Is citizenship secular?
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6. COMPARING TWO PERSPECTIVES: CONVERGING LINES, DIVERGING TRENDS

In the previous two chapters, we have seen that the trends in integration policies do not run parallel to the trends in political philosophies, although several lines of thought are similar in the two perspectives. In this chapter, I want to explore this comparison further by analysing these converging lines and diverging trends in the understanding of the notion of citizenship and with regard to the understanding of the relation between religion and citizenship.

6.1 Similarity and Discrepancies

Liberalism has inspired the subsequent development of other philosophical ideas. The three political traditions of communitarianism, neo-republicanism and liberal nationalism arose in response to liberalism. The liberal approach was generally evaluated as being too thin, and consequently, a ‘communitarian turn’ took place, in which the three positions formulated complementary demands of citizens. I call this a communitarian turn, because the other three traditions have all focused more on the aspect of community than liberalism (which focuses on the individual).

We have seen a similar trend in government policies, in which major framework shifts have occurred (Boshuizen 2006; Fermin 1999; Rijkschroeff, Duyvendak, and Pels 2003). The main shift arose around the turn of the millennium, when prominent politicians and publicists touched upon the (formerly dormant) societal unease concerning migration, the emergence of Islam as new religion in the Netherlands, and the question of Dutch identity. From then on, the political discourse on citizenship in integration policy changed. Later integration policies left the liberal ideal of individual freedom and focused increasingly on a shared national community. This line of reasoning, in which a thin notion of citizenship is replaced by a thicker notion and where the community plays an important role, is thus similarly present in both perspectives.

However, when I take a closer look at the interpretation of citizenship, focusing on questions around integration, assimilation and the balance between majority and minority culture, the conclusion must be that policy documents appear to be in line with liberal nationalism, while in fact, they go even further than the liberal nationalist demand for a shared national identity in that they demand one-sided adaptation. I argue that the notion of citizenship that the government puts forward in the later integration policies is not derived from the
vocabulary of political philosophies, nor does it follow the recommendations of advisory research councils. Where do these differences come from and how can they be explained? I have distinguished three dimensions in which discrepancies occurred:

- uniformity versus diversity
- the content of citizenship: legal, political, social, identity-related
- top-down versus bottom-up shaping of national good citizenship

The first discrepancy occurs in the dimension of uniformity versus diversity. Do good citizens need to display some uniformity or shared identity, or can they be individuals with their own and diverse ways of living and their own conceptions of the good? The content of citizenship is the second dimension. This can be a legal status, it can concern social participation or the political role of citizens, or can be more about identification with a (national) culture. The third dimension is that of a top-down versus a bottom-up shaping of (a concept of) good citizenship. Is good citizenship something that is created and developed in a discursive process between individuals, or should governments have an active role in the definition and development of good citizens?

In regards to the first dimension, both liberalism and neo-republicanism highlight the importance of diversity and individuality, whereas communitarianism and liberal nationalism seem to focus more on uniformity. According to Van Gunsteren (2008), the stimulation of uniformity of citizens reduces the possibilities for citizens to act differently from the mainstream, whereas a dynamic society needs headstrong people and therefore less uniformity. Nonetheless, communitarians and liberal nationalists have emphasised the sense of belonging to and identifying with a community in order to foster trust and solidarity. Within political philosophies, there is thus no clear consensus about this first dimension.

If we examine the integration policies, we discover that focus has moved from individuality and the appreciation of diversity (in the 1990s documents) to homogeneity and uniformity of Dutch citizens (after the turn of the millennium). The growing emphasis on uniformity of Dutch citizenship is also noticed by Duyvendak, Pels, and Rijkschroeff (2005). They argue that the fact that national culture receives so much attention in politics cannot be explained by the (traditional) Dutch appreciation of multiculturalism. On the contrary, the Dutch majority population has become more homogeneous and uniform in the last decades. This has created a value gap between the majority population and cultural minorities, which in turn has led to a change in integration policy. The Dutch government expects a greater level of assimilation with progressive values from her citizens and moves towards a more uniform conception of what it means to be a good citizen (Vasta 2007).

Concerning the second dimension, we have seen that the three political theories differ in their opinion about the importance of the elements that constitute (national) citizenship. Liberalism prioritises the legal status of citizens and stresses the importance of the freedom and equality of citizens, which prompts a focus on law-abidingness and tolerance. Communitarianism
has focused on the social and identity-related elements of citizenship, by stating that citizens are always part of a community that is constitutive of their identities. Neo-republicanism has accentuated the political and social aspect of citizenship and stresses the importance of interactions between individuals in shaping a general conception of good citizenship. Since neo-republicanism takes plurality as a starting point and emphasises interactions between citizens, tolerance is also an essential element in this perspective. Liberal nationalists focus — just like communitarians — on the social and identity-related elements of citizenship. They agree with communitarians over the fact that citizenship entails identification with the community, only they focus on a different level of community. Instead of asserting the primacy of small and tight-knit communities, liberal nationalists maintain that citizens should feel a sense of belonging to the nation, thus giving priority to the national culture and state.

