



CONTENDING RELIGIONS, IDENTITIES AND SPACE

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ABSTRACT :

The predominant analytical attention accorded to religion and identity issues has undermined the opportunities to take into account other relevant elements for the multicultural debate. Questions of welfare and social security in the multicultural society, it is argued here, allow the researcher to explore matters of societal cohesion as well as solidarity from the point of view of the individual and his cultural strategies, without the immediate risk of being exposed to generalization, radicalization and political speculation, often involved when identity issues are discussed. While all human beings share an intrinsic need to achieve both physical and existential security, it is described in the research, the ways in which this need is satisfied vary consistently in reason of different factors like the natural environment, cultural practices and individual memory. This contribution, as part of an ongoing PhD research, investigates thus issues of welfare and security among the Somali diaspora in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, with the purpose of shedding light on alternative ways to deal with the topic of coexistence in contemporary Europe, as a primary question of achieving security. It is important to underline that the case study is of particular interest, given the consistent differences between the traditional stateless Somali society on the one hand, where the extended family is the actual welfare provider and works also on transnational basis; and the state-centered as well as -contained provision of welfare characterizing on the other hand Scandinavian countries, where welfare policies have been considered by some even as deliberately “anti-family”. The approach is prevalently historical and inquires specifically about patterns of change over time in both welfare practices as well as perceptions of social security among the Somalis in Scandinavia. The methodology is highly derived from Reinhart Koselleck’s dialectic between spaces of experience and horizons of expectation at the individual level, as the research compares past and present strategies to achieve security among the Somalis and projections on how to be socially secure in the future. Besides history, elements pertaining to social anthropology are equally present, well represented for example by the incorporation of Arjun Appadurai’s conception of the “future as cultural fact”. Regarding sources, the empirical section of the study is based on the interviews that the researcher has conducted with several Somali men and women living in Scandinavia, particularly in Denmark, plus on the participation to Somali-related events and conferences occurring in the same concerned area. The aim of this contribution is indicating alternative approaches to deal with social conflicts and marginality in diaspora contexts, underlining how religion can be considered in this respect as a part to the cultural strategies put in place by individuals in order to attain security and maintain solidarity, two processes made rather complicated by the encounter with state-based experiences of welfare provision.

AUTHOR'S SHORT BIO AND ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Marco Zoppi is a PhD fellow in Histories and Dynamics of Globalization at Roskilde University, Denmark. He is currently researching on questions of welfare and social security among the Somali diaspora in Scandinavian countries. He holds a MA in African Studies pursued at the University of Copenhagen. His field of interest includes migration, colonialism and politics in Africa.