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**Title: “European Religious Minorities: between Pluralism and Exclusivism”****Abstract:**

*This paper reviews the religious diversity theory in the writings of Hick, Legenhausen and Netland, among other authors. It distinguishes two main approaches on religious diversity, pluralism and exclusivism, and examines their negative and positive application in the current situation of new (minorities') management policies. The pluralist approach, in the literature, emphasizes that, within bounds, any religion is as good as any other and as a normative principle. Religious pluralism requires that people of all or most religions should be treated the same. The second approach, exclusivist or restrictivist, reflects that only one religion is uniquely valuable and it denies any form of pluralism. I review the consequences of the application of such approaches and illustrate them with relevant examples. In an unbalanced manner, exclusivist approaches have been used the most, especially, in the development and implementation of integration policies. The negative consequences of religious minorities' des-integration processes advocate for the need to develop further actions that could effectively accommodate minority religious identities. I argue that religion is part of identity construction of many individuals/groups and therefore cannot be excluded from the integration policies. On the contrary, it should be incorporated as an integral part of such policies. Thus, a “reasonable” integration of religious identities would be necessary, in order to build a common and shared framework, with a certain degree of flexibility to be able to adapt to future social and cultural changes.*

**Key words:** pluralism, exclusivism, religion, integration policies, new minorities

## Introduction

Throughout history, religious and religious-like beliefs enabled people to adapt and harness natural resources and powers and, altogether with science, shaped the ancient and modern worlds. Modernization undermined the social significance of religion and was supposed to lead to a decline in religious beliefs (Wilson, 1966). Such a forecast was heavily criticized, – since it mainly referred to the dynamics of Western European Christianity transformation, from the middle ages to the present (Luckmann, 1991). Different theoretical and practical studies disprove the idea that religion has disappeared, due to modernization. In fact, in a global perspective, the disappearance of religion due to modernization is unlikely to occur in the near future (Urrutia Asua, 2016). Furthermore, the current state of art proves that religion has by no means disappeared from the European public spaces and the resurgence of some believes such as Islam has stimulated a large political and social debate towards religion's role and influence in European societies.

In spite of the recent happenings, the resurgence of a new global conflict was advocated in early 90s. During this time Huntington (Huntington, 1996) pioneered to forecast a new conflictual scenario for humanity to face in the years to come. He stated that the fundamental source of conflict in the new world would be cultural and between civilizations. According to him, the conflict will dominate global politics and the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. The divides would be mainly of a cultural nature, separating civilizations from one another, and representing cultural and religious differences. These differences are not only real but fundamental; they are the product of centuries of historical practices. Among different cultural differences, religion is considered to be the most important one. Huntington states that in the contemporary world, religion moved in to fill the gap left behind by the separation of people from longstanding local identities and often took the form of fundamentalist movements (Huntington, 1996). Although, there are many critics to Huntington's statements, "it is in relation to Islam that... [his] thesis has found the greatest resonance and has provoked the most heated debates"(Casanova, 2011: 252). Tragically, the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in the United States and the following terrorist attacks in Europe have been seen as a confirmation of Huntington's theory of clashes: between Islam and the West.

Today, the terrifying terrorist attacks that keep on taking place in Europe place a "new" emphasis on the faith issues of religious minorities. This increased challenge for democratic societies makes the debate on religious minorities' accommodation balance between exclusivist and pluralist views. The former raises serious questions in relation to the compatibility of Islam with Western values and advocates for the exclusion of religion from the public space, the exclusion of the religious closings and prohibition of the building of worship places. -Exclusivist ideas back many integrative offers for the new minorities and suppose that sooner or later they should acquire the host's values and culture.

The latter, pluralist approach, asserts positive value for many or most religions. It advocates for policy improvement that could include participatory and inclusive offers, to value more the cultural and religious diversity that could lead to proper inclusion with a sense of belonging. This benefits both religious minorities and society as a whole. Unfortunately, a proper pluralistic approach to integration is not yet implemented in Europe but there are countries that tested a closer focus to balance religious pluralism in their countries.

