Religious Attitudes of Christian and Muslim Adolescents in Flanders (Belgium):

Underlying Structure and Relationships with Values, Racism and Acculturation

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Abstract

Wulff's (1997) scheme of religiosity in terms of Exclusion versus Inclusion of Transcendence and Literal versus Symbolic is a well-accepted dimensional model of religiosity. The present study tested the validity of this model in a sample of Flemish Muslim and Christian adolescents. The results showed the validity of the two-dimensional structure of religious attitudes in a Muslim context, and Muslim adolescents obtained higher scores on Inclusion of Transcendence than their Christian counterparts. Moreover, in the Muslim sample, the two dimensions were meaningfully related to values, racism, and acculturation.

Keywords: Acculturation, Islam, Muslim, Racism, Religion, Religious Beliefs, Values

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The question of how people differ in their religious attitudes has been fiercely debated in recent literature. This fertile line of inquiry revealed that religiosity is not merely a question of 'do-or-don't believe', but that the attitude towards religion is more complex and represents different components. Wulff's (1997) theory has emerged as one of the most promising attempts to arrange religiosity components, accommodating all types of attitudes towards religion in a single comprehensive framework. However, to date this model has only been tested with Christians.

Studies on religious attitudes of Muslims are sparse, although nowadays more than one billion Muslim people live around the globe. According to Ababou (2005), "very little research work includes a quantification of Islamic belief and practices". The First International Congress of Religion and Mental Health in Teheran concludes that one "has to avoid both simply assuming the universal validity of a given" (Khalili, Murken, Reich, Shah, & Vahabzadeh, 2002).

The present article has two aims. First, it intends to check whether Wulff's theory is valid for (Flemish) Muslims. Second, it intends to check whether the relationships between Wulff's religiosity dimensions and some important social psychological variables (i.e., values, racism and acculturation) that were established in Christian samples can be replicated in a sample of Muslims.

Wulfff's Theoretical Framework of Religiosity

To date, the ample research on religious attitudes has not succeeded in reaching consensus about a consistent, clear-cut and well-defined conceptualisation of religion (Berry, 2005). However, Wulff (1997) developed a model that nowadays is considered as one of the dominant models in the psychology of religion. Wulff (1997) argued that the various possible approaches to religion can be summarized along two orthogonal bipolar dimensions that are usually merged together in one-dimensional religiosity measures. The vertical axis in this space, Exclusion vs. Inclusion of

Transcendence, specifies whether the objects of religious interest are granted participation in a transcendent reality or not, and therefore refers to the distinction between being religious or not. The horizontal axis, Literal vs. Symbolic, indicates whether religious expressions and symbols are interpreted literally or symbolically. Hence, this dimension is situated at the level of social cognition and explicitly refers to the way religious contents are processed. In this way, four quadrants are defined, each covering a specific religious attitude: Literal Inclusion, Literal Exclusion, Symbolic Inclusion, and Symbolic Exclusion. *Literal Inclusion*, represents a position in which the literal existence of religious objects is affirmed. This position is most clearly embodied by religious fundamentalism. *Literal Exclusion* represents a position in which one believes in neither the literal meaning of religious words nor in the possibility that these words can have a symbolic meaning. *Symbolic Exclusion*, represents a position in which the existence of the religious realm is rejected, but in which the possibility is taken into account that religious contents might have a symbolic meaning. Finally, *Symbolic Inclusion* represents a position in which the existence of the religious realm is affirmed, and in which one tries to encompass and transcend reductive interpretations in order to find a symbolic meaning in the religious language which has personal relevance.

<div align="center">The Post Critical Belief Scale</div>

Building on Wulff's theory, Hutsebaut (Duriez, & Hutsebaut, 2000; Hutsebaut, 1996) constructed the Post-Critical Belief Scale, which captures four approaches to Christian religion: Orthodoxy, External Critique, Relativism, and Second Naiveté. These four approaches were considered equivalent to, respectively, Literal Inclusion, Literal Exclusion, Symbolic Exclusion, and Symbolic Inclusion. Only recently, however, thorough assessments were made of the construct validity of this scale. Duriez, Fontaine and Hutsebaut (2000) have shown that its subscales provide accurate measures of Wulff's four approaches to religion, and Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten and Hutsebaut (2003) have shown that, when inter-individual differences in acquiescence are corrected for, two components are sufficient to explain the empirical relations among the scale items and that these two components can be interpreted in

terms of Exclusion versus Inclusion of Transcendence and Literal versus Symbolic.

