Is citizenship secular?
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In general terms, the central aim of this book has been to provide a better understanding of the relation between religion and citizenship, with an eye to contemporary Dutch society. Three research goals were formulated to fulfil the central aim:

- To analyse the complex and multidimensional concept of citizenship;
- To clarify how thinking about citizenship influences thinking about the public role of religion; and
- To investigate how religious beliefs influence thinking about citizenship and religion.

In order to accomplish these goals, I have investigated how the notion of citizenship and the relation between religion and citizenship have been interpreted at three levels: political philosophical theories, Dutch government policies and Dutch citizens. To keep track of the different interpretations and trends in thinking about the contested notion, I developed the Big Five model of Dutch citizenship, which consisted of the following five dimensions: social engagement, political engagement, law-abidingness, tolerance and shared identity.

Part One started with an analysis of the lines of reasoning about citizenship in four contemporary political philosophical traditions: liberalism, communitarianism, neo-republicanism and liberal nationalism. These four traditions are among the most influential theories in modern political philosophy and help to understand important currents in contemporary Dutch political thinking. Plotting these developments in political philosophy gave me the opportunity for a comparison with parallel trends in government policies. As the Dutch government has reformulated citizenship as its explicit goal in integration policies since the 1990s, I have focused on contemporary trends in this policy domain.

Part Two contained the empirical component of the book and is comprised of two studies that investigated how religion and citizenship are interwoven at the level of the individual. The method of investigation was twofold; I began by looking at how a person’s religious background influenced his or her interpretations of citizenship, and then at how interpretations of citizenship influence opinions on religion. The first study was an online survey, which mapped the general Dutch approach towards citizenship and religion. Despite the fact that over 1500 people participated in this study and special efforts were made to collect a sample as representative as possible, Muslims and lower-educated people remained under-represented. This under-representation might
have influenced the results, so my conclusions here are cautious. Nonetheless, the results pointed towards some trends, which I discuss below.

The second study consisted of eighteen interviews with religiously highly committed Protestants and Muslims with a Turkish background. Orthodox religious people are often negatively portrayed in public debates, despite the well-known fact that they contribute positively to various aspects of citizenship. As such, I wanted to investigate how two specific groups of ‘orthodox’ religious citizens interpreted the notion of citizenship and how they experienced the acceptance of their faith in their direct surroundings and in society at large. In addition, these interviews enabled me to gain practical insight into the reasoning behind the abstract notion of citizenship, thereby complementing the findings of the survey.

In the Synthesis, I integrate the results of Part One and Part Two. How is citizenship understood at the different levels? How are religion and citizenship interwoven? What role can religion play in contemporary Dutch citizenship? In the next three sections, I return to the research goals to review and interpret the main findings. I conclude my book with a proposal for a weighted Big Five model of Dutch citizenship, which would embrace positive contributions of religion to society at large.

14.1 Analysing the Notion of Citizenship

Bringing together the three perspectives — political philosophical theories, Dutch government policies and Dutch citizens — has opened new avenues for understanding diversity and nuanced thinking in the contested notion of citizenship. Upon reflection of what I have achieved in my book, I want to highlight three findings.

14.1.1 Typical Dutch Tolerance

The first major finding is that tolerance is an essential dimension of contemporary citizenship in the Netherlands. Including tolerance as a separate dimension has been one of the innovative aspects of the current study. Due to the centrality of tolerance in the perceived (historical) identity of the Dutch, I wanted to test the extent to which tolerance was also considered an essential element for good citizenship. Analysis of the political philosophical traditions showed that for both liberalism and neo-republicanism, tolerance — in the sense of openness to others and acceptance of diversity — is one of the key virtues of a good citizen. Dutch citizens agreed that this interpretation of tolerance for citizenship is important. The results of the survey and the interviews indicated a widely-shared agreement over the fact that tolerance is considered a necessary component of living together in a multicultural society like the Netherlands. Dutch integration policies, however, do not seem to fit into this picture. While tolerance was an ideal in the 1990s, governments nowadays tend to demand socio-cultural adaptation to specific Dutch norms and values.
Arguably, this results in a move towards cultural homogeneity, which stands in opposition to the ideal of Dutch tolerance.