## **Exclusivism vs Pluralism**

There is almost no state today without at least one minority within its territory. Although, minorities are present in one territory for a long time, the so called national (old) minorities' co-habitation with the hosting society was not always peaceful. Many social, political and armed conflicts characterize this relation. The new minorities came into the debate to reemphasize the need of recognition, non-discrimination, equal rights, and cultural and religious diversity accommodations.

Different responses have been used to accommodate diversity, most of which having been influenced by a domestic political tradition of a "majority versus minority" perspective (Ruiz Vieyetz, 2007). In this way, majorities rule and impose their integration policy perspective over minority groups. In the particular case of religious minorities, there has been little public concern on their religious accommodation needs. They were usually regarded as "others" that, sooner or later, should leave, assimilate and/or acquire the majority's values, customs and traditions. In this way the Western tradition, most of the time, neglected and denigrated the claims of religious minorities.

The current religiously grounded clashes emphasize the need to examine the issues of religious diversity anew. In rethinking it, the first task is to revise the theoretical framework of two main approaches: pluralism and exclusivism, and then re-examine their negative and positive applications in the current situation of new minorities' management policies.

The **exclusivists** are primarily concerned with justifying the role of a one and only truth in religion as an absolute. To put it in a nutshell, exclusivism in regards to religious diversity, denies any form of pluralism. It dismisses the idea that all beliefs, or at least the "major ones," are the same in some important respect (Netland, 2001). Because of this, arguably exclusivism represents a default view in several religious traditions (Burton, 2010). For example, the earliest Buddhist and Christian sources prominently feature staunch criticisms of various rival teachings and practices as, respectively, false and useless or harmful (Dale, 2015). Criticizing another was used to ground their own true religion.

Followers of an exclusivist approach can be found amongst several religions, such as Christians, Muslims and others, all being biased by their own religious beliefs and advocating for their one and only religious universality. From one side, Christians are claiming that salvation is offered only

through Jesus Christ who is the only Savior and the only way to God. Similar strong exclusivist views are to be found amongst Muslims as well. Many Muslims claim to be the only ones who shall enter Paradise, based on the Qur'anic teachings which mention that all Kuffar (infidels or non-Muslims) will go to hell. According to both of these (exclusivist) views there is just one center and there can be just one unique and "universal" truth.

A scholar that heavily defended exclusivism in his works is Harold A. Netland. He emphasizes that salvation is settled exclusively through Jesus Christ and that such a saving dimension does not exist in other religions. Netland states that "Exclusivism maintains that the central claims of Christianity are true and that where the claims of Christianity conflict with those of other religions the latter are to be rejected as false. Christian exclusivists also characteristically consider that God has revealed himself definitively in the Bible and that Jesus Christ is the unique incarnation of God, the only Lord and Savior. In addition ... Salvation is not found in the structures of other religious traditions"(Netland, 1999). The lack of salvation in the other religious traditions proves to Netland the exclusivity of Christian faith, although he accepts the existence of other faiths with which Christianity relates.

Looking at the relation of Christianity with other religions he notices that the religious ultimate, the human predicament and the nature of salvation are differently, even contradictorily, pictured by the Buddhist, Muslims, Hindus and Christians. Although, he acknowledges that they have their own specific claims, Netland does not see it possible that all religious claims can be right. Once this incompatibility is acknowledged, Netland starts investigating the question, "Which, if any, is the correct one?" (Netland, 1999: 77) In this way the author is excluding from the start, the possibility of a plural existence of two or more divine truths. While the author starts looking for a correct answer to his outstanding question, he points out that "not all of the claims of the various traditions can be true. Some must be false" (Netland, 1999:78). And, in order to substantiate his statement he considers that "it has traditionally been held that the Muslim and the orthodox Christian cannot both be correct in their respective beliefs about the identity of Jesus" (Netland, 1999:78). In this way relying on old beliefs, Netland built his exclusivist theory emphasizing the quarrel among religious faiths.

