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Compte-rendu de la 64e séance

The Political Impact of Minority-Religion Symbols in the Public Space

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Nonna Mayer (Sciences Po, CEE, CNRS) reminds us that our colleague and friend Fariba Adelkhah has been held in Iran for three years and nine months. She is no longer in prison, but she has not yet recovered her identity papers and research documents and cannot travel out of the country. Mayer then passes on the apologies of Tommaso Vitale (Sciences Po, CEE & Urban School), who co-organized this seminar session but unfortunately could not be here due to family problems. Finally, she turns to the subject of the day's discussions.

Does the presence of minority-religion symbols in the public space facilitate minorities' acculturation or not? Conversely does it accustom host society members to their presence or, on the contrary, antagonize them? And how can these effects be measured? These are the questions Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom[1] (Hebrew University of

[1] Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom is a Full Professor and the director of the Political Psychology Laboratory in the Department of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She is currently a visiting fellow in the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) at Cambridge, and

Jerusalem) tries to answer, drawing from her large-scale comparative ERC project ReligSpace, mixing naturalistic field experiments, embedded surveys and augmented/virtual reality technologies in France, England and Israel. Ben-Nun Bloom has been exploring the conditions under which enduring values – particularly religion and moral convictions – hinder or enhance democratic norms.

Ben-Nun Bloom's presentation will be discussed by two colleagues: Martin Aranguren and Juliette Galonnier. Aranguren (Sciences Po, CRIS, CNRS) investigates everyday discrimination in urban public places, on the basis of field experiments.[2] Galonnier (Sciences Po, CERI) works on the social construction and imbrication of racial and religious categories, and particularly on Islam in situations where it is a minority religion, using in-depth interviews and ethnography.[3]

Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom's intervention

Ben-Nun Bloom thanks Nonna Mayer for her invitation. She is particularly interested in the effects of religiosity in relation to democratic norms. These effects can be very diverse, positive or negative. Over the past decade, she and her colleagues have worked to show that religion is not a monolith, but is composed of multi-dimensional experiences (belief, social behavior, private behavior etc.) and is driven by various psychological motivations which often yield differential sociopolitical behaviors. She cautions that her presentation is about a work in progress. Her work derives from Michael Billig's classic book *Banal Nationalism*,[4] which is about everyday representations of the nation. In a similar fashion, she focuses on religion in the public space. Today, she notes, she will only address public expressions of minority religions

is also affiliated with Clare Hall College, Cambridge and with Nuffield College, Oxford. She is the recipient of the Erik Erikson Early Career Award, recognizing exceptional achievement in the field of political psychology (2019), has received over $2,000,000 in grants, including an ERC grant, and has published in leading political science, social psychology and public policy reviews.

[2] See "Responses to the Islamic Headscarf in Everyday Interactions Depend on Sex and Locale: A Field Experiment in the Metros of Brussels, Paris, and Vienna on Helping and Involvement Behaviors", *PLoS One*, 16 (7), 2021(with F. Madrisotti, E. Durmaz-Martins, G. Gerger, L. Wittmann & M. Méhu); "Anti-Muslim Behavior in Everyday Interaction: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Paris", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Online 15 July 2021(with F. Madrisotti & E. Durmaz-Martins).

[3] See "Barbes et foulards: les marqueurs genrés de l'islamophobie", in G. Lavinia, E. Lépinard and O. Sarrasin (eds.), *Genre et islamophobie : Discriminations, préjugés et représentations en Europe*, Lyon, ENS Editions, 2021; "The Racial Realities of French Muslims: Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Issues", in Z. Abdullah (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Islam and Race* (forthcoming).

[4] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism,* SAGE Publications Ltd, 1995.

and the way they can influence immigrant integration in France, leaving the effect on natives as well as other settings to future talks.

There are many conflicts in Europe about whether people belonging to minority religions should be allowed to wear religious symbols (such as the veil) and whether these religions should be represented in the public space in other ways. Ben-Nun Bloom looks at data from across 23 European countries from 1995 to 2015 and shows that there are general restrictions on religious building and religious clothing for minority religions. But how do such regulations affect the integration of immigrants belonging to minority religions?

After introducing her research questions, Ben-Nun Bloom then defines the main concepts involved. She starts with defining immigrants' integration, adjusting the European Commission's Action Plan definition. Based on this, she looks at three dimensions: identification and sense of belonging; practices; and democratic values.

