BECOMING A CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION? DYNAMICS OF IMMIGRANT RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN CIVIL SOCIETY AND PUBLIC SPACE

Abstract

The article addresses immigrant religious communities in Western Europe and analyses their place in political and civil society. In the past decades, many immigrant religious communities have succeeded in leaving their initial provisional worship sites and constructed new religious buildings, often prominently visible in the public space of a town or a city. The new visibility established immigrant religious communities as new players in the local religious setting. This new public presence was not always applauded by local residents and politicians, at times, resulting in severe controversies and conflicts. The article discusses whether the new noticeable presence in public life and the often much less noticed multifarious services of the communities may turn the diasporic communities into civil society organisations similar to organisations such as NGOs and charities. What implications arise from such a categorisation and what consequences follow? The article will discuss these issues with regard to the transformation of public space, civil society, citizenship and the state, using case studies from Britain and Switzerland.

Keywords: immigration, religious communities, civil society, public space, Britain, Switzerland

The central theme of the 22nd Nordic conference of the Sociology of Religion focused on the dynamic interrelations of religion, state and civil society. In the past two decades, numerous scholars and research projects in Western Europe and North America studied this interrelated field, resulting in new insights and approaches (e.g. Casanova 1994; Putnam and Feldstein 2004; Klein et al. 2004; Habermas 2005; Liedhegener and Werkner 2011; de Hart 2013). Taking leave from these and related studies, this paper aims to contribute with analytical insights on the effects of immigration and immigrant religious communities in the transformation of public space, civil society and state in Western Europe. Recently, various studies on immigration and (civil) society, primarily situated in the United States, have emerged (e.g. Putnam 2007; Foley and Hoge...
Evidently, large-scale immigration and its ramifications have led to a plurality of religious groups, communities and organisations on both the local and national levels. Processes of social and political incorporation have seen both tensions and gains, leading to structural changes in national legislative frameworks, local and national public spaces, and the contours of civil societies.

This article will address these issues, starting with an outline of the transformations of the religious landscapes and the consequences for public space, by using the examples of Britain and Switzerland. In part two of this article, I will take a closer look at the variety of activities and services which immigrant religious communities offer to their co-believers. Part three will take up the topic of civil society and suggest a structural differentiation of the concept. Based on this account, the article will discuss whether immigrant religious communities, on the basis of the, at times, multifarious services they have on offer, may be characterised as civil-society organisations. What is gained and/or what is lost by using this description? This will be analysed in the final part, followed by a brief conclusion.

The basic concept for this paper is that immigrant religious minorities, after initial processes of settlement, re-organisation, and institutionalisation, have increasingly become players in the public space and civil society. The article will consider whether public acknowledgment of immigrant religious communities as civil-society organisations will lend support to an understanding that these diaspora communities have become an integral part of society and contribute to it in various ways. The early immigrants are no longer visitors or foreigners, though they are often perceived as such by large parts of the established population. As residents of a country, they have initiated changes in the political, legal, civil, social, and religious formation of a nation-state. However, these changes are also often initiated by the majority population on behalf of the minorities, as has been observed in Switzerland and Norway.

Transformations of Public Spaces in Western Europe

As has been much studied, modernising processes of rationalisation and societal differentiation as well as processes of individualisation and globalisation have changed the religious profiles of most Western European countries. On the one hand, the ramifications of rationalisation in the form of secularisation processes diminished the societal importance of the long-established Christian churches and reduced its membership. On the other hand, processes of individualisation and globalisation enabled personal religious choices (Pollack and Olson 2007; Pollack et al. 2012). In this regard, the import of new religious ideas, practices, and people has laid the foundation for a broadened religious plurality.

In order to illustrate these dynamics, two European countries have been chosen as case studies. Britain, a long-established immigration country, and Switzerland, a state quite reluctant to concede to this status, provide exemplary and contrasting cases. In
both countries, large-scale immigration has changed the religious landscape and profoundly influenced national policies.