How can we interpret these results? The apparent contradiction between Dutch citizens and contemporary integration policy might be due to the fact that the survey sample was not representative for the whole population. Public debates in the media suggest that large groups of Dutch people embrace cultural homogeneity. It is known that there is a general under-representation of minorities and lower-educated people in social-scientific research, due to inaccessibility on the one hand and unwillingness to participate on the other (De Leeuw and Hox 1998). Both of these aspects must be taken into account in future research in order to gain a more representative sample, which might alter the results. However, it is equally possible that the media exaggerates the longing for a national identity and that my survey data reflect the general Dutch approach towards tolerance and Dutch identity better. A thorough analysis of the public support for a cultural national identity in combination with media research could contribute to the findings of the present study.

Nonetheless, if we follow my findings, we may assume that tolerance is indeed regarded as an important element of citizenship by Dutch citizens and in political philosophies. However, integration policies have increasingly demanded cultural adaptation. It seems to me that this disparity points to a major interpretation gap between the three perspectives. The conclusion that can be drawn from my research indicates that the difference between the three levels can be related to the government response to the emergence of Islam as a new religion in the Netherlands. As several scholars have argued, the emergence of Islam has been met with ambiguity in European countries (Rath et al. 2001; Cesari 2004; Casanova 2009). Although European governments respect the individual freedom of Muslims and their adherence to their religion, they have difficulties in tolerating the public exercise of Islam because they interpret Islam as un-European. Different countries have used a variety of arguments to problematise the public exercise of Islam in Europe, ranging from the presumed incompatibility of Islam and liberal secularist norms to the fear that Islam would threaten (the preservation of) the Christian nature of European countries (Casanova 2009).

In Part One, I have already indicated that the appearance of Islam in Dutch society fuelled public debates on national identity. In response to that, Dutch governments have emphasised the adaptation to Dutch identity in recent integration policies. My comparative analysis of integration policy and philosophical theory reveals that the perceived typical Dutch tolerance has played a role in defining ‘us’ as Dutch in these recent policies. If we take a closer look at the documents, we see that the governments try to protect the Dutch tolerant tradition by demanding socio-cultural adaptation to specific norms and values. I reconstruct the underlying argument as follows: citizens who do not accept the progressive Dutch values are considered intolerant and therefore un-Dutch. If they want to become Dutch, they must tolerate the progressive values and even accept and internalise them. Therefore, the demand for more socio-cultural adaptation to a liberal-progressive comprehensive
doctrine is legitimatised in order to make intolerant newcomers more tolerant. The fact that demanding one-sided tolerance of (and adaptation to) specific values itself contradicts the value of tolerance has been overlooked or ignored. I share Judith Butler’s critique on the selective prioritising of particular minorities’ rights and freedom in Dutch integration policies at the cost of the rights and freedom of others (Butler 2009, 126–131). This tendency not only concerns newcomers, but extends to native religious groups as well.

Recent policies suggest that all Dutch citizens need to embrace progressive values. This also counts for those progressive values at the centre of many public debates. For instance, the idea that the SGP needs to accept the eligibility of women and that all civil celebrants must be willing to marry gay couples. Once, tolerance entailed that (religious) organisations were free to determine their own statutes and that individuals could refer to conscientious objections based on their religion. Nowadays, the principle of non-discrimination prevails over the rights of religious organisations and religious freedom. The results of the interviews have shown that religiously highly committed Protestants do not recognise themselves in the picture of ‘the Dutch’ that governments draw today. Indeed, they cast doubts on the neutrality of secular government rhetoric, while in fact the rhetoric reflects normative positioning. The push for tolerance of progressive values as part of Dutch culture is thus met with criticism by this native group of Dutch citizens. I conclude that tolerance is understood as an important aspect of Dutch citizenship in all three levels, although the interpretation of the dimension is radically different in integration policies compared to the other two levels.