Next, she gives a few examples of the measures that she uses. For example, to measure "identification and sense of belonging", she focuses on:social identification and belonging (identification with national group, identification with religious group etc.); and b) place identification and belonging (place attachment, affective evaluation of space etc.).

According to some theories, seeing signs of one's minority religion in public could make sociopolitical integration more difficult. Other theories suggest that seeing signs of one's religion could facilitate integration and could increase political trust. These conflicting views are actually not just theoretical but also mirror conflicting ideologies in policies.

Ben-Nun Bloom mentions that six experts from four disciplines marked the direction of the hypothesized effect of mere exposure to religious cues (such as Halal stores, mosques etc.) on religious minority immigrant integration for each integration variable. She considers there is a disagreement if at least two experts disagree. Some experts hypothesized that, under the assimilation perspective, the treatment is expected to reduce a sense of belonging, whereas others hypothesized that it would increase

feelings of acceptance (especially among minorities that attach more importance to religion) while nonetheless possibly increasing feelings of discrimination and distrust. Then, she sets formal thresholds for deciding between the conflicting hypotheses.

Next, she presents an overview of her research based on a comparative survey of three religions in two cities: London and Paris. The first step is, of course, to conceptualize what minority religion is. The next steps are empirical studies that examine the effect of spatial religion on integration. Ben-Nun Bloom and her colleagues mostly collected data on Muslims, Christians and Jews, focusing on a dozen different neighborhoods. In order to establish causality, the next step is to conduct a field experiment.

Ben-Nun Bloom discusses an opinion survey conducted in Paris to understand what spatial religion looks like in the real world. She introduces spatial religion (i.e., level and type of public religious manifestations) as a new dimension of study. The Paris survey encompassed four groups: Muslims, Jews, Christians and people without any religion. The Paris survey encompasses four groups: Muslim immigrants of first and second generation, Jewish immigrants of first and second generation, non-immigrant Christians, and non-immigrant people without any religionShe only focuses on the results concerning Muslims and considers four specific measures she developed: desired religion, accessibility of religion, comfort displaying religion, and frequency of seeing religion in the public space. She first presents descriptive statistics of spatial religion across the different groups, and then shows correlations with measures of integration and beyond. For example, the survey shows that being comfortable displaying one's religion is correlated with well-being.

In addition to the comparative survey, Ben-Nun Bloom describes how she developed a "spatial game" experiment on a smartphone. The app leads participants to different types of cues in a route (randomly assigned) and the GPS-enabled app prompts micro-surveys. She explains that manipulated spatial religion affects perception of place, such as perceived representation of Islam and of immigrants in a neighborhood.

To wrap up her discussion of the "spatial game" method, she explains that the experiment has proven to have both advantages and limitations. In terms of

advantages, it shows real-world engagement (complex environments) and fully embodied experience. It uses generic technology that can be implemented anywhere and that shows behavioral indicators. Moreover, participants are familiar with the smartphone's technology and interfaces, so the experiment does not require extensive training. Overall, participants reported reasonably positive user experiences. In terms of limitations, the design of the study allows the researcher only partial control over the environments and stimuli. The design of the routes is dependent on many constraints (such as availability of stimuli in the field).

After this, Ben-Nun Bloom notes that the next step of the research will focus on Paris natives (analysing a survey and field experiment) and the continuation of data collection in London. She concludes by recalling the main lines of the project. The main goals are to create a novel approach to religion, to offer a new understanding of the role of urban space in local-level integration and to aggregate priming effects in the messy real world. In terms of methodology, she hopes that it will motivate dynamic ecologically valid experiments and that new measures will enable research on visible religions. In terms of policy, she hopes that the project will provide some insight that would advance more effective urban planning. She acknowledges all her collaborators that helped through this project and the support of the European Research Council (ERC) through the Horizon 2020 program (Grant #804131), as well as additional funding from ISF, CIG, NSF, Eshkol, Davis and The Center for German Studies.

Intervention of Martin Aranguren

Martin Aranguren starts by underscoring that Ben-Nun Bloom's claims about the realism of the experiment, and so about its external validity and ecological validity, are largely justified. He also appreciates the creativity of the field procedure, suggesting that more research of this kind is urgently needed. He has encountered many similar challenges in his own field, experimental research.