The conflicting nature of beliefs, leads the analysis of Netland to a solution. According to him "where the claims of the Scripture are incompatible with those of other faiths, the latter are not to be accepted as truth"(Netland, 1999:80). This means that what is not according to the Christian religious tradition is false and has to be neglected, avoided and rejected and this relates the inner exclusivist views of the author. Similar exclusivist opinions are made by other authors, among which is Kärkkäinen, who introduced the terms of ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism and theocentrism (Kärkkäinen, 2003). According to the author the centrism of Christian beliefs make the faith exclusive. In this way, both Netland and Kärkkäinen advocate for the exclusivist approach and both points of view are heavily anchored in Christianity. Additionally, both authors agree to replace the concept of

exclusivism by a more neutral term such as “particularism” and “restrictivism”(Dale,2015), as in the original approach had a strong negative connotation. Such an intention was due to the criticisms that the authors received and the proposal for a softer concept was intended to increase the acceptance of their point of view.

While particularism points out the specificity of different religions, being used in exclusivist terms it maintains the idea of one religion being better than the other. The same happens with “restrictivism” that keeps on emphasizing that imposing and eliminative character. The effort to “polish” the concept did not help properly as it still keeps the mark of the original meaning – to make distinction between the different categories, to separate and advocate for a one and only supremacy.

Notwithstanding the fact that the exclusivist theoretical approach was criticized, it found its pragmatic application in a wide range of policy offers that deal with new minorities’ management. In most of these policy offers, the exclusivist approach was nicely veiled inside the integrative offers for the new minorities. Once arrived into the new land, it has been considered that one has to adapt to the cultural context or leave at the end of a short-term working contract. As none of these cases happens, there appeared the need to integrate the new minorities and European states, depending on their traditions, developed some offers with different degrees of restrictive/exclusive policy measures. Such measures had the main aim to harmonize the society or in other words to embrace one identity for all, to make the “others” forget their origins, faith, and culture and adopt those of the host. France is a good example in these terms. The French example is relevant due to its separation of state-church relations and its model of integration where the exclusivist approach was heavily advocated.

Firstly, the French church - state relationship is based on the separation of religion from the public square (Soper, 2017:51) - the so called *laïcité*. But France keeps on being a Catholic country and France was the first to introduce restrictions in regards to cultural or religious clothing. A good example is the French law<sup>1</sup> that prohibited the wearing of clothing covering one's face in public spaces. Although the ban applies to scarves, masks and motorcycle helmets, it particularly affects Muslim women who wear the Islamic veil, or niqab. Due to which, the law has been commonly called the “burqa ban” or burqa exclusion.

In this regard, in 2014, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that France's argument, that the law was based "on a certain idea of living together," was "legitimate." This ruling essentially set the precedence to other countries within the ECHR's jurisdiction to impose similar restrictive laws. Similar exclusive measures undoubtedly followed later on in other countries. For example, the Swiss

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<sup>1</sup> In its decision number 2010-613 DC of October 7, 2010, the French Constitutional Council found the law prohibiting the wearing of clothing covering one's face in public spaces constitutional, with one reservation. (Decision no. 2010-613DC du 07 octobre 2010, loi interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public, Constitutional Council official web site (Oct. 12, 2010), <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/les-decisions/acces-par-date/decisions-depuis-1959/2010/2010-613-dc/decision-n-2010-613-dc-du-07-octobre-2010.49711.html> ) The reservation applies to places of worship open to the public; in such places, the prohibition is not applicable.

referendum on worship places. In 2009, the Swiss people decided to vote in a popular referendum in favor of an absolute prohibition of the construction of minarets on Swiss territory. In the particular case of this vote we find the “absolute prohibition” which means under any circumstances the minarets shall not be built on Swiss territory or otherwise said is absolutely excluded.

Second area of restrictivism/exclusivist approach in French policy, as it was mentioned earlier, refers to the integration policy. The assimilation model has its roots in French ideology during the colonial time and which in the modern time has evolved to be used in relation to the new minorities. They were supposed to be equal to the rest and mainstreamed into the French culture. But the non-discriminatory and egalitarian policy did not work as expected and since 2005 rioting in many French cities have been eschewing divisions of race, culture, ethnicity and religion, involving many people of Arab and African origin, most of whom were descendants of immigrants. These and other riots were seen to show that French emphasis on assimilation had not addressed serious problems of youth alienation and unemployment, and that discrimination was an important concern. The riots fed a growing concern about the corrosive effects of immigration as a threat to national identity and security heightened by the terrorist attacks (Charlie Hebbo magazine, Islamic State attacks) using Islam to justify their actions. These events clearly show from one side, the profound unease at the institutional level when dealing with issues related to ethnicity, culture or religion and disconnect between people and their political leaders (Geddes, 2016:48). The negative consequences of religious minorities’ — pseudo integration processes advocate for the need to rethink the actions that could effectively accommodate minorities’ religious identities. An outstanding argument is that religion is part of identity construction of many individuals and groups and therefore cannot be excluded from integration policies. On the contrary, it should be incorporated as an integral part of such policies. Thus, a “reasonable” integration of religious identities would be necessary, in order to build a common and shared framework, with a certain degree of flexibility to be able to adapt to future social and cultural changes.

