We started this book by asking whether and how religion is a resource and a barrier to women’s citizenship, perceived by religious women themselves and also by us as academic feminists. In our view, the feminist concern that women are drawn to religious traditions and institutions that practise gender inequality must be addressed via careful and contextual studies that involve the voices of religious women themselves. Do religious women comply with, resist or subvert gender inequalities within their own communities? How, and why? The raising of such questions suggests a focus on religious women’s agency and submission and on gender equality and women’s rights. In this book we have discussed whether and how religion is a resource and a barrier to women’s citizenship through an exploration of how Christian and Muslim women in Europe live their faith in everyday life (Chapter 3), how they perceive and practise citizenship (Chapter 4) and how they view and relate to gender equality (Chapter 5) and to women’s movements and feminism (Chapter 6). The questions we posed were: What do women of religious faith think about citizenship, and how they practise citizenship in their everyday life? What is the importance of faith in their lives, and how is religion bound up with other identities such as gender and nationality? How do religious women conceptualize ‘gender equality’, and what do they think about women’s movements and about feminism? We addressed these questions through the lenses of religious women’s lived citizenship, their lived religion and gender. Our book is first and foremost a contribution towards a feminist acknowledgement of the role that religious faith plays in many contemporary women’s lives. But in this final chapter we also raise a further issue for feminist concern: Can religious and secular women find common ground in resisting neo-liberal policies that endanger women’s welfare and well-being and undermine gender equality and women’s rights?
Religion: A resource and a barrier

The answers we found are complex: for the Christian and Muslim women in Europe who participated in our study, religion is both a resource and a barrier to their citizenship; their identities are multi-layered, and for some religion represents a ‘root reality’ (Neitz 1987) while for others religion is more of a compartmentalized aspect of their identities; they think of citizenship as multi-dimensional and their conception of citizenship goes beyond status, rights and duties to include participation, belonging, love, care, tolerance and respect; Christian privilege is invisible and silenced while Muslim disadvantage is both visible and articulated; some want gender-equal opportunities within their religious communities while others accept lesser roles and spaces for women; they tend to emphasize ‘natural’ differences between women and men to justify different social gender roles and equal gender value rather than equal rights and opportunities; they view women’s movements as having contributed positively to improving women’s status in politics, work and education but are critical of women’s movement claims related to abortion, divorce, lesbian rights and ‘unrestrained’ equality; and they are deeply sceptical of and also opposed to what they view as feminism’s selfish, unwomanly, anti-men and power-seeking stance. How do we unpack and make sense of these findings, and what implications do they have for the relationship between religion, gender and feminism?

Religion is clearly a positive resource for the interviewed Christian and Muslim women in Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom. Religion is a ‘meaning-maker’; it provides each of them with a sense of meaning in the world. For many, religion is a foothold and foundation in life which is constantly used to interpret and understand the world, while for others religion is a more taken-for-granted aspect that can be compartmentalized and drawn upon in times of need. Religion is, however, not only a meaning-maker and comfort to the individual; religion also has a strongly communal aspect and as such provides individuals with social identities, a strong sense of belonging to a community and opportunities for participation and citizenship practice. Through relations with others, religious selves and religious identities are formed, negotiated and changed at the individual and collective levels. The ‘community’ in question ranges from families, local churches and mosques, neighbourhoods and cities to nation states and global communities of shared faith. Religious women’s identities are also multi-layered: they are shaped and negotiated not only via religion but also through national belonging, migration, marriage, motherhood, family, education and employment.

An ethic of love, care, tolerance and respect

The multi-layered identities of religious women are linked to their understandings of citizenship and how they live citizenship in everyday life.