He has chosen to focus his discussion on the supporting documents provided by Ben-Nun Bloom, where the results are summarized in the following terms on page 25: "the findings provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis concerning the impact of being exposed to a religious setting and conclude that exposure to religious cues in

the environment affect Muslim newcomers' acculturation". In view of the data, MA suggests that the conclusion might be slightly overstated and proceeds to show why His discussion proceeds in three steps, covering respectively operationalization, design and hypothesis testing.

Outcome acculturation is subdivided into three dimensions, two of which are further sub-divided into two distinct types, resulting in 29 indicators of the outcome. These 29 indicators of the same outcome (the construct of acculturation) end up being analyzed as 29 separate, independent, distinct outcomes which he proceeds to examine.

Some indicators of outcome acculturation are strictly post-treatment variables, and therefore easy to interpret as being affected by the route manipulation. For example, one question asks: "How much did you have the following feelings walking around the neighborhood?". Participants cannot have a feeling about the route before following the route. The situation is very different for most of the other indicators of acculturation. "I feel French" or "Muslims encounter more obstacles in their daily lives than non-Muslims" are answers to questions about attitudes; these attitudes pre-exist the route manipulation.

More generally, attitudes such as feelings of belonging or discrimination operate in a time frame that is much longer than the very limited time window of the field experiment.

It is not clear to him what can be concluded from showing that self-reports about these long-term attitudes differ between the control route and the Muslim route conditions. Can the perception of a few religiously connoted objects in an experimental session change a long-term attitude such as feeling of belonging to the national community? He suggests an alternative interpretation, according to which any effects of the route manipulation on self-reported attitudes could be interpreted as mood effects. For example, in a famous experiment it was shown that people's life satisfaction decreases when questions are asked on cloudy vs. sunny days.[5] Cloudy weather induces a

[5] N. Schwarz and G.L. Clore, "Mood, Misattribution, and Judgments of Well-Being: Informative and Directive Functions of Affective States", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45 (3) (1983): 513-523.

pessimistic mood that leads people to report less life satisfaction than on sunny days, which induce a more optimistic mood. Obviously, life satisfaction has not changed. What has changed is the mood of the respondent, which leads to under-reporting satisfaction when in a pessimistic mood and to over-reporting satisfaction when in an optimistic mood.

Mutatis mutandis, maybe the Muslim route condition induces a particular mood that leads respondents to situationally over- or under-report a stable underlying attitude? In this case, the experiment would not affect the underlying attitude, but impact the immediate mood that affects the reporting of the attitude in the very short-term?

Another concern here is that the outcome indicators that refer to lasting attitudes were measured only after the route manipulation. Had they also been measured before (as a pre-treatment), the design would have enabled assessment of the extent to which participants are affected by the manipulation, making the results more interpretable.

Last, if he understood correctly, these 29 indicators of acculturation give rise to 29 null hypothesis tests? Statistically, this would mean that the 29 indicators of the same outcome, acculturation, are being treated as 29 separate outcomes. This, in his eyes, First, increases the probability of getting a spurious significant result (the well-known problem of an inflated alpha error). With each hypothesis test on the same data set, the probability of a false positive increases. One classical solution to this problem would be the Bonferroni correction, which requires dividing the original alpha level, here 5%, by the number of tests to be performed[6].. Another possibility would be to perform the hypothesis tests with a different analytical strategy in which all the outcomes are treated together within the same model. This could be achieved, for instance, with a multilevel model estimated with Bayesian inference.

All this, Aranguren observes, could nuance the claim that “exposure to religious cues in the environment affects Muslim newcomers’ acculturation”.

[6] The significance threshold in this study, thus corrected, would be lower the original alpha 0.05/29 indicators of acculturation=0.0017. When we apply this Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, only 3 of the 29 null hypothesis tests yield non-null (or “statistically significant”) results.

Aranguren closes his discussion on a positive note, saying again how stimulating he found the presentation .

Intervention of Juliette Galonnier

Juliette Galonnier thanks Nonna Mayer and Tommaso Vitale for their invitation and expresses her gratitude for having been given the opportunity to read Ben-Nun Bloom's article. She explains that she does not use experimental methods in her own work, so her view will be different from Martin Aranguren's. She mostly uses qualitative and interpretative methods, and is therefore more familiar with inquiries into the causes of effects, and less so with systematic inquiries into the effects of causes. She points out that her remarks must be considered more as an invitation to make the evidence more palpable and concrete with attention given to context and meaning, rather than an invitation to make the causal argument more robust in its claims as Martin Aranguren provided. She notes that she will focus more on what is *around* the analysis rather than what is occurring *within* the analysis.

