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Re-Examining an Ethics of Citizenship in Postsecular Societies

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Jürgen Habermas is, without any doubt, one of the most influential, albeit not undisputed authors in the debate about ‘postsecularity’, ‘postsecularism’, ‘the postsecular’, ‘postsecular societies’, and so forth. Unlike many other authors who use these concepts to describe and explain the continuing presence of religion in contemporary ‘modern’ societies (see Beckford, 2012), the core of Habermas’s notion of the postsecular society is *normative*. It includes an ethics of citizenship that aims at making it possible that all citizens can participate as equals in democratic procedures, including public political debate about matters of common interest, and hence in co-determining the development of their society. This contribution critically examines Habermas’s proposal of an ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies in view of the question whether it is able to adequately deal with problems that arise in public controversies about particular verbal and nonverbal acts of expression, namely acts which are understood by their authors as contributions to public debate, which are experienced by numerous believers as denigration of their religion, and as offense to their religious sensibilities. Controversies about such acts offer especially interesting possibilities for an investigation of normative dimensions of the notion of the postsecular and postsecular societies, respectively. For what is at stake, here, is not only the demand of religious people that they themselves should be allowed to practice their religion (like in the case of debates about ritual slaughter or the wearing of religious clothing). Rather, the controversies that I am interested in concern the formal and informal rules that structure the public sphere common to all members of society, whether religious or not (see March, 2012: 320), and the discursive space that is essential for the legitimate exercise and control of democratic politics. Accordingly, this chapter aims to contribute both to the debate about post-secularism and to the broader political philosophical task of developing an ethics of citizenship in democratic and pluralistic societies.

The concrete example that will serve as the background of my analysis of Habermas’s position is the public controversy about the so-called Muhammad cartoons, published first in

2005 by Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, and – importantly – about public protests against it. I will argue that Habermas’s understanding of an ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies is too limited to be able to adequately deal with the various obstacles that can prevent people from participating as equals in public political debate. As I will show, the main reason for this is that Habermas focuses strongly, albeit not exclusively, on epistemic attitudes that are situated on a cognitive level, while important obstacles to participation in public political debate are related to emotional, and cultural elements. I will suggest that political philosophy must go beyond Habermas’s ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies, in order to be able to grasp and possibly dismantle elements that can effectively exclude citizens from public political debate.

Habermas’s ethics of democratic citizenship in postsecular societies

Like other authors who address the notion of the postsecular and postsecular societies, respectively, Habermas unfolds his considerations about postsecular societies against the background of the failure of the secularization thesis. The theoretic angle, however, from which Habermas approaches the topic, differs significantly from that of, for instance, sociologists of religion who describe developments in the religious landscape of particular societies. His considerations are part of a larger political philosophical project that aims to answer the question of how we should understand ourselves as members of democratic societies where religion plays an important role in the lives of many citizens, and what we can, or must, reciprocally expect from another in order to make it possible that all citizens can participate as equals in social interactions, including public political debate.¹ More specifically, Habermas aims to provide a solution of a problem that results from the claim that, according to the model of deliberative democracy, political decisions can only be taken to be legitimate if they can be justified by reasons that all citizens can equally accept. Reasons that depend on religious authorities such as sacred texts or instructions of religious dignitaries do not count as acceptable in that sense. Because of this, religious citizens can not directly contribute with their religiously based convictions to democratic debate, but are supposed to ‘translate’ them into what counts as ‘secular’ or ‘public’ reasons which are independent of any reference to religion. This, however, means that religious citizens are “encumbered with an asymmetrical burden” (Habermas, 2006: 11), since they may make (valid) contributions to public political debate only if they translate their ‘religious language’

¹ The following sketch of Habermas’ position is primarily based on Habermas 2006 and Habermas 2008.

into ‘public reasons’, whereas secular citizens are not required to make comparable efforts. Even more, for some people it can be impossible to translate their religious views into a language of secular reasons since this would require them to undertake an “artificial division [between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ convictions] within their own minds” (Habermas, 2006: 8) which would not be possible without jeopardizing their identity as pious persons. To require believers to pay such a price for the possibility to make use of their right to political participation, however, is morally problematic: “a state cannot encumber its citizens, whom it guarantees freedom of religious expression, with duties that are incompatible with pursuing a devout life – it cannot expect something impossible of them” (Habermas, 2006: 7).

