

## **Faith in the City?– negotiating the postcolonial and the postsecular**

The aim of this lecture is to enquire into the emerging and increasingly significant space of the postsecular city – in which certain secularist assumptions concerning the disappearance of religion from the public sphere are being significantly redrawn by the re-emergence of religion into that space. A principle driver for this re-emergence of religion or faith in the public space has been the arrival of the postcolonial city – the city of diasporas and migrations in which difference and plurality have upset and rewritten hegemonic, colonialist, mono-cultural dialogues. Much postcolonial city discourse with its roots in cultural studies, social anthropology and political theory has ignored the significance of religion as a feature of the postcolonial city, but it can do so no longer. As we progress beyond the cusp of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is clear that religion and the practices of faith and spirituality will be major shapers of the public sphere – and we will therefore need to understand the further the interface between the postsecular and the postcolonial at the level of lived experience as well as theory – and if we are going to be able to create socially and political sustainable communities of difference (never mind environmentally).

So in terms of advancing this enquiry, this paper will be a dialogue between theory and practice and it will end with a series of questions for discussion – an open-ended, inductive enquiry.

In terms of the building blocks for this enquiry therefore I want to look at what we might define as the postsecular city, and then how we might define the postcolonial city. I would bring into the frame the work of the influential feminist planner Professor Leonie Sandercock, and her definition of the concept of cosmopolis as a vision of an inclusive city based on difference and otherness. I will then test that concept out with a case study based on research on religious-based identities done in the Netherlands which I think goes to the heart of some of the layers of complexity associated with this new public space – please note that I am using the concept of space (or the city) in both a spatial and political and cultural sense. I will then conclude by suggesting the need to reframe two further concepts – namely that of negotiated identities and what a definition of multiculturalism might look like in the light of this discussion. I would like to leave you with three or four questions which you might like to pursue or not.

### **The Postsecular City**

This is an emerging and contested term, and in a forthcoming book I am co-editing I have identified at least six dimensions to the concept which would include the philosophical, the theological, the sociological, the spatial, the cultural and the political which would include issues of governance and civil society. Therefore snappy definitions are not yet possible. The air however, is full of revisions of the classic secularisation thesis, which suggested strongly that by the time we reached the 21st century, religion would cease to have any significant role in public life. Thus the sociologist Peter Berger used the term ‘secularisation’ to describe a process ‘by

which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.' Similarly, Wilson applied the term secularisation to 'the process by which religious institutions, actions and consciousness lose their social significance.' Now Berger and others are using terms such as desecularisation to describe the resurgence of furious, supernaturalist, fundamentalist or conservative expressions of religion in politics and public life.

Meanwhile, the philosopher Charles Taylor is his recent magnum opus *A Secular Age* argues against what he sees as the professional assumption within secularism which he argues, is nothing but a secularist bias, born out of (unsuccessful) doctrines that were designed to 'keep at bay' the 'moral malaise', the 'terrible flatness', and the 'aching lack' of over-rationalised being in the modern era. Working forwards from medieval Christendom, with occasional references to 'pre-Axial' systems, Taylor relates how it was that 'we' got from a fused, sacred sense of being in the world to the fractured *mentalitie* of the secular age. The story is told of how the 'bulwarks of belief' were steadily broken down. From an enchanted world ('charged' objects, portentous occurrences, spirits actively entwined with earthly doings) to a disenchanted world; from a *porous* self (people 'possessed by' and 'receiving' supernatural influences) to a *buffered* self; from subjectivity prone to and seeking of God's love and intervention to a fortress-like, self-sufficient self, keeping the world and its deeper currents at a distance; from God's functional kingly cosmos to an impersonal, causal universe; from a life close-to-chaos, punctuated by timely revelry and periodic symbolic overturnings to disciplined and purified conduct; from multiple, simultaneous, higher, and 'kairotic' times to a singular linear time; from 'vertical' social relations and ethical norms to 'horizontal' ones; from a sociality collectively orientated to the divine, to a society of individuals governed by the hidden hand of mutual benefit; from the 'incarnation' of mystery and inspiration within our very bodies, to intellectualistic 'excarnation'.