In any case, she highlights that she is very grateful for this opportunity to explore how different methods can enrich our common understanding of these complex issues of religious symbols, public space and integration. She considers Ben-Nun Bloom's project to be very important and innovative, especially in regard of what has been called the "spatial turn" in research on religion. In Ben-Nun Bloom's research, space is much more than the "theater" or backdrop of social life: the project convincingly demonstrates how spatialized expressions of religion can have an effect on perceptions of integration and discrimination. This directly contributes to a budding body of research, as exemplified by a recent special issue of the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (edited by Tobias Müller, Adela Taleb and C.J.J. Moses) on "Rethinking Islam and Space in Europe" (2021), which sought to explore "how Muslims across Europe engage in the socio-political fabric of European public space, a space often marked as variously secular, Christian, and white".

Galonnier wonders, however, what must be understood by the "religious cues" that were placed on the "religious route" that the participants had to take. It has been said

that the religious and non-religious cues had been pre-tested and she wanted to know more about this aspect: what counts as "religious" and who tested this? In a European context that is very secular, the religious dimension of an object can sometimes be misinterpreted or overlooked, as exemplified for instance in the work of British anthropologist Matthew Engelke. In his book *God's Agents: Biblical Publicity in Contemporary England* (2013, University of California Press), Engelke discusses efforts by a Christian organization, the Bible Society, to create an ambience of faith in various cities in England: the group lobbied the municipality of Swindon to put them in charge of the Christmas decorations and decided to display angels in the streets. In studying how the decorations were received by the public, Engelke discovers that most people thought the angels were "nice" (they expressed positive views about them) but did not necessarily interpret them as Christian, or religious, or even spiritual. In focus groups following a poster campaign by the Bible Society in Manchester, the author also shows that many people did not understand the religious dimension of the posters (some of them thought they were ads for potato crisps). In contexts that are very secular, people do not always interpret religious cues in a religious way. This is certainly stretching the research design of Ben-Nun Bloom's project, but it would be interesting to have a qualitative post-survey discussion with the participants, asking them how they interpreted those spatial cues and whether those cues did indeed mark the neighborhood as Muslim, or as something else.

She also makes some remarks on the comparative dimension of the project. The research seeks to compare France and the UK and pays attention to the role of *context* in shaping the effects of religious symbols on perceptions of integration. While we are still waiting for the results from the London research, Galonnier wonders how Ben-Nun Bloom and her team might interpret the results if there are significant differences between the two contexts. What does "context" signify? What exactly are we saying when we say that French and British people, or in this case French and British Muslims, respond differently to religious cues as far as integration measures are concerned? Is it a story of national frames (assimilation vs. multiculturalism)? Is it a story of socialization (for example, French Muslims being so socialized into the French assimilation model that they react in a certain way to religious symbols)? Is it a story of cultural repertoires (that is, the tools that are available to think and talk about religion and discrimination)? Is it a story of relations between the State and religions in France

and the UK? Is it a story of racism and discrimination? Is it a story of different Muslim minorities, one mainly North African in France, and the other mostly South Asian in the UK, and the fact that the parents and grandparents of these Muslims have been exposed to various political and religious traditions and to various historical events and modes of colonization, that might explain how they react to religious prompts? Or is it a story about the neighborhoods of Belleville and Tooting, these two neighborhoods being saturated with ethnic and religious meanings? Belleville specifically has a very dense urban social fabric, and it looms large in the French political imaginary on Islam. Even if the project controls for real-world noise, it might be the case that religious cues are overinterpreted in this neighborhood specifically.