To solve this problem of an undue asymmetrical burden, Habermas restricts the ‘translation proviso’ to the realm of institutionalized practices of deliberation and decision-making in political bodies such as the parliament. In the “‘wild life’ of the political public sphere”, however, religious citizens should be allowed to couch their contributions in religious language. Furthermore, and for the context of this chapter especially importantly, Habermas construes the task of translating religious contributions into a “generally accessible language” as a collaborative task: Both religious and non-religious citizens must likewise participate in this task, and “secular citizens must open their minds to the possible truth content of those presentations and enter into dialogues from which religious reasons then might well emerge in the transformed guise of generally accessible arguments.” (Habermas, 2006: 11). This has a number of normative implications that concern the cognitive or epistemic attitudes that both religious and nonreligious citizens of postsecular societies need to develop.

Religious citizens, on the one hand, must develop epistemic attitudes that enable them to constructively cope with challenges and cognitive dissonances that could arise from the fact that their religion is faced with pluralism, the emergence of modern science, and profane morality and law. Regarding the latter, Habermas points out, fundamental normative principles such as the separation of religion and state and, related to this, the secular legitimation of politics must be supported from within the view of the respective religious traditions and communities. In this regard, Habermas speaks of a “modernization of religious consciousness” that results from a “learning process” that must be undertaken from within religious traditions themselves (Habermas, 2006: 14).²

² Habermas made this point in an earlier contribution as well: If conflicts of loyalty are not to simmer, the necessary role differentiation between members of one’s own religious community and co-citizens of the larger society needs to be justified convincingly from one’s internal viewpoint. Religious membership is in

Non-religious, or ‘secular’ citizens, on the other hand, are required to develop comparable epistemic attitudes in the context of a postsecular society: They must self-reflectively transcend a secularist self-understanding of Modernity that encounters religion with “sparing indifference” and that understands religious traditions as “archaic relics of pre-modern societies” (Habermas, 2006: 15). In other words, secular citizens must develop an epistemic stance that prepares them to take religious contributions to public political debate seriously and even to actively help to investigate whether such contributions include moral intuitions that can be expressed in secular language and justified by reasons that are accessible for all.

This specific ethics of democratic citizenship is the core of Habermas’s notion of postsecularism and postsecular societies, respectively. Accordingly, the decisive feature of a postsecular society is not so much a return or a revitalization of religions in the public sphere, et cetera, but rather “that it is *epistemically adjusted* to the continued existence of religious communities” (Habermas, 2006: 15. Italics in original) which requires a change in mentality that is cognitively exacting for both religious and non-religious citizens. To be ‘postsecular’ in that sense is not so much a ‘fact’ (like the ‘return’ and continuing presence of public religion is said to be), but rather a political ethical requirement, because neither a widespread secularist mentality including a more or less blunt rejection of religion as ‘backward’ or ‘anti-democratic’, nor ‘fundamentalist’ attitudes of a large number of religious citizens are compatible with deliberative democracy and the ideal of equality of participation in public political debate (Habermas, 2008: 27). This requirement, however, does not primarily concern institutions of society (such as the law), but mental attitudes and, especially, cognitive capacities of citizens which is why Michele Dillon points out that “it seems [Habermas] really intends to talk about a post-secular *Zeitgeist*” rather than about a postsecular society (Dillon, 2012: 257). The ethics of citizenship of which the postsecular *Zeitgeist* is a part, is construed almost exclusively in cognitive terms by Habermas; other elements, such as culturally predominant imaginaries, embodied emotions and frameworks for perception and interpretation that are applied more or less unconsciously, are largely, but not entirely, ignored. There are some small traces that can be understood as acknowledgment

tune with its secular counterpart only if (from the internal point of view of each) the corresponding norms and values are not only different from each other, but if the one set of norms can consistently be derived from the other. If differentiation of both memberships is to go beyond a mere *modus vivendi*, then the modernization of religious consciousness must not be limited to some cognitively undiscerning attempt to ensure that the religious ethos conforms to externally imposed laws of the secular society. It calls instead for developing the normative principles of the secular order from within the view of a respective religious tradition and community. (Habermas, 2004: 12).

of the influence that not purely cognitive elements can exercise on the process of public debate, in general, and the inclusion of convictions of ‘religious citizens’ in this process, in particular. The above-mentioned requirement that “the secular citizens must open their minds to the possible truth content” of contributions that are made in religious language (Habermas, 2006: 11) could be understood as indication that Habermas does not completely overlook such not purely cognitive aspects. However, this does not alter the fact that his ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies is construed primarily in terms of ‘cognitive burdens’ and an ‘epistemic adjustment’ of society and its citizens respectively to the presence of religion.