Orthodoxy consists of items that express a literal interpretation of the Bible and a firm belief in what is written. An example of a related questionnaire item is: *"I think that Bible stories should be taken literally, as they are written."* External Critique manifests the rejection of faith and anything that has to do with it, in exchange for an unwavering conviction that science and rationalisation offer all the answers. An example of an item is: *"Faith is an expression of weak personality."* Relativism refers to people who accept the historical relativity of religion, but do not give a special status to the religious framework. They accept that religion offers a possible answer, among others, on existential questions. A sample item is: *"I am well aware my ideology is only one possibility among so many others."* Finally, high scorers on Second Naiveté feel connected to religion, but they approach it in a more symbolic way and have a more nuanced opinion, as reflected in the following item: *"the historical accuracy of the stories from the Bible is irrelevant for my faith in God."*

The original Post-Critical Belief Scale, which was developed in a secularised and Christian context, was recently adapted by Vanbeselare (2005) for a Dutch-speaking Muslim population. The adaptation includes changes to specific religious terminology. For example: *"Even though this goes against modern rationality, I believe Mary truly was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus"* was changed to *"Marjam (mother of the prophet Jesus) was truly a virgin before, during and after the birth of Jesus (masieh Isâ), even though this goes against modern rationality"* and *"The Bible holds a deeper truth which can only be revealed by personal reflection"* became *"The Koran holds a deeper truth which can only be revealed by personal reflection."*

External Relationships

A multi-dimensional conceptualisation of religion is not only important for the understanding of religious belief, but also offers an opportunity to study the relationships between religion and proximate (e.g. church attendance) and distal variables (e.g., values, racism and acculturation).

Religious Attitudes and Church Attendance.

The church as an institution is indisputably connected with religion. Therefore, people with high scores on Inclusion of Transcendence are expected to visit the house of God more frequently. In line with this, Village (2005) reported that a conservative belief in the Bible is correlated with more frequent church visit. However, Village (2005) also reported that a less conservative and more flexible stance – comparable to Second Naiveté - was unrelated to church attendance (see, Hoge, & Petrillo, 1978).

Religious Attitudes and Values.

According to Schwartz (1992), all human values can be arranged into a two-dimensional circumplex structure on the basis of the mutual compatibilities and conflicts between their respective motivational goals. The first dimension, Conservation versus Openness to Change, contrasts the values of tradition, conformity and safety with the values of stimulation and self-direction. The second dimension, Self-Transcendence versus Self-Enhancement, contrasts values of philanthropy and universality with values referring to power, hedonism, and achievement. Previous studies using the Post-Critical Belief Scale (Fontaine, Luyten, & Corveleyn, 2000; Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten, Corveleyn, & Hutsebaut, 2005) reported that Inclusion of Transcendence correlated positively with Conservation and negatively with Self-Transcendence. In addition, a literal interpretation of religious contents correlated positively with Self-Enhancement and negatively with Self-Transcendence.

Religious Attitudes and Racism.

Despite the universal message of brotherly love that is propagated in every world religion, religiosity seems to have an ambiguous relationship with racism and prejudice. However, research with the Post-Critical Belief Scale revealed that a Literal interpretation of religious contents is accompanied by higher racism levels, whereas a more symbolic stance was negatively correlated with racism (Duriez, 2004; Duriez, & Hutsebaut, 2000).

Religious Attitudes and Acculturation.

Immigrants who have a different religious background than the dominant religion of the host country have greater difficulty to assimilate (Wald, & Williams, 2005), especially when one is a Muslim

(Faragallah, Schumm, & Webb, 1997). In line with this, research conducted in Germany showed that Muslims who described themselves as very religious do not have much contact with members of the majority group (Wilpert, 2004).

<div align="center">Method</div>

Participants

Six schools in the region of Ghent with a substantial presence of (Muslim) immigrants were contacted. Three schools agreed to distribute the questionnaires. Respondents were third-grade secondary school students, ranging in age between 14 and 22 years (M = 17.7, SD = 1.3). The total sample consisted of 51.9% males. Of our participants (N = 161), 40 had a Moroccan origin, 35 had a Turkish origin, and 35 adolescents were Muslims with a different origin (mixed origin). Fifty-one participants were from the Caucasian majority group. Participants completed a questionnaire that was given to them by their teachers who were informed about the content of the questionnaire. This questionnaire included an informed consent form and an introductory and explanatory letter. Anonymity was guaranteed and the questionnaires were returned in a closed envelope.