In integration policies, we have seen clear shifts on this second dimension as well. Where the policy documents focused on the legal, egalitarian and social aspect of citizenship in the 1990s documents, the focus of later documents has been on an emotional identification with the ‘typical Dutch culture’. Although the content of this national culture is ill-defined, the suggestion is that the ‘basic Dutch norms’ or the ‘typically Dutch elements’ point to more than simply legal norms. The integration film which articulated specific Dutch values and traditions, reinforces this suggestion. Identification with the national culture is required in order to be considered a good citizen. Linked to this concept is the fact that although multiculturalism was an ideal in the 1990s, the existence of different value systems is no longer considered to be an enrichment for society. The idea that both migrants and society have duties in the integration process disappeared in the policies after the turn of the millennium. In the words of Van Bruinessen: ‘The notion that integration demands adaptations from both sides appears to be submerged’ (Van Bruinessen 2006, 21, emphasis added).

It thus seems to me that, although the later policies clearly display liberal nationalist elements, they diverge from liberal nationalism regarding the reciprocal nature of carrying the burden of integration. As we saw, Miller argued that the integration process cannot be painless on both sides. This balance of demands and adaptations, that even academic liberal nationalists have noticed, is not at all visible in the later integration documents. There are no restrictions or burdens on the side of majority culture in the integration policies. At most, one can discern a fear for the loss of national identity, which needs to be prevented through demanding adaptation from newcomers.

This leads me to the third dimension, and the discrepancy between the levels in thinking about, a top-down versus a bottom-up approach of good citizenship. The first three political philosophical traditions that I have discussed, start from markedly different perspectives, but tend to move towards common ground when it comes to the shaping of citizenship. I propose that liberalism, communitarianism and neo-republicanism have come to an agreement over the value of a discursive process in the development of a concept of good citizenship. Instead of imposing a specific interpretation of what constitutes the good citizen, they have argued that citizens need to interact with each other,
exchange reasons, which might eventually lead to a certain kind of consensus. Liberal nationalism seems to be the odd one out as it focuses on the necessity of adapting to the national culture, which means that all citizens must speak a common language and embrace the societal culture. However, as said before, liberal nationalists do not expect the national identity to be a static and fixed entity that can be imposed on newcomers without any effort. As Miller said, the national identity needs to be ‘thinned down’ in order to be open towards minority groups (Miller 2000: 36). Consequently, governments cannot implement a complete cultural identity on its citizens from the top-down.

Nonetheless, the trends in integration policies do show a shift towards top-down implementation of the ideals of good citizenship. While in the 1990s, the liberal approach to citizenship left room for individual identities, integration policies have increasingly demanded adaptation to an — admittedly ill-defined — national identity. The freedom to preserve one’s religious or cultural identity and to define one’s own citizenship has been replaced by a top-down gesturing towards a specific interpretation of citizenship.

We thus see the government’s interpretation of citizenship move away from the trends in political philosophies and research council recommendations with regard to this third dimension. This is compelling, because one might expect that the normative discussions within political philosophy would reverberate in government policies. Prominent academics are often members of advisory councils, through which these discussions can be passed on to policy implementations. The fact that this has not happened in recent integration policies, supports Scholten’s analysis (2011), where he argued that policy-making had become an increasingly politicised process after the turn of the millennium.

Perhaps this divergence from normative political philosophical discussions and other scholarly insights is related to changes in the political landscape in the Netherlands over the past decades. While in the time of pillarisation, Dutch citizens were fairly stable in their political choices, increasing numbers of undecided voters have emerged. Political parties, including those in government, have tried to win their votes (Voerman 2007). In doing so, it has become more important to align the political position to the opinions of the people; policy-making might have become more politicised through this process. Therefore, while we have seen that government policies do not follow the general trends in political philosophies when it comes to the issue of defining what good citizenship entails, it might be that the integration policies reflect the opinions of Dutch citizens. In Part Two, I will investigate the extent to which this is indeed the case. Before I proceed, I shall compare political philosophical theories with integration policies on their interpretation of the relation between religion and citizenship.
6.2 Is It All About Sex?

In political philosophies, we have seen that the relation between religion and citizenship is understood differently within the four traditions, although they all share a certain ambiguity when it comes to discussing this relationship. In liberalism, we have seen that the priority given to the values of freedom and equality, in combination with the search for a stable society and the awareness of the fact of pluralism, have led to the problematisation of religious expressions in the public domain. In communitarianism, citizenship is mainly understood as membership of small and tight-knit communities, such as religious communities. Religion and citizenship in this sense are closely related; a good citizen of a specific religious community is someone who embraces the religious values of that group.