14.1.2 Voting as Dutch Political Engagement

The second finding that I want to highlight is the fact that political engagement was hardly regarded as an important characteristic of good citizenship in the Netherlands. My empirical studies corroborated results from previous research, which revealed that Dutch citizens prioritised social engagement over political engagement. Aside from this, integration policies paid little attention to political engagement. My choice to focus on the policy domain of integration may have influenced this view. However, a suggestion for future research would be to investigate government interpretations of citizenship from multiple policy domains. The policy domain of education, in particular, could complement the current findings. It is quite conceivable that the government presents a different picture of citizenship in its education policies than in integration policies: what the government expects from young future citizens may differ from expectations of foreign future citizens. A quick glance at education policies indeed suggests that both the elements of political engagement and tolerance are
more prominent in this policy domain, compared to the domain of integration. Future research on diverse policy domains could perhaps offer a more nuanced view of diverse government interpretations of citizenship; specifically regarding the importance the government attaches to the dimension of political engagement.

All in all, current research seems to suggest that political engagement is considered relatively unimportant for good citizenship in the Dutch context. However, there are subtleties indicated by the interview data that may influence this suggestion. When asked explicitly about the topic, interviewees indicated that political engagement was indeed an expression of good citizenship, with several respondents emphasising its importance.

Diving deeper into the actual meaning of the dimension of political engagement, an interesting pattern becomes visible. The interviewees focused almost exclusively on voting in elections when talking about political engagement. According to them, voting enables people to voice their opinions in and about society. Voting is arguably the most obvious expression of political engagement, which might explain its prominence in the interviews. Remarkably, the results of the survey indicated that voting is not only the most obvious, but also the only important element of political engagement. The other five elements that measured political engagement (such as following the national news, knowledge about party programmes and engagement in local politics) were not considered important for being a good citizen. These results suggest that the broader spectrum of political engagement highlighted in several political philosophical traditions and subsequently taken into account in the survey, did not resonate in the opinions of Dutch citizens. Aside from voting, political engagement does not constitute an important dimension of Dutch citizenship.

14.1.3 Opposed Trends in Reasoning About Citizenship

My third major finding revealed that the trends in reasoning about citizenship in integration policies and political philosophies ran in opposite directions. We have seen that the three most influential political philosophical traditions — liberalism, communitarianism and neo-republicanism — started in the 1980s as three colliding theories. They disagreed not only on the dimensions belonging to the concept and on the relations between the dimensions, but also on the way in which citizenship should be shaped in society. In the course of the debates on citizenship, the three theories have moved towards common ground. All three

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82 As of 2006, primary and secondary schools in the Netherlands are expected to pay attention to active citizenship and social integration in their education programmes. The laws made to this effect, state that: ‘Education: 1) is founded on the assumption that pupils grow up in a multiform society; 2) aims to promotion of active citizenship and social integration; and 3) is directed towards pupils’ understanding of and acquaintance with the various backgrounds and cultures of their fellow pupils’ (Wet op het Primair Onderwijs 8.3 and Wet op het Voortgezet Onderwijs 17).
now favour a discursive process and thus a bottom-up approach in the
development of a concept of good citizenship. Citizens should discuss the
content of citizenship in interaction with each other, so that a common
understanding of — and agreement on — the concept can be reached.

In integration policies of the 1990s, the Dutch government acknowledged
the necessity of a discursive process. At that time, integration documents
accentuated mutual acceptance and valued (cultural and religious) diversity.
Citizens had the freedom to live according to their own ideals. In the years after
the turn of the millennium, this approach changed and the subsequent
governments started to act as so-called ‘gate-keepers’ by demanding more
socio-cultural adaptation. In doing so, integration documents no longer
promoted a dialogue about values and conditions for living together. On the
contrary, government rhetoric has only gestured towards a clear-cut picture of
what is typically Dutch in our society without providing any detailed
description. Despite the vagueness of citizenship signifiers in the documents,
the documents demand increasing uniformity of its citizens. That is the real
issue. The government expects everyone to be Dutch without explaining what
that entails.

