

# **European Muslims and Liberal Citizenship**

## **Reconciliation through Public Reason: The Case of Tariq Ramadan's Citizenship Theory**

Ph.D. Thesis  
By **Giovanni VEZZANI**

Thesis Advisors:  
Pr. Sebastiano MAFFETTONE  
Pr. Jihane SFEIR

GEM Ph.D. School  
Globalisation, Europe, and Multilateralism Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate  
Joint Research Project AMETRINE

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ULB, Brussels: Political and Social Sciences

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### **SYNTHESIS**

This study investigates the subject of Muslims' citizenship in contemporary Western European societies from the viewpoint of John Rawls's political liberalism, in particular in light of the 'idea of public reason.'<sup>1</sup> By its very nature, political liberalism does not prescribe a single model for being Muslim in contemporary Europe. Thus, one may wonder if it is too vague as a point of departure for the analysis. On the other hand, however, here I argue that political liberalism specifies a peculiar

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<sup>1</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) and the 1997 essay "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," originally published in *University of Chicago Law Review* 64 (1997), 765-807 and now included in *Political Liberalism*, expanded edition, 440-490.

*evaluative framework* that allows citizens to answer questions such as “What is politically at stake when citizens of Muslim faith are publicly presented as permanent aliens in contemporary European societies?”, “On what grounds is such exclusion based?”, and “What requirements can European citizens be reasonably expected to meet?” in a distinctively *political* way and, ideally, to solve the political and social problems from which those questions spring. In this research, I claim that public reason provides a *common discursive platform* that establishes the ground for a *public political identity* and for *shared standards for social and political criticism*. Together, these two elements solve the two dimensions of the problem of ‘stability for the right reasons’ (in Rawls’s terms) in contemporary European societies, because they secure both the political *inclusion* of Muslims on an equal footing as citizens and civic *assurance* that they will remain committed to fair terms of social cooperation. A joint solution of these two apparently conflicting demands of stability for the right reasons (i.e., inclusion and mutual assurance) requires an effort in *political reconciliation*. After having compared public reason citizenship with two prominent normative alternatives, I will conclude that the former is an adequate ideal conception of citizenship for European societies. Finally, I will apply the justificatory evaluative methodological framework (whose requirements I will specify starting from the idea of public reason itself) to a conception of citizenship elaborated by one of the most renowned Muslim public intellectuals in Europe: Tariq Ramadan. (I justify the choice of this author in sections 2.3 and 6.1). Such an evaluation sheds light on one of the main insights of this research, that is, the idea that public reason makes a *decompression of the public space* possible: it frees the public space from those forces that would prevent citizens from the possibility of exercising effectively their two moral powers (once more in Rawls’s words, the ‘capacity for a sense of justice and for a conception of the good’) as free equals. In this sense, public reason tries to reconcile ideal political consensus and the fact of reasonable pluralism on a public political ground. I believe that this is the deepest meaning of what Rawls calls ‘*reconciliation through public reason*’: its aspiration is to *reabsorb reasonable pluralism politically without annihilating it*.

This research is structured in three parts: the first is methodological, the second is reconstructive, and the third is evaluative. Each part is composed of two chapters.

In chapter one (“General Framework”), I begin from some empirical observations about the role of perceptions and identities in relation to the issue of Muslims’ citizenship in contemporary Europe. I claim that from this point of view Islam seems to “make problem” in a very specific sense. This does not mean that Islam *is* a problem, but that Islam is frequently *publicly presented and perceived* as a problem. This is the background problem from which my work starts. Thus, I explore some dimensions of such a problem (see 1.1). Subsequently, I provide a more specific formulation of the

research problem and questions and of the aims of this study. Then, the main research question (Q) is stated in these terms: Which ideal conception of citizenship should provide the common normative perspective in contemporary Western European societies, which are characterised by both demands of inclusion of Muslims and the need for solving a ‘problem of mutual assurance’<sup>2</sup> concerning citizens’ commitment to shared terms of social cooperation, so that those societies can be stable for the right reasons? In order to answer this question, I also specify three sub-questions that I call respectively Q1, Q2, and Q3 (see 1.2).