Conditions of participating in public political debate

As was already mentioned above, the main purpose of an ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies is to make it possible that all citizens can participate as equals in democratic procedures, including public political debate. Clearly, open public debate is important for democratic societies since legitimate democratic power is constituted and controlled by the people. Matters of common interest need to be publicly discussed and all members of society, certainly those who are affected by a certain matter or political decision, must be able to fully participate in public debate about it.

Concern for an open public debate in pluralistic democratic societies was also the frame into which the editors of *Jyllands-Posten* placed the publication of the Muhammad cartoons. According to Fleming Rose, cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, the reason to commission and publish the cartoons was what he perceived as an increasing self-censorship among authors, artists, and translators which was, according to Rose, caused by fears and feelings of intimidation in dealing with issues related to Islam (Klausen, 2009: 13-20; Rose, 2006). Such self-censorship motivated by fear, Rose argued, was incompatible with political democratic debate, and the goal of the publication of the cartoons “was simply to push back self-imposed limits on expression that seemed to be closing in tighter.” (Rose, 2006). In other words, the stated aim of *Jyllands-Posten* was to further public debate in democratic societies about issues such as freedom of expression, freedom of religion, cultural and religious diversity, but also about possible relations between Islam and violence.

But what does it mean for public debate to be ‘open’ in the normatively relevant sense mentioned at the beginning of this section? To be able to function as democratic political forum, public debate must be open in a twofold sense. First, it is necessary that *all matters* that are considered of common interest can be publicly discussed. Second, *everyone who is affected* by a certain matter or political decision must be able to contribute to public debate

about it. These formal requirements are grasped by the right to freedom of expression, including the right to access to mass media. There are, however, also informal preconditions. As a form of public communication, political democratic debate is always dependent on what Bernhard Peters calls 'public culture' that consists of stocks of shared knowledge, norms, values and conventions, rituals, symbols, and so forth, which build contexts of meaning, dispositions for attentiveness, and components for frameworks within which certain events and decisions are interpreted or justified (see Peters, 2008: 69-76, 219-221). On the basis of a public culture, it becomes possible for different people to understand statements, events, or decisions, to evaluate and weigh them, and to communicate about them in a broader public. In that sense, public culture is "the quintessence of facilitative and restrictive conditions of communication within a community. Public culture works like a sluice, opening and closing communicative opportunity." (Wetzler and Wingert, 2008: 5). For the interest of this chapter it is especially important that certain components of public culture concern the respective community or society itself. These "collective self-images" (Peters, 2008) refer, for example, to the history and the current state of the respective community and to cultural, historical or political achievements. Furthermore, they include criteria that are used to ascribe group-membership to certain people and to exclude others; they are linked with (mostly positive) self-evaluations and ideals, on the one hand, and with "contrasting images of other groups" and "definitions of the relations to other collectivities (as friendly or hostile and so on)" (Peters, 2008: 72) on the other hand. In democratic societies, 'public culture' includes normative assumptions that predetermine "how citizens interpret their civic bonds in practice, who they regard as competent citizens, who they regard as incompetent, how much unity and how much diversity they think a democratic polity needs or can endure" (van den Brink, 2007: 354). Such 'informal conceptions of democratic life' (van den Brink) are usually rooted in dominant traditions and often represent and reproduce social power relations. They strongly influence the way in which citizens who are differently situated within the informal power relations of society think of themselves and of others in view of democratic citizenship. Accordingly, they influence the dominant 'grammar' of public debate and determine who is recognized as competent and 'respectable' contributor and what passes for a valuable contribution. This is especially important in the case of public political debate as a specific form of communication where people do not merely want to tell others their views, but put in normative, political claims, for instance concerning free speech, self-censorship and the relation between particular religions and violence (like *Jyllands-Posten* did) or regarding the proper public treatment of what religious believers consider sacred (like many

protestors against the publication of the Muhammad cartoons did). In doing so, contributors claim the authority of somebody who is, as member of a democratic society and on a par with others, legitimately engaged in the process of self-government and in the ongoing process of developing and (re-)shaping of society and its formal and informal institutions. This distinguishes public political debate from other forms of public communication that do not share the normative significance for democratic politics. In order to succeed, the specific authority of the speaker as having a say in matters concerning the society in question must be recognized by other participants of the debate. Otherwise, the person may be able to make use of her right to freedom of expression; she may be able to use media to convey her claims and arguments. Nevertheless, without being recognized as somebody who has a say in matters concerning the development of society, the person cannot succeed to fully participate as peer in public political debate.³ It is this latter aspect of a specific authority that needs to be recognized by others in order to be able to fully and effectively participate as equal in public debate that is especially interesting in the analysis of, for instance, the controversy about the Muhammad cartoons in light of the notion of the postsecular.