Taylor does not wish simply to turn the clock back, or altogether reject the 'immanent frame' of modernity. But he does want to insist that *secularity* – which lies at the heart of the 'modern social imaginary' – is not a matter of *secularism* as such. He does however believe openness to the prospect of an otherwise unavailable 'fullness' remains a very 'live option' within today's 'galloping spiritual pluralism', in which reflexivity is everything and decisive truth impossible (2007: 300). It follows that social analysts as well as active citizens are under an obligation not to close out the possibility of transcendence, in which the transforming power of 'God's pedagogy' might be entered into.

And talking of citizen's, political theorist Jurgen Habermas has recently suggested that political theory moves to 'a postsecular self-understanding of society as a whole in which the vigorous continuation of religion in a continually secularising environment must be reckoned with'.

I think this idea of postsecular (i.e. more of both rather than religion conquering secularisation or vice versa) reflects the nuanced and fluid relationship between the religious, the spiritual and the secular within Western liberal democracies such as the

UK. As my colleague at the University of Manchester Professor Elaine Graham recently reflected, 'I wonder whether what we are witnessing in part is the opening up of a new cultural and sociological fault-line in British society, not between members of different faiths, but actually between a relatively indifferent but increasingly detached and baffled irreligious majority, and an increasingly vocal and sometimes united minority of those holding a religious faith'.

### **The postcolonial city**

Similarly to postsecularism there is no single definition of the postcolonial city.

Some theorists equate the postcolonial city with the globalised city which not only includes an openness to western capital investment but the ongoing colonisation of these cities by cultural and anti-democratic processes which continue to exploit and experiment on these cities for the benefit of western markets. This exploitation is usually within the gift of pro-western governments/dictatorships who evince a strong nationalist rhetoric whilst at the same time allowing priority to American or European investment or military needs (many countries in South East Asia, Philippines, Indonesia etc). In other words the cities in these countries are postcolonial in name only – in other words for post-colonial read neo colonial pressure to become neo-liberalised cities

For other theorists the postcolonial city is more a site of resistance and new identity – a truly diversified and pluralised community in which the Other, (the slaves and the racially exploited who for so long were labelled as inferior and whose experience has been studied and pronounced upon by colonial anthropologists and political masters), is finally finding an authentic voice, and a public space which is at the centre of political and cultural life rather than at the periphery. A very short hand definition of the postcolonial city would be to say that the periphery has come into the centre – or even that the concept of a space between the centre and the periphery no longer exists but is a mixture whereby the global and the local co-exist in a new type of fluid and ever-unfolding glocal space. There is as well the whole literary and cultural studies debate about the hybrid or Third Space between the saying and the Said (Bhabha via Said and Orientalism vs Occidentalism etc) – the fluid and agonistic space between the labelling and the lived experience that also feeds into this postcolonial city debate. Another shorthand word in circulation for the postcolonial city is the notion of the cities of difference.

One postmodern planner who expands a lot of these more abstract theories is the work of Leonie Sandercock an Australian postmodern feminist planner currently based in Vancouver who passionately believes in the political liberation contained within much of this rhetoric and attempts to put into practice the notion of the postcolonial city of diversity. She does this by attempting to create local processes of planning and community development that bring about genuinely inclusive and participatory spaces of planning and local democracy. That is not to say that she believes the battle to build the genuinely inclusive postcolonial city is won. She is sanguine 'As a function of the state, planning is one of many social technologies of

power available to ruling elites and has primarily been used to support the power and privileges of dominant classes and cultures' – e.g. South Africa, Israel, or the 'more subtle residential segregation by race in the United States, and the attempted exclusion of indigenous peoples from metropolitan areas of Australia' – what she calls 'racialised liberal democracies' (2003: 129).

She has a number of building blocks with which she constructs her postcolonial or mongrel city.