Although it seemed that this trend in integration policies fitted within a
liberal nationalist approach in defining citizenship, I demonstrated in Part One
that, in their demand for one-sided adaptation, recent governments went far
beyond the call for national identity exemplified by this tradition. We can thus
conclude that there are opposing trends in the ideas on how to shape good
citizenship. Integration policies tended to support a discursive process in the
1990s, but started to demand more adaptation to vague cultural norms after the
turn of the millennium. Meanwhile, political philosophies started to embrace the
ideal of a bottom-up shaping of the notion, or at least acknowledged that
integration was a costly process involving two sides.

My studies revealed that the ideas on how to shape good citizenship are
related to the question of individuality versus uniformity. If the content of
citizenship is fixed and implemented top-down, uniformity becomes the main
focus, as opposed to when citizens are free to develop citizenship in a discursive
bottom-up process. The move away from the liberal concept of citizenship in
government policies after the turn of the millennium therefore stems from this
desire for cultural uniformity.

It would have been of great benefit to have investigated the development of
the opinions of Dutch citizens in the past decades. Unfortunately, I could only
perform a single measurement of the opinions of Dutch citizens. As essentially
contested concepts like citizenship are constantly in flux, future research on this
topic can gain much from longitudinal empirical data. Nonetheless, the results
of my empirical studies allow me to tentatively conclude that the views of
Dutch citizens do not match the government’s top-down approach, with its
increased emphasis on adaptation to Dutch culture. It is precisely this dimension
of national identity where the divergence between Dutch citizens and
integration policies is the greatest. This is remarkable, since the changes in the
framing of good citizenship by the government were expected to be reactions to
populist tendencies. In their efforts to win the votes of the people, political
parties and Dutch governments have increasingly tried to articulate the opinions of Dutch citizens. Public debates in the media suggest that Dutch citizens are more inclined to favour a nationalist approach to citizenship and the changes in integration policies appear to parallel the call for more uniformity and a stronger focus on shared culture. However, my research indicated that Dutch citizens do not embrace this approach.

Dutch citizens considered the dimension of a shared national identity least important. Combined with the clear emphasis on the dimension of tolerance, the results of the online survey sketched a different picture of the good citizen than the one presented in integration policies. A good Dutch citizen is a tolerant and open-minded person who takes care of his fellow people; that is what both the survey data and interview data told us. The survey data showed that the nationalist interpretation was not embraced by Dutch citizens in general. The interview data supplemented these findings, demonstrating that religiously highly committed citizens counted social engagement and tolerance to be important characteristics of citizenship. In contrast, their response to the dimension of a shared Dutch identity was, at best, ambiguous. Many of the religiously highly committed respondents — both Muslims and Protestants — seemed to support the transitions made in integration documents in the late 1990s, when the liberal approach to citizenship was expanded to incorporate a greater emphasis on social engagement. Post-millennium integration policy, with its shift towards a liberal nationalist approach and the added pressure to adapt to Dutch culture, was not appreciated by these religious citizens.

14.2 Clarifying the Relation Between Religion and Citizenship

14.2.1 Spurious Relation Between Religion and Citizenship?

In the first part of the book we saw that the various interpretations of citizenship had implications for thinking about religion. In all four political philosophies, boundaries for the public expressions of religion were related to thinking about good citizenship. In integration policies, this relation was even clearer. After the turn of the millennium, policy documents abandoned the liberal conception of citizenship. Consequently, diversity was no longer seen as desirable. While cultural and religious diversity was seen as enrichment for society in the 1990s and the only limits to religious expressions were formed by the constitution, in recent years public religion has been challenged. Nowadays, religious communities are expected to adhere to certain (normative, not merely legal) norms and to accept progressive Dutch ‘accomplishments’ and sexual morals. These tendencies indicate a direct relation between the interpretations of citizenship and attitudes towards religion.

It is therefore unusual that I found very few strong correlations between interpretations of citizenship and attitudes towards religion in the empirical data. The results of the survey suggested that the two were relatively unrelated. How is this possible? Did I see relations that weren’t actually there? Is there a
difference between individual thinking and policy strategies? Or can the findings of the survey be explained by introducing a third variable? It is conceivable that the relation between thinking about religion and interpretations of citizenship is mediated by a different variable. I therefore tested the possible explanation that the relation between the two is different for religious and non-religious people. Splitting the sample into a non-religious and religious group did not, however, drastically change the results. This suggests that the perceived direct correlation in integration documents is not solely due to the secular nature of government policies. Otherwise the survey data would have probably shown a similar tendency in non-religious persons.