In this line lay the **pluralism** ideal, differently from exclusivism, is mostly used for asserting positive value for many or most religions. Predominantly, it embraces the idea that a peaceful co-existence of all religions is possible. Furthermore, the pluralistic approach to religious diversity advocates for an egalitarian attitude and a wide acceptance towards other religions, and considers that, within bounds; one religion is as good as any other.

The pluralist approach came into the contemporary panorama as a natural consequence of increased diversity and was characterized by more and more plural societies - in linguistic, cultural and religious terms (Ruiz Vieyetz, 2007:9). The plural realities gave birth to different elaborations of terms and meanings but with one outstanding characteristic: contextual bias. In this way, religious pluralism in some contexts means an informed, tolerant, and appreciative or sympathetic view of the various

religions. While in other contexts, religious pluralism is a normative principle requiring that people of all or most religions should be treated the same (Dale, 2015).

An advocate for a tolerant view towards various religions was J. Hick. He displays a strong sympathy for the pluralistic ideal and considers that no religion stands out above the rest, and none can claim to be the only context for authentic religious experiences. The different religions are, as Hick defines them, different responses to the same absolute ultimate (the Real). In Hick's (Hick, 1989) work, "the Real" is used to refer to the ultimate in different religions and sometimes he uses the following synonyms: "the ultimately Real" and "ultimate Reality" or even simply "the Ultimate" or "Reality".

For Hick the Real or the truth has multiple faces and he argues that what we see represents just our subjective and historically influenced views. Correspondingly, what is true for us might not be true for other religions as they have their proper, genuine truth. To put Hick's idea in a nutshell, our truth is as true for us as the others' truth is true for others. In this way, Hick recognizes the plurality of the Real for each person but he considers that each person taken separately has only one, unique Real. In order to emphasize each separate religious view, Hick uses the Real in singular form because he "considered that there cannot be a plurality of ultimates but only one" for each person and who can bear different names (Hick, 1989:249). It means, according to Hick, that the "presence" of the Real in different religious practices consists in the "availability of information, from a transcendent source, that the human mind/brain is capable of transforming into what we call religious experience. And, as in the case of our awareness of the physical world, the envioning divine reality is brought to consciousness in terms of certain basic concepts or categories. These are, first, the concept of God, or of the Real as personal, which presides over the various theistic forms of religious experience; and second, the concept of the Absolute, or of the Real as non-personal, which presides over its various non-theistic forms"(Hick, 1989:244).

In this way the author emphasizes the subjective interpretation of the Real by human beings as well as their biased opinion in understanding the transcendent, due to which "the adherents of the major religious faiths experience the Real through their varying culturally shaped lenses"(Hick, 1989:240). Emphasizing the cultural influence, the author underlines that the adherents in most of religious believes have only one center and experience the transcendent through the perspective of their own religious affiliation. Acknowledging this, Hick explores his "pluralistic hypothesis that the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human; and that within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place (Hick, 1989:240). The divine process of transformation inside various religious traditions are seen by Hick as alternative salvation "spaces" within which, or "ways" along which, men and women can find

salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfilment”(Hick, 1989:240). In this way the author’s call to reflect and accept the reality-centered transformation is the premise that leads to the acceptance and peaceful co-existence of the plurality.

It should be no problem to accept plurality, as according to the author the religious affiliation is a “birth accident” that pass on from one generation to another through the historical channels(Hick, 1989:2). If these premises are understood and accepted then the peaceful co-existence of different religious beliefs might be indeed possible. Nevertheless, for this change to occur the author underlines some necessary milestones.