In Britain, in the wake of World War II, British industry was in dire need of additional workforce. Men were primarily recruited from the former colonies and by the late 1950s, thousands of labourers from India and Pakistan were employed in the industry. In due time, the legal unrestricted entry of people from former colonies on the basis of the 1948 British Nationality Act became increasingly criticised. This led to more restrictive migration policies in the early 1960s and 1970s. In reaction to the imminent tightening of entry opportunities, more people came from the former colonies—whose families were brought from overseas. The arrival of women and children changed the generally lax religious observances of the working men. The re-union of families initiated a boom in the converting of houses and factories into provisional mosques, gurdwaras, temples and other religious sites in the 1980s (Knott 2005: 57; Gilliat-Ray 2010: 49). The former immigrants had become permanent citizens. As people from the former colonies, they were usually in possession of a British passport and thus British citizens. At the same time, racist voices against coloured immigrants increased which were, in turn, met by anti-discrimination laws from British policymakers. Official politics aimed to promote better race relations and to secure rights of worship and self-defined sacred sites for religious minorities. These multicultural politics, backed by legal acts and the general idea that religion is a private matter and an affair not to be disputed by others, enabled Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and others to establish sizable religious infrastructures. The arrival of refugees and skilled workers from Africa, the Balkans, Asia and South America further enhanced the growing religious diversity. Transnational ties satisfied the needs for religious personnel and at times, for spouses, thus securing a continuation of relationships with countries of origin (Woodhead and Catto 2012).

In terms of numbers, in 2011, among a population of 56 million people in England and Wales, there were some 2.7 million Muslims (4.8 per cent), 800,000 Hindus (1.5 per cent), 423,000 Sikhs (0.8 per cent), and some 250,000 Buddhists (0.4 per cent) (Office for National Statistics 2012: 2). Importantly, from 2001 to 2011, the percentage of people identifying themselves as Christians fell from 72 to 59 per cent while the Muslim population grew by 1.2 million people (i.e. from 3 to 4.8 per cent). As in other European countries, the percentage of people identified as having no religion grew markedly from 15 to 25 per cent. In terms of religious affiliation, in London more than 20 per cent had a religion other than Christianity, of which Muslims constitute 12.4 per cent (Office for National Statistics 2012: 3, 5).

This evolved religious diversity led to a multitude of newly built religious sites, which were at times prominently visible in town centres, not only at the outskirts of a town or city (Gale and Naylor 2002, Knott 2005). Their prominence in public space was by no means accepted without protest. Opponents lamented car parking problems, increase in traffic and the perceived aesthetic discordance of the buildings to established townscape (Nye 2001; Gale and Naylor 2002: 392–394). In addition, urban planning authorities often refused planning applications. As geographer Richard Gale disclosed, during the 1990s, applications for Muslim buildings—mosques and mak tib
(Arabic, pl.; Engl. madrassas, educational centres)—were more often declined than applications for Christian churches and Sikh gurdwaras (Gale 2005: 1170–1171). The Rushdie-affair in the late 1980s and a growing negative perception of Muslims had an impact here. However, as Gale also highlighted in his case study of Birmingham, planning authorities initially considered the 1975 inaugurated Central Mosque a «controversial element» of a major redevelopment scheme (Gale 2004: 22). In the 1990s, however, Birmingham City Council celebrated the mosque and its minaret as a landmark and «symbol of Birmingham’s social and multicultural diversity» (Gale 2004: 20).

Apparently, the council realised that the religiously and ethnically diverse population made substantial economic and civic contributions to the city. At the same time, as Gale stresses, the planning authorities strongly intervened in the design of the Central Mosque—insisting on the use of red bricks instead of the envisaged white stucco (Gale 2004: 21). This change was deemed necessary in order to (better) blend in with the surrounding area and to diminish opposition. This ‘accommodating’ practice was repeated with the building of later mosques, gurdwaras and temples.

In the words of the French sociologist Henry Lefebvre, the public space was modelled by the city authorities to form «representations of space […] the space of scientists, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers», the produced dominant space in a society (Lefebvre 1991: 38). Lefebvre contrasts this space with «representational spaces: space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’» (Lefebre 1991: 39, emphasis added). In Birmingham as well as in other British cities, city councils forced building owners to make outer adjustments in order to reduce tension and objections by local residents (Gale 2004: 29). Thus, in the wake of setting up new mosques or new gurdwaras, non-Muslim or non-Sikh residents called for the manufactured ‘representations of space’ to be maintained and opposed new lived ‘representational spaces’. In other words, the dominant representations of space were to be kept; new representations of space were only to be additions to already pre-established spatial norms.