Debating Muhammad cartoons – construing debaters⁴

Almost immediately after the publication, the cartoons became an object of intense public debate. The editors of *Jyllands-Posten* received moderate support, and the cartoons were republished on the Internet and by newspapers in various countries. There was, however, also harsh criticism of the publication of cartoons, which partially was staged for political and economic reasons not, or not directly, related to the cartoons. It cannot be doubted, however, that many Muslims experienced the cartoons as moral insult, offense to their religious sensibilities, or as expressions of hostility against Islam (see Klausen, 2009; Mahmood, 2009; Levy and Modood, 2009). Many Muslims voiced their discontent in newspapers, talk shows, and in public protests in countries almost all over the world. In Europe, on which I will focus here, protestors predominantly reacted moderately and expressed their protest in, for

³ This dependence of particular forms of communication on the recognition of speaker's authority is well investigated in philosophy of language. Mary Kate McGowan, for instance, distinguishes between purely communicative speech acts such as telling, on the one side, and speech acts that she calls 'communication-plus', on the other. For 'telling' it is essential (and sufficient) that the hearer recognizes the speaker's intention; as soon as the addressee recognizes my intention to tell him or her (p), I have succeeded in telling him or her (p). This is different in the case of 'communication-plus'-speech acts: Such speech acts can only succeed if the speaker has a specific authority that is recognized by the addressee. McGowan illustrates this by means of the example of an order: "[S]uppose that I try to order my boss to give me a raise. Although the boss recognizes my (misguided) intention to order her to give me a raise, I nevertheless fail to do so exactly because I lack the requisite authority." (McGowan, 2009: 193).

⁴ This section follows, partly in wording, Baumgartner, 2013.

example, petitions to political representatives and passionate but peaceful demonstrations. In countries of the Middle East, the Caucasus region, South and Southeast Asia, and Africa, however, imams and political representatives mobilized demonstrations that partly turned into riots and violent acts, such as attacks on Danish embassies and death threats against cartoonists and editors. The protests, in turn, were followed by reactions of (amongst others) journalists, intellectuals, and politicians, and this is the part of the controversy that I am especially interested in. Although the debate about the different kinds of protests against the publication of the Muhammad cartoons was very heterogeneous and often disordered, I suggest distinguishing three types of reactions to the protests: qualified solidarity, assimilationist critique, and exclusive rejection. I do not claim that it is possible to capture the details of the entire controversy by means of this classification, but it is sufficient to yield insights that can be used for a re-examination of Habermas's ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies.

Qualified solidarity. Throughout the debate, Muslims who objected to the publication of the cartoons received solidarity from members of other religions, as well as from non-religious people. Sympathetic reactions that followed the protests usually pointed out that freedom of expression does not include the right to intentionally offend religious sensibilities, but rather a responsibility to treat the deeply-held religious beliefs of others respectfully. Such views were advocated, for example, by the Nordic Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church which declared that they deplored the publication of the cartoons, describing them as an 'attack on religion' that caused hurt among Muslims. The Nordic Bishops' Conference pointed out that they "welcome free and open discussion which searches the truth but in a context and climate of mutual respect and knowledge about what one is speaking of." (Conferentia Episcopalis Scandiniae, 2006). Similarly, representatives of the United Nations, the European Union and the Islamic Conference jointly stated that they shared "anguish" of the Muslim world at the Muhammad cartoons, claiming that "[i]n all societies there is a need to show sensitivity and responsibility in treating issues of special significance for the adherents of any particular faith, even by those who do not share the belief in question." (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2006). The solidarity with protesting Muslims was *qualified*, however, since tighter legal restrictions on freedom of expression did not find much support, and violent reactions to the cartoons were condemned virtually unanimously in the public debate of Western societies. The essential message was that critique and public debate must be possible, but that *Jyllands-Posten* went overboard by

publishing depictions that were bound to be profoundly offensive to a religious minority in Denmark.