If we delve further into the results, another possible explanation emerges: when splitting the sample into a religious and a non-religious group, the results regarding Dutch identity and tolerance show a consistent picture. For both groups, those who stressed the dimension of national identity were more negative about religion, while those who accentuated the dimension of tolerance appreciated religious diversity more. These results are in line with the trends we discovered in integration policies and call for a slight correction of the results. There is a presumably direct relation between attitudes towards religion and interpretations of citizenship, but only at the dimensions of Dutch identity and tolerance. This was prominent in integration policies and seems to be confirmed by the results of the survey.

14.2.2 The Contested Issue of Sexuality in Relation to Dutch Identity

It has become evident that religion is the motivating force behind the focus on sexuality in thinking about citizenship. The emergence of Islam in Western Europe triggered the debates over national identity in political philosophy as well as in integration policies. One of the issues which seemed to show Islam’s incompatibility with Dutch society was the acceptance of progressive values and typical Dutch accomplishments in this domain. These values appeared to be concentrated around themes of sexuality. On the other side of the coin, by emphasising progressive attitudes towards sexuality in integration policies, recent governments choose to embrace a specific picture of the good citizen, which arguably also excludes other (mainly orthodox) religious groups. If the acceptance of these progressive values is indeed so important for good citizenship, it could be expected that the survey data would show that non-religious people ascribe greater importance to the dimension of a shared national identity than religious people. We would also expect to see that Muslims would find this aspect rather problematic. None of these were true: Protestants emphasised shared national identity more than non-religious people; no differences were found between any of the other groups. Based on the actual scores, I conclude that this dimension cannot be considered important for good citizenship in general and that Muslims do not find this aspect either more problematic or less important than the other groups.

Admittedly, the dimension of a shared national identity did not only concern the acceptance of progressive values or sexual morals. Therefore, I decided to
look specifically at the issue of accepting homosexuality as being a typical characteristic of a good Dutch citizen. The survey did indicate differences here: while Catholics and non-believers find the acceptance of homosexuality a rather important indicator of good citizenship, Muslims were less positive about this issue. It was also apparent in the interviews that homosexuality was a difficult topic. Several respondents, both Muslims and Protestants, thought that the government should not impose specific moral values on its citizens and used this motif to disentangle good citizenship from an endorsement of ‘progressive’ (sexual) values. To complicate matters, some respondents indicated that, although they did accept the fact that gay marriage is legal in the Netherlands, they should also have the freedom to hold a personal opinion about homosexuality that diverges from the mainstream. Acceptance of the legal possibilities for homosexuals is something different to them than the individual and personal acceptance of homosexuality.

I wonder whether non-religious Dutch citizens in general would agree with this unusual approach, in which diverging personal values and legal values are allowed to co-exist. This typically religious, minority approach was only explicitly expressed with regard to the issue of gay marriage, although one could easily translate it to other issues related to progressive values; perhaps even to other social debates. It seems to me that Dutch governments of the past decade expect each and every citizen to accept homosexuality wholeheartedly and truly internalise progressive values. This expectation, however, leaves no room for the co-existence of conflicting values within individual citizens; a balance of values that the ‘homosexuality’ issue highlights. According to government policy, the acceptance of legal norms should be accompanied by matching internal beliefs. Yet, since my research showed that Dutch citizens did not embrace the ideal of a shared national identity to the same extent as the government did, I tentatively suggest that there might be room for this type of balance between personal, religious values and legal values or norms. In essence, the co-existence of conflicting values revealed by the issue of homosexuality could provide a working model on how to deal with other conflicting value and belief systems.