In chapter two (“Toward a Justificatory Evaluative Political Theory”), I firstly try to frame the problem of public justification within Rawls’s political liberalism (see 2.1). I then consider a specific approach to the question of Muslim citizenship in liberal democracies which can be adopted from a Rawlsian perspective: namely, reasoning from conjecture (see 2.2). Finally, I explain my own approach (which I call justificatory evaluative political theory) by means of comparison with the method of reasoning from conjecture (see 2.3). In presenting the evaluative framework specified from a political liberal standpoint, I point out three political liberal evaluative requirements: the reciprocity requirement (RR), the consistency requirement (CR), and the civility requirement (CiR).

Chapter three (“What is Public Reason?”) deals with the history of the notion of public reason from Kant to Rawls and its enunciation within Rawls’s work (see 3.1 and 3.2 respectively). In doing so, I also identify three specifications for the three political liberal evaluative requirements considered in the second chapter. Furthermore, in chapter three I also unpack CR in three different dimensions (PR1, PR2, and PR3).

Chapter four (“Public Reason and Religion. Reinterpreting the Duty of Civility”) completes the reconstructive stage by analysing Rawls’s ‘wide view’ of public reason and two major lines of objection to it (see 4.1). After having discussed such criticisms, I then introduce my own interpretation of the ‘proviso,’ which is structured around a two-level (or bifurcate) model of the ‘duty of civility’ (see 4.2).

Chapter five (“Reconciliation through Public Reason: Justificatory Evaluative Political Theory between Modelling and Application”) bridges the second and the third part, that is, the reconstructive and the evaluative stage respectively. In the first section of the chapter, I summarise the political liberal evaluative requirements developed in the second part. In doing this, my purpose is to present my *justificatory evaluative model of public reason citizenship* (see 5.1). In the second section, I firstly

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<sup>2</sup> On which, see in particular Paul Weithman, *Why Political Liberalism? On John Rawls’s Political Turn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

argue that a conception of citizenship grounded in public reason is not only possible in existing European societies, but also preferable if compared with alternative conceptions (I consider liberal multiculturalism and Cécile Laborde’s critical republicanism)<sup>3</sup> with reference to the problem under scrutiny in this research. In conclusion, I show that public reason citizenship is able to solve the theoretical problem and the main research question mentioned above: Which ideal conception of citizenship should provide the common normative perspective in contemporary Western European societies, which are characterised by both demands of inclusion of Muslims and the need for solving a problem of mutual assurance concerning citizens’ commitment to shared terms of social cooperation, so that those societies can be stable for the right reasons? In the final part of chapter five, I try to demonstrate that public reason citizenship can both include Muslim citizens and solve the assurance problem because it provides both shared standards for political criticism and a common political identity on the basis of which citizens politically recognise one another as free equals. If my argument succeeds, then public reason citizenship not only could but also should be adopted as the ideal conception of citizenship in European societies (see 5.2).

In the sixth chapter (“Tariq Ramadan’s European Muslims and Public Reason”) I apply the evaluative framework based on public reason to the conception of citizenship for Muslims in Europe developed by Tariq Ramadan. (According to a principle introduced in chapter two which I call the “plausibility principle” PP, I argue that Ramadan’s theory of citizenship can be plausibly presented as a “European Muslim” approach to the issue of citizenship, see 6.1). The purpose of such an evaluative work is twofold. Firstly, it aims at examining whether and how the idea of public reason accounts for a version of European citizenship for Muslims coming from Muslims themselves. Secondly, it aims at disclosing whether what such a Muslim conception of citizenship in Europe says about the two dimensions of ‘stability for the right reasons’ of the system of social cooperation (namely, inclusion and ‘mutual assurance’) is consistent with the provisions of public reason citizenship (see 6.2-6.5).

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<sup>3</sup> Cécile Laborde, *Critical Republicanism: The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).