The role of religious cognition for the integration of Sunni Muslims

Aim: To extend research on immigrant religion and its role for immigrant integration with the concept of religious cognition, i.e., how individuals reason about truth and meaning.

Theoretical background:

Immigrants in general, and Muslims in particular, have been found to be more religious than non-migrants in European societies. In public and scholarly discourses, this high level of religiosity is often conceived of as a barrier to immigrant integration. However, 20 years of large-scale survey research have yielded contradictory findings regarding the question of how religion is related to immigrant integration and how immigrant religion changes as a consequence of migration and integration (Fleischmann, 2022). Yet survey-based research on immigrant religion to date has a rather narrow focus on religiosity, i.e., the frequency of religious practices and the subjective importance of religion. According to psychologists of religion, religiosity is only one out of two dimensions that capture individuals' orientations towards religion or the supernatural, the second being religious cognition, i.e., the different ways in which individuals reason about religion, truth and meaning, which can range from more literal to more symbolic approaches.

Research among non-migrants that distinguishes between these two dimensions of religious orientations typically finds that religious cognitions are more relevant for a range of outcomes than individual differences in levels of religiosity, particularly in the field of intergroup relations, e.g. out-group prejudice (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005). However, existing measures that capture both dimensions of religious orientations, most prominently the Post-Critical Belief Scale, are strongly rooted in the Christian tradition and need to be adjusted for the use among adherents of other religious traditions in the context of migration. The aim of this project is to develop a measurement instrument that captures individual differences in religious cognition as well as religiosity among Sunni Muslims living in the Netherlands, and to examine its explanatory power for integration in the structural, social and cultural domain (e.g. levels of education and employment, intergroup contacts and national identification).

Research design:

The first stage of this project involves conducting cognitive interviews to further develop a preliminary version of the Post-Critical Belief Scale for Muslims (PCBS-M). Therefore, we particularly seek candidates with proficiency in Dutch and/or a language spoken by migrants from Muslim-majority countries in the Netherlands (e.g. Arabic, Turkish). After the first interview phase, a small-scale data collection among a convenience sample is planned to assess the measurement properties of this new instrument. The instrument will then be embedded in a new survey among immigrants to the Netherlands from Muslim-majority countries. The candidate is expected to contribute to the design of the survey, and will draw on the survey data to answer specific research questions regarding the relations between individual differences in religious cognition and specific outcomes in the domains of structural, social and cultural integration of Sunni Muslims.

Literature:

- Fleischmann, F. (2022). Researching religion and migration 20 years after '9/11': Taking stock and looking ahead. *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik*, (6), 347-372.
- Hunsberger, B., & Jackson, L. M. (2005). Religion, Meaning, and Prejudice. Journal of Social Issues, 61(4), 807–826.

Project: This PhD project is part of the NWO-Vidi project "The role of religious cognition for immigrant integration (RECOGNITION)". In another part of the same project, a postdoctoral researcher will develop comparable measures for two other religious minority groups.

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