In Switzerland, processes have been both similar and different. On the basis of recruitment schemes from the 1960s onwards, Swiss policy enabled so-called «guest-workers» from Southern Europe and Turkey to work within Swiss industry. The sojourn of the workers was meant to be provisional with a return home as soon as the employment contract ended. However, employers renewed contracts and new legislation enabled these workers to bring their families to Switzerland. The intended return of the workers changed thus to a permanent settlement. As in Britain, the arrival of children and wives during the 1970s marked the start of a change. Houses and old factory buildings were converted into mosques and Catholic migrants from Italy and Spain could make use of existing churches. The 1980s saw the arrival of refugees from Vietnam and Sri Lanka, followed in the 1990s by a large influx of refugees from the Balkan war. As hopes for a return home evaporated, the migrants prepared for a longer, possibly permanent stay. They set up social and religious infrastructures with cultural societies and religious sites. In contrast to Britain, the migrants remained foreigners for a long time, only being able to apply for citizenship after a twelve-year stay. A large number of Swiss citizens and politicians viewed the migrants with suspicion and
pressed for assimilation to Swiss culture and habits. For a long time, Swiss official politics perceived Switzerland as a non-immigrant country, and Switzerland only developed an official migration and integration policy in the 1990s (Hoffmann-Nowotny 2001; Baumann and Stolz 2007; Haug 2008).

In terms of numbers, in 2010, among a population of 7.7 million residents, there was an estimated number of 420,000 Muslims (5.4 per cent), 50,000 Hindus (0.6 per cent), some 30,000 Buddhists (0.4 per cent) and around 1,000 Sikhs (0.01 per cent). In 2000–2010, membership in Christian churches dropped from 79.3 to 72 per cent and the number of Muslims increased from 4.3 to 5.4 per cent. The percentage of people unaffiliated to a religious organisation grew from 11.1 to 20.1 per cent in the same period (Bovay 2004: 11; Bundesamt für Statistik 2012: 13).

Comparing the figures for Britain and Switzerland, the range of percentages for religious minorities is more or less similar. Christianity (still) stands out as the dominant religious tradition, followed by the category of «no religion». In Britain, however, the rate of immigrants in possession of British citizenship is much higher than in Switzerland. For example, among Muslims, an estimated 80 per cent have a British passport while only 35 per cent of Muslims have Swiss citizenship (Hussain and McLoughlin 2013: 683; Lathion and Tunger 2013: 634).

The less welcoming context for most immigrant groups in Switzerland, and the often badly-paid jobs, hindered migrants in Switzerland from constructing new religious buildings to the same extent as was seen in Britain. Indeed, even now, Switzerland is home to only a few new religious buildings and four minarets in total. In the project «Cupola – Temple – Minaret», a colleague and I portrayed the current 25 visible religious buildings in an online documentation. Amongst the buildings are a Tibetan and a Thai monastery, two purpose-built mosques, a gurdwara, and a recently inaugurated Hindu temple. Although conflict arose around the building of a minaret and the construction of a Serbian-Orthodox church, support and acknowledgment were observable in other cases.

As is well known, in 2009, Swiss citizens banned the construction of further minarets in a federal referendum. The prohibition was inscribed into the federal constitution (article 72.3, see Mayer 2011; Tunger-Zanetti 2013). This strong signal against the alleged «Islamification of Switzerland» reflects apparent insecurities amongst large parts of the population. It also underscores public space as a socially produced arena and as a contested terrain. In the words of Henry Lefebvre, in the minaret referendum Swiss citizens voted for the maintenance of the dominant «representations of space» (Lefebre 1991: 38). Many felt that such new buildings would give foreigners too large of a public visibility. In contrast to people’s insecurity, however, most local planning authorities approved applications for new buildings on the basis of existing regulations, with only a few exceptions. And, in contrast to British authorities, they intervened much less in the exterior design of the constructions. A genuine celebration of a purpose-built religious site as a town’s landmark, however, has not occurred for 40 or 50 years—an ironic contrast to the two earlier purpose-built mosques in Zurich and Geneva (Baumann and Stolz 2007: 360–361).
Immigrant Religious Communities as Multifunctional Service Centres

The various mosques, temples, gurdwaras and churches set up by immigrant minorities turned out to have many more functions than only religious services. In the diaspora, as has been observed by US-American scholars, the range of services and offers broadened to include social, cultural, educational, religious, and leisure activities (see Warner and Wittner 1998; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Foley and Hoge 2007: 91ff.; Stepick et al. 2009). In particular, communities with an emphasis on collective orientation and communitarian engagement are prominent here, as Fred Kniss and Paul Numrich have convincingly studied (2007: 60–62, 180–193). In this regard Peter Kivisto offered an important critique, noting that «[s]cholarship on immigrant religion in Western Europe has been far more inclined to look at the context of reception rather than the way in which immigrants adapt and adjust to new circumstances» (2014: 14). Though this observation certainly deserves credit, it neglects pioneering studies (e.g. Knott 1986; Ballard 1994) and, as is commonly the case, non-English written studies (Nökel 2002; Baumann et al. 2003; Jacobsen 2004; Kühle 2006; Beinhauer-Köhler and Leggewie 2009). In this regard, I will now outline some of the main functions and activities of immigrant religious communities and in so doing, their efforts to adjust and adapt in organisational, social and cultural terms.