*Voices for the Borderlands:* These voices belong to people who dwell in the spaces of displacement and transplantation, to cultures with a long history of oppression, to people who have been marginalised for hundreds of year but who are now insurgent and who are now turning their marginality into a creative space for theorising and a space for insurgent citizenship. They challenge dominant notions of theory and practice, of epistemology and ontology. They challenge us to acknowledge and respect diversity or difference in our theory or practice. If we listen to these feminist, postcolonial and postmodern voices, we need to radically revise our notion of planning ... to incorporate the concept of difference (there is that concept again)

*Insurgent Practices:* (A thousand tiny empowerments) As new and more complex kinds of ethnic diversity come to dominate cities the very notion of a shared interest may come increasingly into question. These struggles over belonging take the form of struggles over citizenship in its broadest sense of rights to and in the polis. James Holsten calls these sites of struggle, spaces of insurgent citizenship – Citizenship changes as new members advance to take their claims, expand its realm, and, as new forms of segregation and violence counter these advances, eroding it. The sites of insurgent citizenship are found at the intersection of these processes of expansion and erosion' (cos 2: 21)

*New Cultural Politics:* embracing The Other. The old cultural politics, based on fixed and essentialised notions of difference – notably the concept of blackness– attempted to create lots of separate spaces for each little group to live, but much of this right to difference created a series of parallel rather than overlapping. Within the New Cultural Politics – every citizen has the right to difference but with that right comes a commitment to respect the right of difference in others- and not in a passive way that requires no shift in attitude, but in a way that acknowledges that the right to difference must be negotiated within an understanding of that we all share a common fate – we cannot ultimately cut ourselves off from the other and live in a homogenised ghetto.

And this actively created postcolonial mongrel city of difference she boldly levels as Cosmopolis - 'a building site of the mind a utopia which can never be realised but only ever be in the making.'. *We need to start understanding our cities as bearers of our intertwined fates. We need to see or city as the locus of citizenship and to recognise multiple levels of citizenship as well as multiple levels of common destiny... we need to see our city and its multiple communities as spaces where we connect with the cultural other who is now*

*our neighbour... the cities and regions of the future must nurture difference and diversity through a democratic cultural pluralism.* (Sandercock, 1998: 182 – 183)

Is Sandercock being too Utopian despite herself? Is the reality more complex and contested? Well. I would now like to move to a case study to test this out the viability of this notion of Cosmopolis. It comes from research conducted by two Dutch researchers called Marjo Buitelaar & Femke Stock, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen into the experience of Moroccan Dutch citizens. Out of this quite inductive research emerged the idea of home – where is home if you are a Dutch Moroccan Muslim immigrant of second or Third generation – some general findings:

- Feelings of being at home can be located spatially or they can be located in social settings or they can be located in dreams, stories, memories or routines or habitual practices
- To feel at home requires a sense of belonging – i.e. meaningful ties with some aspects of one's environment
- We can feel at home on our town (plus those home towns we return to) but more difficult to locate at the level of the nation state#
- Home for women can be a restricted four walls – through choice or not choice
- Going home to Morocco can be euphoric, but also boring after a short while – used to higher levels of freedom and privacy – and MacDonalDs
- Permission to be depends on the attitude of others and especially for immigrants others have a say tin where and to whom they belong
- The question where do I belong is more acute for those who have inherited migration than the first wave of settlers and has intensified since 9/11 where the Muslim identity has hardened – because in the end you do not belong here – you are a stranger or else you have to leave your own religion behind (i.e forced to make choices) – you are therefore forced to live up to the Muslim identity the host community want to label you
- Within Dutch politics they are confronted with the pressure to privatise their religion in line with the Dutch model – known as pillarisation – but also a repeated demand to account for their religious views in public – the double bind of having to subscribe to the secularist view that religion as a private matter and yet also publically defend their religious credentials.

We now move onto to two contrasting strategies by young Dutch/Moroccan women for coping with the double-bind.

Tahara – 1999 – a self-confident Dutch Muslim woman 'with a headscarf, brains and a big mouth' Age of 16 has a religious experience back in Morocco in the mountains of her natal rural village – sense of the presence of God and when she comes back to Netherlands, she takes the headscarve and with a desire to share what the researchers call a 'mission' to testify to others about the beauty of Islam and its guidelines for good citizenship.

She translates an Islamic discourse into a social democratic discourse that sounds more familiar (and less threatening) to her non-Muslim Dutch audience:

*I am here with a message, because why has God bestowed all those blessings on me? I was raised in a European country. I've had all the chances that one could wish for: good parents, a good upbringing and a good education. I have to do something with that. I can't just keep it to myself. Because, as you can tell, I am a social democrat by origin: share and share alike!*

The negative response to the headscarve, she experiences this as a 'wake-up call' which gave the impetus to a political career in which she demands respect and 'a place of their own' for Muslims in Dutch society.

