

**Missmatch and meta-discrimination
between religion and politics
A provocative understanding of religion as performativity
Instead of personal (cultural) integrity**

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ROUNDTABLE: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE IN EUROPE
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Why is it sufficient to add political signs to religious signs to rule out a claim of indirect discrimination? Is politics a kind of trump card? This connection between religion and politics is never discussed. Yet this analogy is not neutral. Firstly, it is not found in Directive 2000/78. Secondly, it implies a confusion between religion and politics which is either a vision of the past linked to the Belgian 19th century, or it is the result of a methodological atheism which reduces the religious to a mere political. But even in a methodological atheism, and even if everything is political, everything is also culture. Why not consider this option. Banning religious signs but not cultural signs would then be discriminatory.

Human sciences perfectly show how biased the law is, and how it is the basis for major indirect discrimination, we know that this kind of expertise is not compulsory for the parliament. It is up to the legislator, in an almost miraculous search for consensus, to arbitrate democratically on the quarrels of experts.

I will very briefly propose an explanation of the singularity of the religious reference in religious studies and attempt to explain the strange fascination which leads to a confusion of religion with politics rather than culture.

Let us start with the obvious: the impartiality of civil servants requires that he or she not show any sign of adherence to a political movement. If we take this for granted, we can see the attraction of political neutrality. On the other hand,

religious symbols and their prohibition on civil servants are not self-evident. It has been controversial for over thirty years.

The first explanation is the closeness between religion and politics in Belgium during the nineteenth century, and which still exists in the minds of some: a large-scale fight between Catholics and Secularists, through religious or secular political parties. Does the polarisation still leave its mark today? This question could be discussed at length, including with the State Security services.

But it is above all a second hypothesis that I would like to explore: it has to do with the accusations of crypto-racism against those who want to prohibit the Islamic headscarf, and it has to do even more deeply with the performativity of religion, with its illocutionary force, as our colleagues say in linguistics.

If religious minorities were considered as a race, the protection that religions enjoy would be very high. But it is clear that a distinction must be made between the dignity of individuals on the one hand and a debate on their beliefs and behaviours on the other. To limit the expression of religion, it is therefore forbidden to attack the person, but rather their ideas, or their chosen behaviour. However, focusing on religion as a choice could lead to accentuating the issue of chosen intimacy, or even the integrity of the person and their clothing choices as a guarantee of privacy.

Switching religion to an anthropology of choice rather than integrity is therefore not enough to justify any kind of prohibition in the workplace. Choice is then re-examined in its normative capacity for tother and even its imperative nature : any religious choice would be understood as necessarily radical and proselytising, even through a small-sized and passive sign. This expansion movement is the point of contact with the political dimension.

But there is more: religious normativity to which the profane politician ascribes with envy an absolute imperative capacity, is more than an imperative. It is a performativity. The power of God, feared by the profane, is self-fulfilling. Prayer is a threat. God's vengeance is feared in its capacity to mobilize men as if they were robots. Let's think again of the episode of the voodoo dolly bearing the image of Nicolas Sarkozy. Each buyer could then stick pins into the doll and cast evil spells against Nicolas Sarkozy. The French justice had the doll removed from the market. In this respect, religion is seen as even more powerful than human politics. It is able of radical performative power. In this way, it is distinct from cultural integrity, and also from any ethnic aspects.

Religion seems to be understood as a magical force that brings it closer to politics than to cultural integrity. Therefore, it is an incredible force that is attributed to the smallest religious minorities.

Confusing Religion and Politics instead of comparing Religion to culture is definitively not a neutral choice. But perhaps some supernatural understanding about religions can make one fear the performative power of those who have God with them.

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