Amongst other things, most immigrant religious communities provide a familiar environment for co-ethnic newcomers and longer-settled migrants. People receive psychological support and solidarity, the provision of guidance and orientation, and a sense of belonging. For example, in the Swiss capital Berne, a Pentecostal church set up by African Christians welcomes newcomers and guests. As a refugee from the Congo reports: «I have found friends […] and I met people who are like a mother and a father to me today» (Jäggi and Schaer 2009: 10, my translation). During his five years of uncertainty as an asylum seeker, the church provided solidarity, encouragement and a place of belonging for this refugee.

In addition, religious communities function as a basis for the main religious personnel and members of the board to receive respectability and social status, both inward and outward. These persons represent the temple and mosque vis-à-vis the media, municipal authorities and interreligious fora. Their voices are heard and considered important, which lends social recognition to them. For example, in 2013 a national Swiss newspaper portrayed the imam of a mosque in the town of Wil (Canton St. Gallen) as «the most engaged imam of Switzerland». This public praise awarded the imam respect and acknowledgement far beyond the local area. According to the journalist, imam Bekim Alimi built up a reputation with appearances in the media and in discussion fora. As the journalist summed up «Alimi is engaged in the communication of culture and language, as a translator, a lecturer and as member of the town’s integration committee» (Meier 2013: 4). Along a similar line, Muslims in Britain expect from imams that they «should be active community leaders, engaging with and addressing the social, educational and political realities facing Muslims in contemporary Britain» (Gilliat-Ray 2010: 167). In general terms, Steven Vertovec observed, in the context of
Britain, that such «high-profile individuals» (Vertovec 1996: 64) are of great importance to the publics’ incorporation of a minority. They establish channels of communication, trust within and outside the community, «provide important role models for youth» (Vertovec 1996: 65), and aim to better mutual understanding and exchange (Gilliat-Ray 2010: 248–252).

Also, immigrant religious communities often provide a wide range of resources beyond worship and prayer. Looking at Serbian Orthodox churches, many parishes have turned into multi-functional community centres. As sociologists François Hainard and Maria Hämerli emphasise, «the centers offer various socially oriented services such as counselling, libraries, entertainment and cultural activities, thereby stimulating institutional and social integration» (Hainard and Hämerli 2011: 9). For a diasporic minority bereaved of its former majority status in Yugoslavia, the parishes take on the role of vital cultural preservers, trusted facilitators, and supportive networks for Serbian immigrants and their descendants.

Similar observations apply to many Islamic centres and mosque associations, although certainly not to all. Ethnologist Martin Sökefeld summarises the services of Ahmadiyya and Alevi communities as «[offering], amongst others, German language courses, functions to acquaint co-believers with the Swiss education system and health system and participate in intercultural meetings» (Sökefeld et al. 2010: 12; my translation). Furthermore, Islamic centres may arrange for childcare, entertainment, sports activities, women’s clubs, and participation in inter-religious dialogue (Behloul and Lathion 2007: 201). In Britain also, many migrant organisations engage in shared actions, as Kim Knott points out: «New places of worship and their associated community spaces may be used for diverse social action initiatives, such as multicultural gatherings, immigration advice centres and cross-community facilities for the young or the elderly» (Knott 2005: 59).

Drawing an interim conclusion, churches, mosques and other religious organisations often take on important functions for the individual and the diaspora community. As pointed out by scholars in the context of the United States (see Hirschman 2004), religious diaspora communities in Britain and Switzerland also provide the key functions of refuge, representation and resources. The social and educational services on offer—that provide useful information, advice, counselling, language classes, and role models—not only assist individuals in pragmatic terms, but also open avenues that allow individuals to better cope with the challenges and obstacles in the wider society. These are services which state agencies and organisations in civil society would otherwise have had to provide in order to enhance the social acculturation and incorporation of migrants. In this regard it might be worthwhile reflecting upon whether such multi-functional diaspora communities may be viewed as a part of civil society and classified as civil society organisations. And if so, what are the implications of this? This brings us to the next, more theoretical part.
Religious Diaspora Communities as Civil Society Organisations?