Assimilationist critique. Reactions to protests against the cartoons that are in accordance with this type of critique point out that, since one man's orthodoxy is another man's blasphemy, in democratic and pluralistic societies, all citizens will encounter practices, statements, and images that are, in one way or another, offensive to them. However, it was said, all citizens of pluralistic societies need to be able to cope with such acts and objects constructively. Against this background, protests against the Muhammad cartoons were construed as proof that many Muslims were hyper-susceptible to religious offense which again was seen as evidence that they take their religion 'too seriously', and that they were not yet enlightened or properly integrated in democratic culture (see Rostboll, 2009: 626). Such 'religious squeamishness', however, needs to be abandoned according to proponents of this type of critique, since otherwise believers will not be able to function as competent citizens of democratic and pluralistic societies. In this context, acts and events like the publication of the Muhammad cartoons were understood to be provocative, but valuable contributions, not only because they point to possibly problematic aspects of particular ideologies, but also because they can unsettle the (religious) self-understanding of believers. This can lead to a deconstruction of religious identities that are in conflict with fundamental principles and practices of democratic and pluralistic societies. Thus, according to this view, religiously offensive acts such as the publication of the Muhammad cartoons can have a cathartic and integrative effect.

This take on the publication of the cartoons and protests against it concurs with the views of Carsten Juste, Editor in Chief of *Jyllands-Posten*. Juste explained why the cartoons were published by claiming that Muslims who publicly represent Islam in Denmark were voices from "a dark and violent middle age" and beset by a "sickly oversensitivity" to critique (Klausen, 2009: 13). Others joined in the course of the debate, notably Flemming Rose who pointed to the Danish tradition of satire that deals with, amongst other things, the royal family and other public figures. Rose argued that the cartoonists treated Islam in the same manner that they treat other religions. In so doing, he claimed, they treated Muslims in Denmark "as equals", and "they made a point: We are integrating you into the Danish tradition of satire because you are part of our society, not strangers. The cartoons are including, rather than excluding, Muslims" (Rose, 2006). As witness for his position Flemming Rose refers to the Somali-born former Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali who stated

that the cartoons had sped up the integration of Muslims into European societies by 300 years.

Exclusive rejection. This third type of critique is closely related to the second, and the two often blend into each other. Reactions to protests against religiously offensive acts that are in accordance with this view take any opposition against the cartoons to be evidence not only of an ostensible need for Muslims to ‘modernize’ their religious consciousness and to better integrate into democratic culture, but also as expression of *antidemocratic* attitudes and values. Proponents of this view interpreted the predominantly peaceful protests of European Muslims in light of the relatively few violent protests in Europe and the much fiercer and violent reactions of Muslims, for example, in Lebanon and Syria. Samuel P. Huntington’s thesis of a “clash of civilizations” and of “bloody borders of Islam” (Huntington, 1996) was used as hermeneutic framework, here. “From this perspective”, Jytte Klausen points out, “the protests were represented as entirely predictable results of the atavistic opposition of Muslims to Europe’s secular values.” (Klausen, 2009: 10)

The tendency to construe opposition against the cartoons as evidence of an ostensible clash of civilizations and a fundamental incompatibility of liberal democracy and Islam was identified in an analysis of the media treatment of the debate about the cartoons in Denmark and France that was carried out by social scientists Carolina Boe and Peter Hervik (Boe and Hervik, 2008). Their analysis shows that protesting Muslims were not only construed as not being sufficiently offence-resilient and in need of a reconstruction of their (religious) identity, but were also construed as fiercely *opposing* liberal democracy and its normative foundations. This is remarkable inasmuch as the vast majority of Muslims and other opponents of the cartoons used perfectly legitimate means to express their discontent, including writing letters to the editor, demonstrating, or suing newspapers that had published the cartoons (Boe and Hervik, 2008: 214). Nevertheless, various influential contributors to the debate conflated different forms of protest, both violent and non-violent, and interpreted them all as an apparent threat of an antidemocratic religious totalitarianism. One of several examples thereof is Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s speech “The Right to Offend” that she delivered in Berlin in February 2006. In that speech, Hirsi Ali claims that the publication of the cartoons:

has ... revealed the presence of a considerable minority in Europe who do not understand or will not accept the workings of liberal democracy. These people - many of whom hold European citizenship have campaigned for censorship, for boycotts, for violence, and for new laws to ban ‘Islamophobia’. (Hirsi Ali, 2006)