Measures

Post Critical Belief Scale. The 33 items of the Post-Critical Belief Scale (Duriez, Fontaine & Hutsebaut, 2000) were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree; 7 = Totally agree). Christians completed the original version, whereas Muslims completed an adapted version of the scale (Vanbeselaere, 2005).

Values. A Dutch translation (Schwartz, & Huismans, 1995) of a brief values inventory (Stern, Dietz, & Guagnano, 1998) based on Schwartz' (1992) value survey was administered. Each item was rated in terms of its importance as a guideline in one's life on a 9-point scale, ranging from "opposed to my principles" (-1) through "not important" (0) to "of supreme importance" (7). We added the item "Open to new experiences" as an extra Openness to Change item (Cronbach's alpha = .61, *M* = 4.46, *SD* = 1.51). Other example items were "Wealth (material possessions, money)", "A world at peace (free of war

and conflict)", and "Honoring of parents and elders (showing respect)" for Self-Enhancement (Cronbach's alpha = .69, *M* = 3.19, *SD* = 1.72), Self-Transcendence (Cronbach's alpha = .77, *M* = 4.17, *SD* = 1.72), and Conservation (Cronbach's alpha = .61, *M* = 5.64, *SD* = 1.35), respectively.

Racism. An adapted version (Van Hiel, & Mervielde, 2005) of the blatant and subtle racism scales (Pettigrew, & Meertens, 1995) was administered. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree; 7 = Totally agree). Some items were adapted in order to be useful in an immigrant sample (e.g. the item *"Migrants are not to be trusted"* was changed into *"Flemish people are not to be trusted."* Some items could not be adapted (e.g., "Belgium should never have allowed immigrants to enter the country in the first place"*)* and were not administered. The resulting 10-item scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .80 (*M* = 3.51, *SD* = 1.04) for the Caucasian subsample, and a Cronbach's alpha of .71 (*M* = 3.83, *SD* = 1.02) for the Muslim subsample.

Acculturation. Adolescents of Moroccan and Turkish origin completed an acculturation measure (Fontaine, Groenvynck, Declercq, & Schittekatte, 2004, based on Arends-Tòth, & van de Vijver, 2003). The 64 items were rated on a 6 point-Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree; 6 = Totally agree). The items measure two dimensions (Berry, 1997): Degree of persisting original culture (e.g., *"I follow the Moroccan news"*, Cronbach's alpha = .93, *M* = 4.59, *SD* = .93) and degree of integration into the host culture (e.g., *"I follow the Flemish news"*, Cronbach's alpha = .87, *M* = 4.08, *SD* = .92).

Results

In this section, we first investigated the internal structure of the Muslim version of the Post-Critical Belief Scale and compared its structure with the Christian target structure. Second, the effect of church and mosque attendance on the religious attitudes was assessed. Third, we analyzed the mean scores on the various religious attitudes, values and racism. Finally, we calculated the correlations between the religion attitudes and the values, racism, and the acculturation scales.

Internal Structure of the Post-Critical Belief Scale

First, we examined whether the internal structure of the Post-Critical Belief Scale is valid in the

Muslim subsample. In order to optimally compare the internal structure of the translated questionnaire to the internal structure of the original version (Fontaine et al., 2003), an orthogonal Procrustes rotation (Schöneman, 1966) towards the internal structure of this original version was applied. When two items (items 15 and 17, item numbers from Fontaine et al., 2003) were excluded, Tucker's Phi indices indicated sufficiently high congruence for both dimensions: .93 for Exclusion versus Inclusion of Transcendence and .87 for Literal versus Symbolic. This result indicates that the internal structure of the Muslim version resembles the structure of the original scale. In the remainder of this section, a high (Exclusion versus) Inclusion score indicates a tendency to include transcendence. A high (Literal versus) Symbolic score indicates a tendency to deal with religion in a symbolic way.

Effects of Church Attendance on Religious Attitudes

Next we conducted univariate analyses of variance to analyze the effect of church and mosque attendance on the religious attitudes. Because the scores on the two dimensions of the Post-Critical Belief Scale were standardized, we reported the scores on the four subscales. As can be seen in Table 1, in the Christian subsample, church attendance had a positive effect on Orthodoxy only. In the Muslim subsample, no significant effects of mosque attendance were obtained.

Means of Religious Attitudes, Values and Racism

Univariate analyses of variance revealed significant differences for the various subsamples (Christian, Turk, Moroccan, and Mixed). As can be seen in Table 2, Duncan post-hoc analyses showed that the Christian subsample obtained lower Orthodoxy and Second Naiveté scores and higher External Critique and Relativism scores than the Muslim subsamples, which did not differ from each other. The mean values obtained in the Flemish subsample approached previous studies on Flemish adolescents (for example, Duriez (2004) obtained means of 2.30, 3.83, 4.59, and 3.98 for Orthodoxy, Second Naiveté, External Critique and Relativism, respectively, in a sample of 338 Flemish adolescents).