Common agreements as to whether religion and religious communities are a part of civil society do not yet exist. Advocates such as José Casanova argue that «religions are here to stay […] and] are likely to continue playing important public roles in the ongoing construction of the modern world» (Casanova 1994: 6). His concept—«public religion»—stresses the point of religious organisations having a voice in the debate about social and political issues. In contrast, sceptics argue that an involvement of religion in civil society would undermine the principles of secularity and the worldview neutrality of a democratic society (Liedhegner and Werkner 2011: 12–13). This position mirrors the earlier critical voices of the Enlightenment thinkers, which aimed at limiting religion in social and state affairs.

But what is civil society and what does it mean? With the transformational processes taking place in Poland and other Eastern European countries, the term «civil society» has gained increasing prominence. At the same time considerations have arisen about the cohesion of modern societies and forms of citizen participation in established democracies (Liedhegner and Werkner 2011: 9). Scholars concede to the difficulty of defining the concept «civil society» and have therefore proposed different aspects as being central to it.

I consider the threefold framing of writer and activist Michael Edwards to be helpful here as he boils down the ideas of the different approaches and combines them. Edwards characterises the main strands of thought as: «civil society as a part of society […]», civil society as a kind of society […] and civil society as the public sphere» (Edwards 2014: 10, emphases added).

The first strand, civil society as a part of society, denotes a sector of society settled between the affairs of the state, the market, and the private sphere, i.e. the family. Characteristic of this sector are voluntary associations in which people come together to pursue joint interests. Such associations may be support groups, NGOs, sport societies, and charities, as well as churches and denominations (Liedhegner and Werkner 2011: 11; Edwards 2014: 20). This strand, with its emphasis on associations building mutual trust and at the same time opposing the possible domination of the majority, is closely linked with the name of Alexis de Tocqueville. In volume two of his acclaimed Democracy in America (1840), de Tocqueville praised the benefits of such associations as joint self-help, the inculcation of good mores, and as «schools of democracy» (de Tocqueville 1969[1840]: 522). The idea of the value of associations for the good of society was prominently echoed by Robert Putnam in his studies on Italy and the United States (Putnam 1993, 2000; Putnam and Feldstein 2004). Putman stresses the importance of voluntary associations in generating social trust, civic engagement and social capital. As a resource, social capital would promote democracy and social cohesion, he claims.

The second strand, civil society as a kind of society, is closely connected with the aforementioned idea of voluntary associations bringing forth social capital and promoting the common good. Associations are seen as socially engaged, as helping, caring
Martin Baumann: Becoming a Civil Society Organisation?

and fostering cultural exchange, thereby enhancing tolerance and mutual understanding. Associations could act as strong promoters in the making of civil society and maintain democracy, while at the same time keeping self-interest and tyranny at bay (Edwards 2014: 48–49). Again, de Tocqueville made this point (de Tocqueville 1969 [1940]: 517) and established the idea of a certain kind of society, i.e. a society that was more equal, civic and democratic. In valuing these characteristics as ‘good’ in an assessment of society, the value of associations carry a strong normative tone.

However, contrary to de Tocqueville’s admiration for civic associations (which needs to be placed in its historical context (Brinton 2010)), it is obvious that not all voluntary associations work for tolerance and a fair society. Associations such as extreme nationalistic groups, racist associations and groups with a sense of superiority, amongst others, each have their own idea of the ‘common good society’. Political scientist Roland Roth calls these anti-democratic associations the «bad civil society» (Roth 2004: 45; my translation). He stresses the need for more attention to the specifics and ideals of an association and concludes that «‘uncivil’ developments derive from the heart of civil society and point to destructive influences of the market, state and communities» (Roth 2004: 57; my translation).

With regard to the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ civil societies and related associations, Detlef Pollack stresses that civil society is no collective agent, has no mandatory aim and is structured basically in a pluralistic way (Pollack 2004: 29). As such, civil society has no ‘voice’ or representative to declare normatively specific positions as binding. Rather, most diverse opinions and values can be advocated (Pollack 2004: 30). In Pollack’s view, what is integral to voluntary associations in a ‘good’ civil society is a capability for self-relativisation and tolerance, an inclusive understanding of democracy and a recognition of the other as an equal (Pollack 2004: 31). In contrast, associations pertaining to a ‘bad’ civil society would share ideas of supremacy and exclusivism as well as a weak and often absent capability for self-relativisation.