Hirsi Ali mentions ordinary means of civic participation in public debate and democratic processes and the campaigns for violence, in the same breath, and she seems to link all forms of protest against the cartoons to antidemocratic attitudes. Other contributions were even more explicit and harsher in their use of rhetoric of war in the description of the controversy about the Muhammad cartoons. Boe and Hervik's media analysis shows that Islam was often strikingly compared to totalitarianism and fascism (Boe and Hervik, 2008: 219-221). Furthermore, in both French and Danish media coverage of the cartoon controversy, references to Nazi Germany in the 1930s were used in order to compare resistance against Nazism with a battle against 'Islamism' which is – according to many voices in the debate – to be fought today (Boe and Hervik, 2008: 219). Boe and Hervik also show that public debate about the cartoon controversy hardly allowed for any differentiated positions to be adopted. Rather, the discussion seems to have followed the motto: 'You are either with us, or against us'. The attitude of many participants in the controversy was not the attitude of an open debate about the ongoing development of society, but rather of strict opposition or even of conflict and struggle. Again, Hirsi Ali's February 2006 speech provides an example of her blaming those people who did not unreservedly support the editors of the newspapers which (re)published the cartoons.

Shame on those papers and TV channels who lacked the courage to show their readers the caricatures in The Cartoon Affair. These intellectuals live off free speech but they accept censorship. They hide their mediocrity of mind behind noble-sounding terms such as 'responsibility' and 'sensitivity'. Shame on those politicians who stated that publishing and re-publishing the drawings was 'unnecessary', 'insensitive', 'disrespectful' and 'wrong'. (Hirsi Ali 2006)

A critical re-examination of Habermas's ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies

What does this analysis of parts of the Muhammad cartoons controversy mean for Jürgen Habermas's ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies? Is his proposal able to achieve what it aims to achieve: to enable all citizens, whether religious or not, to participate as equals in public political debate about matters of common interest?

The brief sketch of different types of responses to protests against the publication of the Muhammad cartoons shows that the process of translating religious convictions into a seemingly generally accessible language and 'secular reasons', which is the core of Habermas's proposal, seems not to have been of major importance, here. The only claim of

protesting Muslims that was based on particular religious beliefs was the argument that the cartoons were wrong because images of Muhammad were generally forbidden, a view that is contested in Islamic tradition itself (see Naef, 2007). This argument, however, did not feature prominently in the protests of believers. Much more important were arguments related to profound offense or social marginalization and denigration, all of which were usually couched in ‘secular’ terms. In light of this, Habermas’s strong focus on *epistemic* attitudes and strictly deliberative forms of public debate appears surprising and rather unfruitful. A brief re-reading of the three types of responses to protests against the Muhammad cartoons in light of Habermas’s notion of the postsecular (and the other way round) promises to yield insights that could be used for a possible future revision of an ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies.

In the case of the first type of response, qualified solidarity, it is important to recognize that those people who expressed solidarity with profoundly offended Muslims were willing to imagine something, and take it seriously, that they themselves did not experience, namely a specific kind of moral insult that is related to a particular religious subjectivity, as Saba Mahmood has shown. Mahmood points out that for certain pious Muslims, religion is experienced as habituated embodied practice, and a devout Muslim’s relation to Muhammad a relationship of intimacy and similitude (Mahmood, 2009: 72). Such people experience the kind of moral injury brought about by the publication of the Muhammad cartoons as profound offense which emanates “from the perception that one’s being, grounded as it is in a relationship of dependency with the Prophet, has been shaken.” (Mahmood, 2009: 78). The implied notion of religion differs from the understanding of religion and proper religious subjectivity that was dominant in the cartoon controversy and that is prominent in Habermas’s writings: a “modern concept of religion ... as a set of propositions in a set of beliefs to which the individual gives assent” (Mahmood, 2009: 72); a liberal ‘Protestant’ notion of religion. As a result, the insult that constituted the main problem of the cartoons in the eyes of a group of devout Muslims remained to a large extent unintelligible for other members of society. Against this background, the ‘openness’ of non-Muslim citizens who expressed their solidarity with protesting Muslims does not simply go without saying, since (if the solidarity was based on an empathic understanding of the insult that some Muslims suffered) it presupposes the ability to conceive a form of religious subjectivity that differs from what is predominantly conceived as ‘modern’, without at the same time (dis)qualifying these believers as anti-modern or religious fundamentalists, and without denying them the status of equal members of society. This could be understood as being in accordance with

Habermas's claim that secular citizens must open their minds to the possible "truth content" of contributions that are in one way or the other related to the religion of some of their fellow citizens. However, a process of *translation* of 'religious language' into 'generally accessible arguments' in Habermas's sense seems not to be involved, here, at least not prominently.