The dilemma of the relation between religion and citizenship becomes pressing when the level of citizenship is lifted to the level of the nation and the national identity and religious identity contradict each other. Liberal nationalists face the same predicament. Their answer is to argue that a good citizen is someone who embraces the national identity. In cases of contradiction between different identities, the national identity surpasses the religious identity. The political philosophical theory that seems to offer the least conflict between good citizenship and the public role of religion is neo-republicanism. By focusing on the political community instead of the small or national community, neo-republicanism opens up the public arena to all citizens. Since good citizenship entails tolerance and political engagement, all citizens, whether religious or not, can become good citizens as long as they participate. However, Habermas argued that only secular reasons count if the line between public discussions and political institutions is crossed. It thus seems that in political philosophical thinking about good citizenship on a national level, all traditions prescribe limits to the public — or at least the political — influence of religion, although they originate from very diverse lines of reasoning.

In integration policies, there is a direct connection visible between interpretations of citizenship and the approach towards the public role of religion. While the early integration reports fit within the traditional picture of the Netherlands as the open and tolerant country for which it has long been famous (Lechner 2008), later documents have dropped this ideal. Nowadays, integration policies present the Netherlands as a progressive country. Interestingly, the integration policies seem to equate progressive specifically with sexuality. Embracing the ‘typical Dutch accomplishments’ in this domain is seen as a condition for good citizenship. In the integration rhetoric, the accomplishments and progressive ideas focus almost exclusively on sexuality. In the integration film, there is a moralistic overtone telling migrants that coming to the Netherlands is not all rosy. The Dutch habits presented in the film are remarkable exaggerations. The ‘cultural oddity’ is again, connected to sexuality; after all, the Dutch ‘do not make a fuss about nudity’. Ironically, in response to the film, we have seen that members of parliament try to profile themselves by making a fuss about the absence of nudity in the film. The expurgated version has been criticised and the progressive stance towards
sexuality is presented as practically the number one national characteristic of the Dutch.

Among all the changes and developments that have taken place, this aspect of sexuality has remained prominent as a continuous element of the typical Dutch culture. The government could, of course, have chosen to mention other accomplishments. The Netherlands is also infamous for its progressive regulations regarding abortion and euthanasia, for instance. However, these topics are neither mentioned in the policy documents, nor in the integration film. It is hard to determine whether this has to do with the fact that the government perceives these to be private matters, while the acceptance of homosexuality and nudist beaches is a more public issue, or whether the uniformity in opinions cannot be claimed as easily for such matters as euthanasia and abortion. Whichever is the case, the choice for this focus on sexuality is a peculiar one, with interesting consequences.

What does this focus on sexuality have to do with the stance towards religion, one could ask. I argue that in integration policies, there is a two-way connection between the two. On the one hand, we have seen that the emergence of Islam as a new religion in the Netherlands has fuelled the debate over national identity. Several of the major issues that contemporary politicians see as problematic in the interaction between Islamic culture and Dutch culture, are precisely these issues about sexuality. In the notorious interview that De Volkskrant published with Fortuyn in February 2002, Fortuyn explained his personal commitment to the problems with Islam with the following statement: ‘I don’t feel like doing the emancipation of women and homosexuals all over again’ (Volkskrant, February 9, 2002). Clearly, the emergence of a new religion in society has (re)triggered the debate on sexuality. By claiming that the national identity consists of the acceptance of progressive sexual morals, people who do not accept these values cannot fully embrace the national identity. If then, the approach towards citizenship shifts from a liberal to a liberal nationalist stance, embracing the national identity becomes essential for good citizenship. In this way too, the acceptance of progressive values with regard to sexuality is situated high on the political integration agenda.

On the other hand, the emphasis on sexuality has had an impact on the approaches towards religion. People who do not embrace the progressive values around sexuality do not live up to the demands of contemporary Dutch citizenship. These people happen to be mainly members of religious minorities: As far as conservative views on issues such as abortion, euthanasia, gender roles and sexuality still exist, their social basis is very small and consists of members of religious minorities. (De Koster et al. 2014, 587)

Emphasising progressive sexual morals has an impact on both newcomers who are not raised with this progressive world view and also on native Dutch religious citizens with more conservative views. If the latter maintain their conservative views, they are not considered good citizens, according to their own government’s definition. As we have seen, the government has now set certain conditions that religious communities have to satisfy in order to be
accepted in political debates. Thus, while the emergence of a new religion has led to a focus on issues around sexuality, this focus on sexuality in turn has led to new conditions that religions have to satisfy in order to be accepted in political debates.

We have thus seen that interpretations of religion and citizenship are interrelated for both political thought and policy documents, although in different ways. In Part Two, I will analyse the perspective of Dutch citizens. How do they interpret good citizenship? Do they share this insistence on the national culture, or do they embrace a different interpretation? Moreover, how do religiously highly committed citizens view the contemporary focus on adaptation to progressive values, and what opportunities are there for religion to contribute to citizenship?
PART TWO

The Views of Dutch Citizens: An Empirical Approach