Finally, the third strand stresses the idea of the public sphere as characteristic of civil society. The public sphere is the social arena—distinct from the state, the economy, and the family—where citizens and associations non-violently debate and exchange their points of view (Edwards 2014: 67). In contemporary political theory, this idea of the public sphere is closely connected with the name of Jürgen Habermas. Public sphere, according to the Habermasian ideal type, is characterised by an openness of access for all private citizens and social groups, who follow the principle of discursivity, i.e. the persuasion of the best rational argument, and function to legitimate politics and democracy. Habermas’ normative concept comprises a critical appraisal of society’s present-day public sphere. In the process of structural transformation, the public sphere turned to a «power-structured arena» (‘vermachtete Arena’), as he called it, controlled by mass media and interest groups (Habermas 1990[1962]: 28; my translation). Importantly, a single, unified public sphere does not exist, but rather numerous public spheres at different levels of society (Edwards 2014: 69). Whereas in his early writings Habermas declared religion to be a private matter (Habermas 1990[1962]: 67, 163), in his later publications he turned his attention to the role of religion in the so-called post-secular society (Habermas 2005). As Habermas claims, there is a need for
«a dialogical relationship, open to learning, with all religious traditions» (Habermas, quoted by Mendieta 2010: 5; emphasis added).

After this somewhat long excursion into the varied interpretations of civil society it is time to ask: So what? What are the inferences for the place of immigrant religious communities in civil society? Obviously religious communities as organised groups constitute voluntary associations, as praised by de Tocqueville. As pointed out before, Christian Pentecostal and Muslim associations build trust among its members. Additionally, others, such as the Serbian-Orthodox and Muslim associations provide various self-help services and may at times engage in intercultural dialogue. These self-help services by collectivist immigrant communities such as Christian and Muslim associations strive to help migrants to better adapt to the new social and cultural environment. The social capital generated by immigrant religious communities can, to a large extent, be classified as bonding social capital, in particular during the first decades. Often, after having arranged for basic needs, bridging capital then comes to the fore in joint meetings and actions with other religious and cultural groups.

However, such an emphasis on bonding activities also helps to sustain less favourable effects such as specific power structures based on gender roles and on caste ascription, hierarchies of power justified by religious concepts as well as the common exclusion of women and youngsters in influential and representational positions. In this regard, Inger Furseth observes that «research literature on social capital tends to focus on its positive consequences», neglecting ‘negative social capital’ (Furseth 2008: 159). In particular a demand to conformity, in terms of gendered spaces and gender roles, as well as efforts to socially control women’s dress, leisure time, and the male partners of female teenagers as they are growing-up, are observable in Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities (Nökel 2002; Müller 2013: 205–222).

Finally, are religious diaspora communities and their representatives engaged in public debates, and do they form an integral part of the public sphere of civil society? In Britain, with its longer established immigrant communities and with most members in possession of British citizenship, this seems to be much more the case than in Switzerland. Community leaders and high-profile individuals have access to the media and to public forums such as political parties and trade unions (Vertovec 1996: 64). Many local religious communities have been able to achieve visible physical representation in the public space with purpose-built buildings, some of them celebrated as a city’s landmark. Despite these achievements, mistrust and suspicion against formerly immigrated people and their off-spring persist, in particular against Muslims (Moosavi 2012).

In Switzerland, with its long established suspicion of ‘foreigners’, so far only a few high-profile immigrants and even fewer immigrant religious communities have been able to participate as respected partners in the discursive public sphere. The picture might be somewhat less harsh at the local level of towns and cities with priests and imams maintaining good contacts with municipal authorities and multi-faith forums. However, on the national level the issue of immigrants and their communities is commonly spoken about in the public sphere rather than a topic debated with participating immigrants. Issues of maintained power relations, restricted access to citizenship, and
a caring—reflective of patronising paternalism—are at stake here. It is difficult to predict future developments, but the results of past votes underscore the bias of the majority of Swiss citizens against foreigners and their reluctance to allow religious minorities to have a respected place in the public sphere.

Summing up, we may suggest that in Britain, immigrant religious communities can more or less be classified as civil society organisations, whereas in Switzerland the credit rests primarily on their aspect as voluntary associations generating social capital (both ‘good’ and ‘bad’). Representation in the discursive public sphere, however, exists only selectively.

**Immigrant Religious Communities as CSO**

Finally, what are the implications of perceiving immigrant religious communities as civil society organisations, as a CSO? I would like to touch on three levels, the diaspora community, civil society, and the state.

Perceiving immigrant religious communities as a CSO would enable various stakeholders to highlight the communities’ aims and activities. A central term would be resources, i.e. the ‘good’ social and educational services as well as cultural and entertainment activities. Focusing on the civic character of many resources instead of stressing the religious aspect would enable one to perceive their contribution to the local community and society at large. In the same regard, however, the effects of negative social capital (Furseth 2008: 159) should not be neglected nor stressed as the only effect.