First of all, he suggests that the belief in the transcendent must start from the new acknowledgment of religious plurality and conceptual relativity. This means that religious beliefs must be seen as containing an immense variety of forms, and this vast and multifarious field of human faith constitutes our variously transparent and opaque interface with a mysterious transcendent reality. In order to achieve this, the intellectual challenge, according to Hick, is granting to others a premise on which we rely ourselves and in the equality of other religious experiences that in the end leads to the intellectual Golden Rule being obeyed (Hick, 1989:9).

Secondly, Hick proposes to go beyond the dominant self-understanding of each religious tradition and to overcome the classical belief to be regarded as uniquely superior to the others. The proposal to challenge the past and present stereotypes and make one step further to acceptance, mutual understanding, tolerance and respect represents a proposal for change or transformation of our classical and old view that could lead to the accommodation of all religious belief in the modern societies.

And last, he calls for a genuinely pluralistic change in the religious world by means of interpretation. Acceptance and tolerance is directly linked to understanding and interpretation. If we start interpreting the world as many and with differences as Hick rightly says “...deemphasize its own absolute and exclusive claims”(Hick, 1989:3).

The three premises that Hick underlines stress the need to transform the views and advance altogether with the changes of the modern world in order to build a peaceful co-existence among religions and faiths.

Other scholars built on the idea of a hypothetical peaceful coexistence of religious pluralism among whom is M. Legenhausen. He considers, as well as Hick, that many religions are equal regarding the central value(s) of religion (Legenhausen, 2009). Although Legenhausen shares the same pluralist ideal, he raises some criticisms to Hick’s work, calling it reductive pluralism and radical in reference to the personal transformation from self-centered to Reality-centered (Bigliardi, 2014).

Legenhausen’s contribution to pluralism is adding different “variants of pluralism” with possible sub-variants. He also conducted a historical survey aimed at demonstrating that: “...modern religious pluralism arose specifically in reaction to widespread Christian views about salvation”( Bigliardi,

2014:1310) and exactly this is a criticism he directed at Hick's theory, considering it anchored in Christianity.

The pluralism according to Legenhausen is non-reductive and it is explained by “. . . the view that each of a number of religions has unique features through which God may guide people, even if there is no common essence to all religions” (Legenhausen, 2006:10). Later on, the author concludes that this version of pluralism (non-reductive pluralism): “. . . is able to avoid the objections raised against liberal or reductive pluralism while maintaining an attitude of tolerance and rejecting prejudice” (Legenhausen, 2006:13). In this way Legenhausen raises the increasing problem of prejudices that in consequence leads to discrimination and marginalization. He considers that: “to defend religion means to support, encourage and defend the dignity of others' faiths and practices to the greatest extent possible”( Legenhausen, 2006:16). Although it is worth trying, he recognizes the difficulties and barriers to fulfil such a mission.

In this way both authors, Hick and later Legenhausen, advocate for tolerance towards other religious realities with the aim of building a peaceful co-existence. Both authors agree that religious pluralism is a reality that needs efforts from all the sides in order to be accepted. The acceptance should come as a normality of modern life and as an equality of all beliefs.

In spite of the existing reality and theoretical contribution, the true pluralistic religious reals are far from being achieved. On the contrary, we witness an increase in discrimination, prejudice and islamophobia. In consequence, there is a growing need to re-evaluate what some countries have done in terms of the integrative offers aimed at integrating religious pluralism.

Although, far from a real pluralist approach, still inside European societies can be found examples of countries that tried to accommodate religious diversity through different policy offers. A country of particular interest in this regard is the Netherlands. The country is particularly well suited as an example due to the fact that religious pluralism altogether with tolerance and multiculturalism for decades has been synonymous with the Dutch context. The Netherlands is a country with a longstanding reputation for its liberal attitudes toward immigrants and individuals of different backgrounds. To many, the large Dutch Muslim population, hailing mainly from Morocco, Suriname, Turkey and the Antilles, is a standing testament to that fact (Barahimi, 2006).