Additionally, the Christian subsample obtained significantly lower Conservation and Self-Transcendence scores than the Muslim subsamples, which did not differ significantly. Finally, a

significant difference for racism occurred. The Christian subsample obtained the lowest and the Turkish subsample obtained the highest scores. The other groups (Moroccan and mixed) scored in between.

Correlations between the Study Variables

Table 3 reports the correlations between the different variables in this study. In the Christian subsample, none of the correlations reached significance, which was probably due to the small sample size. In the Muslim subsample, various significant relationships emerged. Inclusion of Transcendence related positively to Conservation and negatively to Openness to change. In addition, a symbolic approach of religious contents related negatively to Openness to change. Racism was significantly negatively related to a symbolic approach of religious contents. Finally, with respect to acculturation, persistence was positively related to Orthodoxy.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

In the present study, Wulff's religiosity model was investigated. According to this model, the various approaches to religion can be located in a two-dimensional space. The vertical axis, Exclusion versus Inclusion of Transcendence, specifies the degree to which the objects of religious interest are granted participation in a transcendent reality. The horizontal axis, Literal versus Symbolic, indicates whether religion is interpreted literally or symbolically. The present study had three major research aims. First, we wanted to investigate whether the internal structure of religiosity that has been commonly found among Christians can be extended to a Muslim context. Conditional upon the assumed similarity of the underlying structure, a second aim was to compare the religious attitudes of Christian and Muslim groups. Finally, a third major aim was to investigate the relationships between religious attitudes and proximal variables like Church/Mosque attendance, and distal variables such as values and racism.

Pertaining to the first research aim, the results have shown that Wulff's theoretical structure can be applied on a sample of Dutch-speaking Muslim adolescents. Our study supports Wulff's (1997) original point of departure that his model is applicable on all religious approaches. In other words, in order to understand religiosity in a Muslim context, the dimensions of Inclusion versus Exclusion as well

as the dimension of Literal versus Symbolic are equally as important as in a Christian context. As a result, the four distinct religious attitudes of Orthodoxy, External Critique, Relativism and Second Naiveté can also be distinguished among Muslims.

Pertaining to the second research aim, it has been revealed that Muslim adolescents were generally more religious than Christian adolescents. Higher scores were obtained for Orthodoxy and Second Naiveté, whereas significant lower scores emerged for External Critique and Relativism. The differences between the various Muslim groups (Turks, Moroccans, mixed) were non-significant, indicating that country of origin had no substantial effect. The comparable mean scores on Orthodoxy and Second Naiveté attest to the high level of religiosity among our Muslim participants, as well as to the fact that Literal as well as Symbolic interpretations seem to be highly endorsed in this sample. This result undoubtedly contradicts the stereotype that all Muslims would hold orthodox beliefs. Moreover, the effects of Mosque visit on religious attitude were negligible. Hence, the popular idea that Mosques are a breeding ground for conservatism is not corroborated. Conversely, Church visit was associated with higher endorsement of Orthodoxy among Christians, although this result should be interpreted with caution given the (extremely) low levels of Orthodoxy obtained in the Christian subsample. Moreover, the mean level of church attendance was remarkably low in the Christian group (only 7 participants indicated that they visit Church on a weekly basis).

Other marked cross-cultural differences were also obtained. Conservation and Self-Transcendence values were considered more important by the Muslim minority, which replicates the results of a study on young Muslims in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (Phalet, van Lotringen, & Entzinger, 2000; see also Hodge, 2002). Another marked finding was the elevated mean score on racism for the Turkish adolescents. Monteith and Spicer (2000) discovered that "reverse racism" - prejudices from blacks towards whites – depends on the amount of perceived racism towards themselves. Verkuyten and Thijs (2002) concluded that Dutch children from Turkish origin were more often the victim of racism compared to members of other minority groups. Hence, a possible reason for the elevated racism levels

among Turks may lie in the fact that Turks are more often a target of discrimination.

