European Muslims
and
Liberal Citizenship

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

Ph.D. Thesis
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ABSTRACT

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 or 'externalisation'[1] based? What requirements can European citizens be reasonably expected to meet? This research analyses the subject of Muslims' citizenship in contemporary European societies from the perspective of normative political theory, and more precisely from the viewpoint of John Rawls's political liberalism, in particular in light of the idea of public reason.[2] Whilst recent contributions in political philosophy analysing the question of citizenship of Muslims in

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[1] Jocelyne Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 140.

[2] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

liberal democracies from a Rawlsian standpoint have mainly focussed on the notion of an overlapping consensus,[3] the implications of the concept of public reason on that same issue are largely unexplored. This study tries to fill such a gap in the literature. In chapter one, I begin by framing what I call the "background problem" of the research, namely, the claim that "Islam in Europe makes problem" and its different dimensions. I then reframe the question under scrutiny by presenting in greater theoretical detail the problem investigated and the main research question: 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[4] concerning citizens' commitment to shared terms of social cooperation, so that those societies can be stable for the right reasons? My central thesis is that the idea of public reason provides a common discursive platform which establishes the ground for both a public *political* identity for citizens and shared standards for social and political criticism. I also argue that political liberalism specifies a peculiar evaluative framework that allows citizens to answer the above-mentioned questions in a distinctively *political* way. In the first part, I thus develop my "justificatory evaluative" methodological approach based on public reason (chapter two). In the second part (chapters three and four), I reconstruct the idea of public reason and specify the fundamental requirements of the justificatory evaluative approach. In the third part, I firstly attempt to demonstrate that, with reference to the problem at hand, public reason citizenship is normatively more appealing than two alternative ideal conceptions of citizenship, namely 'critical republicanism'[5] and liberal multiculturalism (chapter five); secondly, I apply the evaluative framework to the conception of citizenship elaborated by one of the most renowned Muslim intellectuals in Europe: Tariq Ramadan. The purpose of such evaluation 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.

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[3] See notably Andrew F. March, *Islam and Liberal Citizenship: The Search for an Overlapping Consensus* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2009).

[4] On which, see in particular Paul Weithman, *Why Political Liberalism? On John Rawls's Political Turn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[5] Cécile Laborde, *Critical Republicanism: The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).