Also, the Netherlands has been internationally known for its ‘multicultural’ approach to immigrant integration. Some even suggest that there is a ‘multicultural model’ that informs Dutch political discourse and policy practices. The basic premise of this model is that Dutch policies have been driven by a coherent and consistent belief in the idea that the recognition and accommodation of cultural, ethnic and religious groups promotes their successful integration into Dutch multicultural society (Duyvendak, 2010). A key trait of the Dutch multicultural model is its tendency to

institutionalize cultural pluralism in the belief that cultural emancipation of immigrant minorities is the key to their integration into Dutch society (Duyvendak and Scholten, 2010:41).

Additionally, the Dutch model is based on the country's tradition of pillarization or the Dutch pillarized system, which lasted from the 1900s to the 1970s, and encompassed the division of society along cultural and religious lines. Within this system, minorities could have their own distinct political and social organizations, which allowed them to participate in cultural life and policy making. The main aim was to achieve societal integration through preserving, respecting, and empowering subcultures (Spiecker and Steutel, 2001). Even after the erosion of this system, scholars claim that the Netherlands remained "distinctive" (Statham et al., 2005) from many other European countries, because it continued to encourage cultural pluralism by giving broader rights and freedoms to minority groups, including Muslim immigrants (Erisen and Kentmen-Cin, 2017:85). In these terms, the Netherlands is viewed as a multi-ethnic country with looser requirements for naturalization (Erisen and Kentmen-Cin, 2017:85).

Furthermore, "The Netherlands is still an extreme representative of a 'multicultural' vision of integration. The country allows immigrants easy access to formal social and political rights while at the same time, facilitating expressions of foreigners' own cultural identity with the help of the state. ... (O)rganizations and activities based on ethnic grounds are still generously supported – directly and indirectly – by the government. Whether people want it or not, ethnicity still plays an important role in public institutions and discourse" (Koopmans, 2007:4).

Nevertheless, in the Netherlands, multiculturalism has been criticized "and blamed ... for various adverse effects" (Duyvendak and Scholten, 2012:268). Some authors, such as van Amersfoort considers the Dutch model that it served as a "policy of cultural segregation," forcing Muslim immigrants to the periphery of society where they congregate together, forming their own religious, sports, and political organizations (Barahimi and Ostowar, 2006). A similar opinion has J. Rath. He considers the "Dutch 'multicultural model' a product of a technocratic community of experts and policy-makers and deconstructs the ideological principles on which it was based. Rath 'models' the Dutch approach in a "Minorities Paradigm" that defines society in terms of distinct groups or 'minorities' whose position is characterized both by a weak socio-economic position and by social-cultural differences. According to Rath, Dutch policy adopted the Minorities Paradigm because it legitimizes government intervention in the position of ethnic minorities, but also allows it to exclude minorities from political and economic processes because of their socio-cultural nonconformity. Hence, according to Rath, it is no surprise that the ethnic minorities' policy of the 1980s seems to have failed, as it contributed to a further 'minorization' of ethnic minorities rather than to an amelioration of their social and political position in society" (Duyvendak and Scholten, 2012:271). On the same line of thought are Sniderman and Hagendoorn who claim that the labelling of collective identities has

inadvertently deepened socio-cultural cleavages in society rather than bridging these differences (Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007:269).

From one side, the Netherlands tried to set a pluralistic model of religious diversity and peaceful co-existence but was not able to totally develop it. It created small “islands” of many religions together that did not or had little chances to interact. This gap paid two main negative consequences. From one side, it increased prejudices on unwillingness to integrate and increased marginalization. The communities build their own and parallel enclaves in the main society. “The growth of Muslim networks in the Netherlands has only increased the fear of Islamic radicalism in Dutch society, and reinforced Dutch society’s perceptions about their unwillingness to integrate” (Barahimi and Ostowar, 2006). On the other side, the religious communities themselves did not feel totally accepted and part of the main society. In this way, the Dutch model, although it tried to integrate the pluralistic approach, did not yet find the perfect balance in order to accommodate the needs of majorities and minorities or natives and migrants. It is in this way, a good example to start a critical analysis of its improvement. The future premises are more or less clear at the moment and they lay in a plural and more and more diverse society. This diversity has to be accommodated in order to avoid cultural clashes and conflicts. It is thus, of an interest for all academia, policy makers as well as separate citizens to improve the co-habitation of diversities together.