*The world has changed tremendously in the last ten years, and that has affected me a lot personally. I grew up believing that I was an Amsterdam-girl. But after 9/11 I became a Muslim. I remember well receiving the first call after the attacks from a journalist who wanted to know how I, as a Muslim, felt about what had happened. I was being reduced to a single label: I was no longer simply a town councillor, but 'the Muslim' town councillor. That hurt a lot.*

In other words, her professional identity, which involved, beyond her 'private' sense of belonging, a political commitment to the city and its inhabitants, was recast, against her will, in religious terms. Now in 2008, Tahara has decided to keep her religious inspiration to herself and no longer present herself as a Muslim citizen in the public domain:

- *I gave up. There are many young smart people out there who can take over. Professionally, it's back to core business: my work as a town councillor. If you want my view on projects to improve this town district, fine, but if you want an opinion on Muslims or Islam: go find someone else.*

Farida – tyrannical father - *Whenever my father had something important to tell, he'd line up all six children. And then he'd say: 'My name is not Piet, my name is not Jan, my name is Ahmed'. Meaning: you shouldn't think that you can do the same things as Dutch children, who were too free and rude in his view. Stating his name was Ahmed was really saying "This is me: I am strict and these are my rules".*

Through his 'identity talk', Farida's father stated explicitly that his children should not mistake living in the Netherlands for belonging there.. He demanded strict confirmation of his children to his position: they were Moroccan, not Dutch. This lack of confidence made her very aware from the start about the negative way women were portrayed in Islam – however, she associates Moroccan culture with restriction and so finds an identity in what we might call the supra-identity of Islam

*To me, being Moroccan means being attached to Morocco. Which I am not. Nor am I Dutch. I am profoundly aware of the fact that I am different. I'm being labelled non-Dutch every day. Neither am I Dutch-Moroccan or Moroccan-Dutch. These terms have only been invented to pigeon-down people. If I were free to give myself an identity, I'd prefer my Islamic identity.*

Key liberatory experiences – father died but asked of forgiveness and the undertaking of the Hajj with a women only group – have remained in touch as a close network of friends – what had been restrictive mental space as now become an open network of

friends. Determined that her daughter should grow up in a more integrated space than she ever did, Farida works as a coordinator for a secular Dutch organisation which organises projects to enhance social cohesion on a grass root level. Islam continues to inspire her and still plays a major role in her private life. However, from being a 'safe haven' where she could retreat from what she experienced as a hostile Dutch environment, the Muslim community has now become a home base that serves as a point of departure for active Dutch citizenship.

Conclusions to this story – two contrasting trajectories - one from the centre of Dutch political and civic life to the edge - the other from the edge to the centre. In these contrasting trajectories we see a weaving or dialogue between sacred and secular identities - but a dialogue which at present is far from settled and unproblematic. It perhaps highlights the difficulty in constructing a viable postsecular postcolonial public space. Sandercock's Cosmopolis is potentially far from being a realisable Utopia.

Two conclusions

### **Negotiated Identities**

To survive and flourish in this post secular and postcolonial city requires a willingness to move from essentialised or fixed notions of identity – to notions that reflect the need and importance of negotiating different identities into a workable whole. This negotiated identity has to – well negotiate – between three fields of influence – ethnicity, religion and nationhood. These fields are all dynamic (as we have seen post 9/11) and therefore belonging as a citizen in this space requires a constant reflective re-presentation of beliefs, perspectives and to some extent identities – I say to some extent because part of negotiating identities relies on a strong sense of your own identity, but again one that is not so fixed or essentialised that it cannot adapt to new and evolving cultural and political landscapes. The concept of negotiated (or performative) identities is reflected in the paradox of being rooted but open.