Galonnier also has some questions about how to interpret certain results. There are many interesting results, including the fact that those who took the religious route thought the space was more interesting, estimated a lower percentage of natives in the neighborhood, had an increased perceived fairness of local institutions in Paris, and walked more slowly. But one result is particularly puzzling: the fact that people who took the religious route tended to have an increased perception of discrimination. She wonders how to understand this result. Is it because when they see a Muslim symbol, they are reminded that the Muslim condition in France is pretty harsh? Or is it because they wish there were more symbols in their own neighborhood and are resentful that there are not more of them? Is it because they think religious symbols are inappropriate and wish there were fewer of them so they would not be constantly reminded of their identity? What are the cognitive and perhaps anthropological assumptions that the project is making about how people respond to a cue? She also wishes to come back to a point. It is said in the paper that participants who displayed “manipulation awareness”, that is who showed they understood the real purpose of the experiment, would be disqualified from the study. She wonders why. It is likely that people who have guessed what the study is about might have a higher degree of politicization on these issues: it could be interesting to incorporate this fact into the regression analysis. Finally, Galonnier has a question about how Ben-Nun Bloom and her team would position themselves in relation to the policy uses that might be made of this research?

Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom's response to Martin Aranguren

Ben-Nun Bloom thanks the two discussants for their stimulating interventions. She emphasizes that acculturation cannot be treated as a uniform concept that cuts across all other terms (integration, sense of belonging etc.). There are different types of integration and therefore she does not believe that the 29 variables she measures define a single dimension. The notion of "tolerance", for example, is theoretically distinct from "trust" and from "perceived discrimination". She says that religious cues can affect the attitude of the participants in the very specific moment in which they interact with them, not necessarily on a long-term basis. Pre-measures were impossible in France but embedded in the research in London.

Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom's response to Juliette Galonnier

Concerning the participants' understanding of cues Ben-Nun Bloom explains that at the end of the questionnaire the participants were offered an open-ended question to collect their opinions. She has not yet studied the answers. Regarding the choice of locating the experiment in Belleville, she explains that she and her colleagues needed a place for the experiment in which religious cues are numerous but can also be overlooked depending on the route followed, so that it is not completely Muslim in nature. Ben-Nun Bloom goes on to explain that the reason they left out participants who understood the purpose of the experiment was because she feared it would affect the results (for example, if the participants wanted to please the researchers). In terms of policy recommendations, she wants to make sure she has analyzed all the data (including London, which is a work in progress, native data, etc.) before providing any normative suggestions. She feels that this is one of her responsibilities as a researcher, but only when the study is completed and if the findings allow recommendations.

Daniel Statman

Daniel Statman (University of Haifa) is a philosopher. He says he was surprised that Muslims with a weaker sense of belonging wanted to finish the route faster. He thinks that this is not only because of low identification but also because of a very ambivalent

identification with Muslimhood. He thinks that some Muslims might feel embarrassed if they sat in a room in which there are too many Muslims. He explains that he was also really surprised, just like Juliette Galonnier, that those who took the religious route were those who also felt the most discriminated against.

Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom's response to Daniel Statman

Ben-Nun Bloom states that she completely agrees regarding the ambivalence of identification. As a Jew who lived in the US for years, she also experienced those ambivalent feelings about belonging and non-belonging. There can be mixed feelings and nuanced mechanisms of identification.

Elisa Bellè

Elisa Bellè (Sciences Po, CEE) is currently working on a comparative study of two leading actors of the European right: the Italian Lega and the French Rassemblement National (RN). The notion of space is also fundamental for her own research. She wonders how Ben-Nun Bloom dealt with the center/periphery divide, or the cosmopolitan/traditional divide, as well as its impact on acculturation and understanding of religious cues.

Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom's response to Elisa Bellè

Ben-Nun Bloom explains that she only focused on urban settings. She adds that this is also because most immigrants, when they enter a country, settle in the cities and not so much in the periphery. Moreover, they do not settle homogeneously and proportionally in the cities. Obviously, some cities concentrate more immigrants than others.

Nonna Mayer

Nonna Mayer wants to know more about Ben-Nun Bloom's Israeli experiment even though it is a totally different context. In France, the taboo about religion is very strong and she recalls it made the research and fieldwork extremely difficult. For example, for

the naturalistic experience in Paris, hundreds of people were contacted by the team, but many did not apply or show up.

Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom's response to Nonna Mayer

Ben-Nun Bloom explains that in the Jaffa experiment, the system crashed more, due to technical adjustment before they fixed the application. She adds that she is very grateful to all those who participated in the experiment, whether in France, England or Israel, and who agreed to play the game and give their time and energy. She agrees with Nonna Mayer, who thinks that a special article on the methodology of the experiment would be interesting.

Nonna Mayer concludes by thanking Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom, Martin Aranguren and Juliette Galonnier for their insightful discussion and all the participants for their presence.