## **Conclusion**

The paper review of the religious diversity theory in the writings of Hick, Legenhausen and Netland, among other authors in order to offer an insight on the two extreme approaches to the religious minorities: pluralism and exclusivism. Both find their practical application in several European integration policy offers and as an example the French and Dutch policies are discussed. The distinguished two main approaches on religious diversity and the examination of their negative and positive application in the current situation of new (minorities’) management policies describes how such approaches were used.

The pluralist approach, in the literature, emphasizes that, within bounds, any religion is as good as any other and as a normative principle. Religious pluralism requires that people of all or most religions should be treated the same. As could be seen, both Hick and later Legenhausen, advocate for the tolerance towards other religious realities with the aim to build a peaceful co-existence of all together. Both authors agree that the religious pluralism is a reality that needs efforts from all the sides in order to be accepted. The acceptance should come as a normality of modern life and as an equality of all beliefs.

In spite of the existing theoretical contribution, the true pluralistic religious reality is far from being achieved. On the contrary, we witness an increase in discrimination, prejudice and Islamophobia. Consequently, there is a growing need to re-evaluate what some countries have done in terms of the integrative offers with the aim to integrate religious pluralism. Although, far from a real pluralist approach, still inside European societies can be found examples of countries which tried to accommodate religious diversity through different policy offers. A country of particular interest addressed is the Netherlands. The country is particularly well suited as an example due to the fact that religious pluralism altogether with tolerance and multiculturalism for decades has been synonymous with the Dutch context, a country with a longstanding reputation for its liberal attitudes toward immigrants and individuals of different backgrounds. A key trait of the Dutch multicultural model is its tendency to institutionalize cultural pluralism in the belief that cultural emancipation of immigrant minorities is the key to their integration into Dutch society. Within this system, minorities could have their own distinct political and social organizations, which allowed them to participate in cultural life and policy making. The main aim was to achieve societal integration through preserving, respecting, and empowering subcultures.

The second approach, exclusivist reflects that only one religion is uniquely valuable and it denies any form of pluralism. The works of Harold A. Netland discussed emphasize that salvation is settled exclusively by Christianity. Christian exclusivists also characteristically consider that God has revealed himself definitively in the Bible and that Jesus Christ is the unique incarnation of God, the only Lord and Savior. The lack of salvation in the other religious traditions proves to Netland the exclusivity of the Christian faith, although he accepts the existence of other faiths with which Christianity relates.

The consequences of the application of exclusivist approaches in the example of the French assimilation model, present relevant examples. In an unbalanced manner, exclusivist approaches have been used the most, especially, in the development and implementation of integration policies. It has to be underlined from the beginning that most of the European policies in regards to the religious minorities took an exclusivist perspective, imposing the majority view and neglecting many times the minorities' needs. The negative consequences of religious minorities' des-integration processes advocate for the need to develop further actions that could effectively accommodate minority religious identities.

Western tradition most of the time neglected and denigrated the claims of religious minorities and this emphasized the need to examine these issues anew. In rethinking the issue of religious minorities, the first task is to come to a clear understanding of the nature of religious groups and the value of belonging to such faith. Pluralist approaches seem to be a possible solution but the practical implementation of such a concept needs to be rethought. Moreover, it becomes important to

understand what role faith plays in peoples' lives, and how people are affected if these groups become subject to assimilation or other forms of conflicts. The exclusivists, as it could be seen, do not accept plurality. The exclusivist approach pointed out in the writings of the authors mentioned emphasizes one leading position. Such an outdated thinking cannot cope with the modern pluralist reality and there is a strong need for change. But change should be assumed in both ways from minority and majority at the same time because people are religious beings and for many it plays an important part in their lives. Thus, for a step forward to the future the true pluralistic approach presents the best premises to elaborate new accommodative offers. It should be built on the past experiences and lessons learned and start creating common and shared spaces for all religious beliefs, where they could interact, know each other and break down the stereotypes. Consider that only such type of policy has better premises to integrate the pluralistic approach. An outstanding argument is that religion is part of identity construction of many individuals/groups and therefore cannot be excluded from the integration policies. On the contrary, it should be incorporated as an integral part of such policies. Thus, a "reasonable" integration of religious identities would be necessary, in order to build a common and shared framework, with a certain degree of flexibility to be able to adapt to future social and cultural changes.

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