### 14.3 Understanding the Influence of Religious Beliefs

The third research goal entailed the investigation into how religious belief influenced thinking about citizenship and religion. Results of the survey confirmed the findings from previous studies that indicated differences between religious and non-religious groups. My results pointed to a division between Muslims and Protestants as one group and non-religious people and Catholics as another. This division was visible both on several citizenship dimensions and on several attitudes towards religion; Muslims and Protestants found the dimensions of social engagement and law-abidingness more important for a good citizen than non-religious people and Catholics. Muslims and Protestants were also more positive about the involvement of religion in the public and political domain than non-believers and Catholics.
Hunter (1991) has argued that opinions on moral and social matters depend more on differences in levels of orthodoxy and progressivism than on differences in religious affiliation, but my research showed that his conclusion is overdrawn. The survey results indeed indicated that the level of religious commitment (which is strongly related to orthodoxy) influenced the above-mentioned results, but differences remained between religious affiliations on the dimension of law-abidingness and regarding the privatised role of religion.

In order to understand how the combination of religious commitment and religious background can guide thinking on social matters, I returned to the interviews. Muslims and Protestants both relied heavily on their religious tradition and took this as a starting point for thinking about citizenship. Both groups also emphasised the importance of the dimension of law-abidingness, which corroborates the results of the survey. However, more Protestant than Muslim respondents referred directly to their holy books when discussing this issue. This suggests that not only the level of religious commitment (which was equal for both groups), but also the religious affiliation influences the ways in which citizens combine their religious tradition with their opinions on social matters. Especially in those cases where clear directions are given by a specific religious tradition, differences between religious groups and between orthodox and progressive groups can occur. My research suggests that religious affiliation and commitment both need to be taken into account in order to understand the full influence of religion when it comes to thinking about social matters.

Based on these findings, it is tempting to conclude that religiosity influences the interpretations of citizenship. However, the findings of the survey lead to the conclusion that the relation between religious belief and thinking about citizenship is, in practice, not very strong. The differences in the importance which individual respondents attached to the various dimensions of citizenship are far greater than the differences between religious groups. It appears that there are commonalities across citizens that outweigh differences in religious beliefs. Although it is vital to take the differences between religious groups into consideration, it is remarkable that no diametrically opposed views in thinking about citizenship between non-religious and any of the religious groups were found. Contrary to what was expected, non-religious citizens did not embrace the ideal of a shared national identity to a greater degree than religious respondents and Muslims did not completely reject it. Obviously, the number of Muslim participants was limited, so I must be cautious in drawing conclusions about the whole group. In light of this research however, my results showed noteworthy consistency between religious groups over the dimensions of citizenship, especially with regard to the dimensions of tolerance and shared identity. This indicates that there are at least building blocks for a common outlook on Dutch citizenship that encompasses both religious and non-religious citizens.

Also regarding the opinions on religion, my results revealed that consistencies between the groups were more notable than the differences. In a country with a highly secularised cultural mainstream, where several of the interviewees experienced an increasingly negative attitude towards religion in society and where integration policies recently questioned religion and religious
diversity, my survey indicated that non-religious citizens are neutral or even positive about the role of religion in contemporary Dutch society. This unusual result again points to a discrepancy between government and citizen approaches. While polarised debates in the media suggest that Dutch citizens are increasingly negative towards religion (which might have encouraged recent governments to question the public role of religion and the value of religious diversity), my survey revealed that Dutch citizens embrace a rather different — and generally positive — position in the acceptance of religion in contemporary Dutch society. How is this possible? It might, of course, be that the participants of the survey gave (what they thought were) socially desirable answers. However, I cannot verify this. On the basis of my results, I can only conclude that Dutch citizens are less negative about religion than the media suggests.

As the results of the survey indicated that people who stressed the dimension of national identity were more negative about religion, future in-depth, qualitative research that specifically investigates groups or individuals who are known for their nationalist opinions would complement my findings. Additionally, it would also be worthwhile to investigate the attitudes towards different religions or religious expressions. It is known from previous research that Dutch people are quite positive about Christianity but rather negative about Islam (De Hart and Dekker 2012, 9–10). An investigation into how far the reception of religious diversity actually reaches in Dutch society would have merit, especially since the results of the current research indicated that the dimension of religious diversity was appreciated by both religious- and non-religious citizens.