The core of the second type of response to the protests, assimilationist critique, is that Muslims who protest against the Muhammad cartoons are seen as not yet being competent democratic citizens because of their ostensible hyper-susceptibility to religious offense. To a certain extent, this seems to be in line with Habermas's claim that in postsecular societies religious citizens need to develop epistemic attitudes that enable them to constructively deal with the challenges that can result from encounters with other religions or non-religious world views (see Habermas, 2006: 14). But Habermas's position seems not to be able to empathically deal with the moral insult that, according to Saba Mahmood's analysis, devout Muslims feel in view of, for instance, the Muhammad cartoons. But is this a problem? Mahmood is able to describe and explain the religious subjectivity of a certain group of devout Muslims and the special kind of moral insult that can result from encounters with images such as the Muhammad cartoons. Her analysis does not show, however, that such believers have a right that others refrain from treating their religion as if it was 'modern' in the above mentioned sense: a set of beliefs which one accepts or rejects (and Mahmood does not claim such a right). Religions are always public in the sense that they also "produce doctrines beliefs, practices, institutions, symbols and discourses that others experience as part of *their* social world", and because of this "offense or injury may simply be a double-effect of persons expressing themselves about how they experience that world." (March, 2012: 336). In light of this, a claim that 'non-Protestant' forms of religious subjectivity should be protected from injurious speech is, ironically, "nothing other than a demand that other citizens treat their own beliefs in 'Protestant' terms – that is, as beliefs that must only be privately assented to and not manifested in public through conduct and speech." (March, 2012: 337).

So it seems that we encounter the problem that in certain situations the 'burdens' that are connected with one's being a member of a liberal and pluralistic society are almost necessarily distributed unevenly for people with different religious subjectivities. People who understand their religion not primarily in terms of propositions and beliefs, but as embodied practices can be especially susceptible to painful experiences in public debate about matters that are directly or indirectly related to what is sacred to them, and an essential part of their identity. Jürgen Habermas tries to deal with this by stating that in postsecular societies

religious people must develop epistemic attitudes that allow them to constructively deal with pluralism (see above). This comes close to the claim that religious people are required to transform their religious subjectivity in a way that it accords with a liberal ‘Protestant’ type of religion. Habermas seems to feel uneasy with this when he rejects the view that the required epistemic attitude of religious citizens could result “from drill and forced adaptation” which would, as he points out, contradict the self-understanding of the constitutional state. “Learning processes can be fostered, but not morally or legally stipulated.” (Habermas, 2008: 28, see also Habermas, 2006: 14). He tries to solve this problem by construing the transformation of religions as result of a “learning process” and of “arduous work of hermeneutic self-reflection” that “must be undertaken from within religious traditions” (Habermas, 2006: 14), and assimilationist critique ascribes to ‘provocative’ acts such as the publication of the Muhammad cartoons a special constructive potential to initiate such transformations and ‘learning processes’. This, however, does not take away the fact that a possible transformation of religious subjectivities is far from being independent from social and political circumstances, which always include formal and informal relations of power. “Obviously”, Andrew F. March points out, “liberalism is not indifferent to that transformation; it prefers religions that do not oppose it to religions that do, and liberal terms of social cooperation are more accommodating of some kinds of religious community than others.” (March, 2012: 337). What is important, however, in view of public debates such as the Muhammad cartoons controversy about religiously offensive acts, is that one cannot conclude from this that people who do experience particular acts or objects as religiously offensive, and express this – for instance in the form of public protests and symbolic acts such as the burning of copies of newspapers – lack cognitive or emotional competencies that are – ostensibly – necessary in order to function as competent democratic citizen. To do so, and hence to construe religious people who bring their concerns and injuries into public political debate as insufficiently integrated into democratic societies, effectively means that a specific form of religion and religious subjectivity, respectively, becomes a necessary condition for participation in public debate. This, however, comes close to an informal but powerful discrimination against certain forms of religion and to an informal exclusion of some devout believers from public debate. They are, as it were, communicatively disabled because others deny them the competency and the authority to participate in the ongoing development of their society. This communicative disablement is especially strong in the case of the third type of response to protests against the cartoons, exclusive rejection, where

sometimes fierce but peaceful protests are mixed up with violent riots and understood and publicly described as anti-democratic attitudes.