Finally, with respect to the correlations with more distal social psychological variables, various interesting relationships emerged in the Muslim subsample. First, it was revealed that Muslims who include transcendence tend to embrace conservation values. This result corroborates previous studies (e.g., Lewis, & Maltby, 2000; Roccas, 2005; Saraglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004). Another important result is the lack of a significant relationship between Literal versus Symbolic and Self-Enhancement which has been reported in previous studies (e.g., Fontaine et al., 2000, 2005). A significant correlation between conservation and a Literal approach emerged instead, indicating that Muslims who value Conservation tend to literally interpret the Koran. In the Muslim subsample, a literal approach of religion co-occurs with racism, which corroborates Duriez, Fontaine and Hutsebaut (2000). Also Burn and Busso (2005) reported that 'scriptural literalism' - a concept that is identical to the literal dimension of the Post-Critical Belief Scale – coincides with other forms of prejudice such as paternalism and sexism.

Conclusions

The present study has shown that the internal structure of religiosity in terms of Exclusion versus Inclusion and Literal versus Symbolic is also obtained among Muslims. The subsample of Muslim adolescents obtained higher scores on Orthodoxy and Second Naiveté, as well as lower scores on External Critique and Relativism. Finally, the religiosity dimensions bore out a number of significant correlations with values, racism and acculturation. It can therefore be concluded that Wulff's (1997) theory is applicable to Muslim beliefs.

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Table 1.   Effect of church and mosque attendance on religious attitude by subsample

	Church Attendance			Effect
Christian	(Almost) never	Occasionally	Weekly	
Orthodoxy	2.00[a]	2.47[ab]	3.09[b]	$F(2, 48) = 5.32^*$
External Critique	4.44[a]	3.82[a]	4.02[a]	$F(2, 48) = 2.66$
Relativism	4.87[a]	4.75[a]	5.29[a]	$F(2, 48) = 1.18$
Second Naiveté	3.67[a]	4.21[a]	4.50[a]	$F(2, 48) = 2.61$
Muslim				
Orthodoxy	4.95[a]	5.24[ab]	5.50[b]	$F(2, 107) = 2.37$
External Critique	3.11[a]	2.85[a]	3.25[a]	$F(2, 107) < 1$
Relativism	4.01[a]	3.80[a]	4.01[a]	$F(2, 107) < 1$
Second Naiveté	5.42[a]	5.61[a]	5.39[a]	$F(2, 107) < 1$

Note. Different superscripts indicate significant differences ($p < .05$). * $p < .05$

Table 2.   Mean levels of religious attitudes, values and racism by subsample

	Christian	Moroccan	Turkish	Mixed	Effect
Orthodoxy	2.31a	5.26b	5.24b	5.29b	$F(3, 157) = 105.57^{***}$
External Critique	4.18b	2.79a	3.29a	3.10a	$F(3, 156) = 9.65^{***}$
Relativism	4.89b	3.68a	4.05a	4.06a	$F(3, 156) = 8.38^{***}$
Second Naiveté	3.96a	5.56b	5.46b	5.43b	$F(3, 157) = 27.53^{***}$
Conservation	4.94a	5.73b	6.31b	5.92b	$F(3, 153) = 9.20^{***}$
Openness to Change	4.59a	4.39a	4.57a	4.24a	$F(3, 153) < 1$
Self-Transcendence	3.03a	4.60b	4.82b	4.76b	$F(3, 153) = 13.90^{***}$
Self-Enhancement	2.86a	3.43a	3.65a	2.93a	$F(3, 153) = 1.69$
Racism	3.51a	3.69ab	4.14b	3.67ab	$F(3, 154) = 2.71^{*}$

Note. Different superscripts indicate significant differences ($p < .05$). * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3.   Relationships between the study variables by subsample

Christian	INC	SYM	O	E	R	S
Conservation	-.01	-.09	-.08	-.07	-.01	.13
Openness to Change	-.12	-.23	-.13	-.15	-.11	.15
Self-Transcendence	.04	-.15	.11	-.04	.27	.18
Self-Enhancement	.06	.00	.10	-.02	-.04	-.08
Racism	-.03	.14	.24	.12	.18	-.01
Muslim	INC	SYM	O	E	R	S
Conservation	.38**	-.25*	.11	-.25*	-.16	.31*
Openness to Change	-.25*	-.02	-.05	.22*	.17	.02
Self-Transcendence	-.00	.03	.06	.09	.11	.06
Self-Enhancement	-.06	.19	.17	.21*	.03	-.00
Racism	.04	-.29**	.22*	.18	.01	.05
Persistence	.07	-.18	.29*	.03	.09	-.10
Integration	-.08	.18	.20	.05	.08	-.09

Note. INC = Inclusion of Transcendence; SYM = a symbolic interpretation; O = Orthodoxy; E = External Critique; R = Relativism; S = Second Naiveté. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.