### **Redefining notions of multiculturalism (within a UK context)**

Tariq Modood, one of our leading commentators on multiculturalism has recently defined it as: 'the recognition of group difference within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of citizenship and national identity'. Although these differences are not necessarily ethnic or 'racial' in character, multiculturalism in Britain has become associated with issues of racial equality. Modood claims in fact that multiculturalism has come to represent 'the political accommodation of minorities formed by immigration'. While 'multicultural' refers to the fact of cultural diversity, 'multiculturalism' denotes a 'normative response to that fact' (Parekh 2006, p 6). Britain is undoubtedly a multicultural society, but the role of multiculturalism in the public life is more contested.

One element of this contestation (as we have already implied in our discussion of the postsecular city) is the rise of faith identities in political and social life. The pressure on the concept of the present multiculturalist settlement comes from two

directions. There are 'top-down' pressures as governments seek to engage with 'faith communities' instead of, or at least in addition to, ethnically-based interests and associations. Pressures come also from the growing critique of public and social policies which, in acknowledging and celebrating diversity, are also seen to have reinforced cultural difference and separation. Emphasising commonalities rather than differences, policies of 'community cohesion' have sought to bridge the 'parallel lives' observed among different communities in some towns (Cantle 2005). In this context, faith actors are identified as potentially important brokers in fostering dialogue and interaction between different communities within and across ethnic lines.

Then there are the 'bottom-up' pressures on multiculturalism too, with the rise of faith-based identities in politics and civil society. These pressures relate to the fracturing of monolithic ethnic identities in a context of hyperpluralism, and a growing awareness of the complex nature of difference.

There is also a rapid growth in civil society activity of all sorts as faiths, building on their own long traditions of social action and public service, are asserting themselves as political and civic actors in their own right.

So while Tariq Modood, argues for 'the extension of a politics of difference to include appropriate religious identities and organisations', others link the rise of faith identities to both the causes and the effects of a demise of multiculturalism.

Anthony Giddens meanwhile argues for a 'sophisticated multiculturalism', which 'emphasizes the importance of national identity, and national laws, but also the fostering of connections between different social and ethnic groups'. As Giddens points out, this form of multiculturalism 'is all about social solidarity - not separateness'

Some quotes from Chapter 5, *Faith in the Public Realm – Controversies, policies and practices*, (Dinham et. al Policy Press, 2009)

- I don't want a sort of flat homogenizing society. We want some way of people being able to express different cultural, religious, other identities without it tipping over into parallel lives. I like the idea of some sort of clustering and supportive arrangements for different communities, upon which people can draw but still feel connected to the wider community. So there's a sort of balance there. You can actually have it both ways but there's got to be a strong sense of commonalities. And that's where we get to the question of whether faith should be in the public realm because faith can often reinforce separatism rather than commonalities.
- My instinct is that we're in a moment of transition (to a new model of multiculturalism). We don't have a clear vision of where to go beyond this. I think there is more or less a consensus on segregation - we know that we want a more cohesive and more unified, as opposed to a fragmented, society.

We're not quite sure what the social model will be that will deliver that, as opposed to multiculturalism which was there in the sixties or seventies.

- I think the majority population have always felt unrepresented by the notion of multiculturalism. So if you ask white people, for example, if they have an ethnicity, they don't seem to appreciate that they have. They see ethnicity as something, which only applies to minorities. They also see 'diversity' as something that is only relevant to minorities.
- What is the new model? At the moment it's a discourse around cohesion, around integration, around a society that is much more intertwined than it was twenty years ago or thirty years ago. But I think that vision still has to evolve and crystallise into a model as such. It is confusing for people at the grass roots who have to implement these policies because they're not quite sure exactly where it is we're going.
- I'm not somebody who says, multiculturalism is dead. I actually think it is about a new model of multiculturalism. I don't think we should attempt to bury multiculturalism. It's surprising how many people now accept the promotion of Britishness, for example, that everybody should have English language skills. It was very difficult even five or ten years ago to say that. So I think this model is going to evolve from the emphasis on separate identities to much more on trying to build up the commonalities and be clearer about what they are
- But multiculturalism is a dynamic process of change, so such questions and priorities will always have to be resolved. I think the more you separate faith from society, the more it causes misunderstandings and misconceptions. We are so fortunate in Britain to have an open society, and we need an open debate the place of faith. We simply cannot go back to - let me put it another way - a body without a soul. I think that is how I look at society without faith: it is a soulless body.

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