A trade-off emerges: an immigrant religious community could be seen as an aid agency with a variety of helpful services and programmes on offer. What might not be considered here, however, is the singularity of offering religious guidance, of supplying a solemn place for joint prayer and veneration, and of reconnecting with the home left behind. Piety, confidence and trust in preachers and priests go beyond the functional support of the provision of services and resources. In this regard, leaders of immigrant religious communities might be hesitant to welcome this categorisation. Furthermore, as can be seen in a few places, a differentiation involves separating, for example, religious and educational services. Such cases are mosques and madrassas (Gilliat-Ray 2010: 152–155) as well as Tamil Hindu temples and Tamil mandram, a Tamil supplementary school (Markus 2005: 184–199).

Continuing with the next level—that of civil society—the central term is recognition. Perceiving an immigrant religious community as a CSO would highlight its role as a voluntary organisation. It would stress its role as a civic learning field and show appreciation of it as a place for stimulating social trust and social capital. Also, leaders of such communities could have a voice in the social arena of the public sphere and speak out for themselves. This would most possibly help diminish controversies when constructing a new, publicly visible religious site. As a trade-off, however, such recognition might prolong power structures and forms of gendered exclusion as well as neglect the effects of negative social capital.
Relating to the final level—that of the state—two terms are central: citizenship and political system. As mentioned, in Britain, in contrast to Switzerland, a much higher percentage of former immigrants hold British passports. Citizenship gives political rights and political parties were compelled to take into account the concerns of minorities. A religious community as a civil society organisation also functions as a pressure group for the claiming of certain rights, exemptions or privileges. Citizenship lends much more weight to such claims.

In Switzerland, only few immigrant religious communities and organisations have political influence and power. Due to the fact that citizenship is withheld for twelve years, immigrants and their organisations are kept more or less politically non-influential. Though the rates of Swiss citizenship have risen among immigrant Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Orthodox Christians, so far their concerns for better and dignified religious infrastructures have commonly been met reluctantly by Swiss politics and citizens. Without citizenship, and in the context of general suspicion towards immigrants and foreigners, a perception of immigrant religious communities as civil society organisations would, at least politically, change little.

This point leads me to turn my attention to the political system as the context for a civil society. In this regard, a civil society is strongly governed by the political system and will vary from country to country. De Tocqueville wrote about Democracy in America (de Tocqueville 1969[1835, 1840], emphasis added) highlighting the specifics of the development of democracy and the separation of state and religion in America. In this regard, British and Swiss political systems differ with regards to civil society and immigrant religion.

Britain lacks a written constitution and decisions are based on the accumulated legal tradition. The Race Relation Acts of 1965, 1968 and 1976 have been important in reducing discrimination on grounds of race and ethnic origins. Legal interpretations of these acts, however, have not included religion. In the 1980s, the policy-based principle of multiculturalism enabled ethnic and religious minorities to establish their desired infrastructure, including the establishment of religious schools. The New Labour government of the 1990s made ‘faith’ and religion much more prominent (McLoughlin 2005: 56–58). Nevertheless, the increasing stepping-out of immigrant religious minorities into public view also created tension and controversy (Weller 2008). The policy-engagement with ‘faith’ received a backlash as the London bombings in 2005 led to a policy on ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’. The counter-terrorism strategy generally suspected Muslim communities and mosques of fostering extremists. Muslims felt spied upon by previously trusted authorities and the atmosphere was made worse by an increasing Islamophobia (Hussain and McLoughlin 2013: 684–685). The bottom line is that policy regulations enabled the development of a flourishing and lively civil society, whilst the official principle of multiculturalism gave religious minorities rights and open spaces. The latter has, however, been increasingly questioned by a population (and by politicians) critical of multiculturalism and Islam, in particular.