In terms of Habermas's ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies, the roots of this problem of communicative disablement could be ascribed to a failure of secular citizens to develop an epistemic attitude that enables them to take seriously contributions of religious citizens, and to be open to the possibility that claims that are – at first sight – connected to or even based on religion, are valuable contributions to the public political debate about the future of society. However, this does not address the core of the problem that is at stake here. Habermas's almost exclusive focus on cognitive aspects of more comprehensive mentalities, and on deliberative forms of public debate, is not able to adequately deal with communicative distortions that are caused by visceral and emotional aspects rather than by problems of translating religious truth claims into 'secular' reasons. In the case of 'exclusive rejection' and partly also in the case of 'assimilationist critique', religious people who publicly voiced their protests against what they experienced as denigration of their religion were rendered mute, as it were, not because they couched their contributions in religious language but because they were construed as lacking the requisite competence and authority to participate as equals in public debate. This can be understood with reference to the concept of public culture. As I pointed out above, public culture makes possible forms of public communication by providing stocks of shared knowledge, norms, values, conventions and so forth. In the case of public political debate, informal conceptions of democratic life can be seen as part of public culture. Together with 'collective self-images' of established groups, the informal conceptions of democratic life predetermine who is considered a legitimate contributor to public debate about the current state of affairs and the future development of society. In the case of 'exclusive rejection', believers who protested against the publication of the Muhammad cartoons were publicly construed as opposing important elements of public culture and dominant informal conceptions of democratic life. Not only their contributions but also the believers themselves, and even their religion as such, were described as being 'foreign' or even a threat to democracy. In light of violent riots and harsh statements of religious and political leaders outside of Europe, which were an undeniable part of the controversy and strongly influenced the media coverage of it, religion, more specifically Islam, was used as a marker that made the process of 'othering' possible. There is a threat that such constellations result in a 'closure' of public debate: participants are informally excluded by denying them the requisite competence and authority, or because the speakers are suspected of questionable motives and false consciousness (see Peters 2008, p. 115).

Conclusion

The above considerations show that Habermas's ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies has strengths, but also important limitations. It cannot solve important problems that can make it hard or even impossible for believers to participate as equals in public political debate, and to be recognized in their authority to participate as equal in processes that determine the future development of society. One of the reasons of these limitations of Habermas's ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies is Habermas's strong focus on deliberative dimensions of public debate and the related cognitive aspects; in particular the problem of how to justify political decisions in democratic and pluralistic societies without encumbering believers with an extra and undue burden. This is an important problem, and Habermas's proposal for its solution has been very influential. However, the analysis of parts of the public debate about the Muhammad cartoons shows that, at least in the case of this controversy, believers were not excluded from public debate because they used 'religious language'. The problem was also not that 'secular' citizens refused to take part in processes of translation, primarily because there was no need to translate 'religious' into 'generally accessible' language. Rather, the factors that could have prevented some believers from participating on a par with others in public debate were related to specific constellations where non-cognitive aspects played an important role. An ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies must deal with this, and include, for example, the powerful influence of 'public culture' and dominant informal conceptions of democratic life in analyses and theory development. Such elements of 'informal politics of society' (Scanlon, 2003) are especially effective and much harder to control than formal rules concerning the legitimacy of specific validity claims. In light of this, one important requirement of a revised ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies will be that all citizens will primarily be listened to and addressed as somebody who has a say in matters concerning the development of society – not as a member of a specific community or group – for instance a religion, a cultural, or an ethnic group (see van den Brink, 2007: 365). A further important requirement is that 'pre-rational' elements that underlie public debate, and influence it significantly, such as public culture and informal conceptions of democratic life are submitted to constant critical reflection and possibly revision. Here I see an important collaborative task for both religious and non-religious citizens.

An important conclusion that post-secular political philosophy can draw from the analysis that is offered by this chapter is that an ethics of citizenship that aims at enabling all citizens to participate as equals in public debate must not limit its focus on cognitive or

epistemic requirement as Habermas does. Public political debate is not a purely ‘rational’ or ‘cognitive’ endeavour, but permeated by bodily and cultural influences that co-determine who is recognized as a competent and ‘respectable’ contributor and what passes for a valuable contribution. The felicity conditions of the very specific speech act that ‘contributing as fully recognized citizen to public political debate’ is can be disturbed by influences from all of the different elements, be it cognitive, emotional, or cultural. Accordingly, an ethics of citizenship in postsecular societies must address all of these elements in order to be able to identify and dismantle obstacles that prevent people from exercising their right to participate as equals in public political debate about matters of common interest, including matters concerning the formal and informal rules that structure the public sphere common to all members of society, whether religious or not.

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