the problem of the sacred in the political, showing how the Iranian Revolution appeared as a long time struggle for authenticity and self-awareness (as a reaction to the process of westernization). My analysis will reveal the reasons why a re-“spiritualization” of politics is so tempting (showing the limits of the managerial politics) outlining in the same time the limitations of such a demarche - because in politics, religion, theology and spirituality are detached and dislocated from the transcendental and routinized by human everydayness.