In contrast to Britain, the Swiss political system includes characteristic means of political participation, that of a referendum, and of a people’s initiative. These means of active participatory democracy on the communal, cantonal and federal level were
introduced already in the late 19th century. Whereas in a referendum citizens can give their opinion on governmental projects and spending, a people’s initiative enables citizens and associations to demand a ballot on specific issues. If this is successful, the desired amendment will be inscribed into the cantonal or federal constitution. Though these means are generally praised as strengthening direct democracy, they have proved to be detrimental for the rights and spaces of religious minorities in Switzerland. This was first seen in 1866 with the rejection of the federal referendum to introduce religious freedom for Jews (allowed in 1874 with the revised federal constitution), followed by the approval of the first federal people’s initiative 1893, the prohibition of animal slaughter according to Jewish rules. Other curtailing decisions, based on the people’s initiatives, are the prohibition of the Jesuit order in Switzerland to construct monasteries, more recently followed by the 2009 prohibition on building new minarets (Vatter 2011). Analysing these votes, political scientist Adrian Vatter sees a clear differentiation of in-group and out-group at work, to the detriment of foreigners and non-Christian minorities. He concludes: «To put it in a nutshell, during the past 160 years people’s decisions with regard to religious minorities have been a cascade of resolutions of delay, denial and tightening» (Vatter 2011: 284; my translation). In this regard, the political system curtails rights and spaces for religious minorities though it provides a secured frame for self-organisation and participation in civil society.

Conclusion

This article contrasted British and Swiss societies with regard to their social dealings with immigrant religious communities in respect to public space, civil society, citizenship and the state. As a result, a somewhat opposing picture evolved, with the British state providing many more rights, spaces as well as much more recognition to religious minorities as compared to the Swiss state. The early British adoption of a policy on multiculturalism and the granting of citizenship contrasts the dominant Swiss policy, which defends ‘Swissness’ due to the commonly held perception that Switzerland receives too many immigrants and foreigners. In this regard, the direct-democratic means of the people’s initiatives proved to be an effective mechanism in holding religious minorities and foreigners at bay. In particular, right-wing populist parties used this mechanism quite successfully and a change is not in sight, but rather a worsening of the situation.

As existing examples illustrate, immigrant religious communities in Switzerland, Britain and elsewhere have the means to transform a marginalised situation into one of more visibility and social recognition. A prerequisite seems to be to establish good contacts with municipal authorities, the media, and local party leaders. In addition, cooperation with civil society organisations such as local associations and churches seems vital. Such a pro-active communication strategy will not only reduce feelings of insecurity among locals, but will help to secure a place in civil society. An acknowledgement in civil society will help to enable a voice in the discursive public sphere and thus assist in enabling hitherto publicly disputed religious symbols of the lived repre-
sentational spaces. Such lived representational spaces can then become a part of society’s dominant representations of space. As such, society’s power structures may be circumvented by active communication in civil society and with state authorities—a line of communication too often missed in the planning and building processes of new religious sites.

Finally, as historians of religions have repeatedly underscored, it is important to inquire to what extent the specifics of religions, i.e. their difference in religious ideas, practices, authorities, forms of assemblies, religious hierarchies and sectarian affiliation, may have an effect in yielding services and ‘good’ or ‘negative’ social capital. It is apparent that comparative studies focusing on the religious characteristics of immigrant religious communities are inexistent with the exception of the inspiring research by Fred Kniss and Paul D. Numrich (2007). Their approach pays attention to the specifics of immigrant religious communities and rests on differentiating the three dimensions of (1) the degree of sectarianism, (2) a religion’s locus and emphasis on moral authority (the institution), and (3) a religion’s most central moral project (Kniss and Numrich 2007: 9). Less focused on size than on a religious community’s centrality or non-centrality of religious authority (hierarchy, texts, leaders) and a community’s more individualist or more collectivist moral aims, the authors show that communities which stress the authority of the collective (the group and its power structures) and address social issues tend to engender social capital. In contrast, groups that favour stronger individual aims (such as self-perfection, personal well-being) and allow for more variation in authority yield much less social capital (Kniss and Numrich 2007: 56–70). Though this approach awaits transfer and application to the British and Swiss cases, the cases presented in this article unsurprisingly make reference primarily to communities with a collectivist focus, e.g. Muslim and Christian-Orthodox immigrant groups. They have brought forth both ‘good’ social capital with supportive services and potential civic implications and ‘negative’ social capital with a continuity of demands for conformity, strong social control and often non-adjusted power structures and gender relations. In this regard, the social and political context of reception proves vital with respect to the extent that immigrant religious communities orient themselves more outwardly towards a society, or, more inwardly towards their own community, and what kind of social capital that becomes strengthened.

Notes
1 We have to rely on informed estimations as the official data of the Federal Office for Statistics (2012) counted only persons from 15 years and upward. The estimated numbers for Muslims rely on Lathion and Tunger-Zanetti (2013: 634), for Hindus and Buddhists on Baumann and Stolz (2007).
2 See http://www.religionenschweiz.ch/bauten/ (website is in English, French and German) and Baumann 2009.
References


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