

Western Europe
JOCELYNE CESARI

Nearly seven million Muslims live in Western Europe, their presence being the unforeseen consequence of migration flows towards the continent at the beginning of the 1960s. Later, during the 1972-4 recession, European immigration policy drastically changed: Governments halted labour immigration yet allowed for family reunification. From the 1970s, religious and cultural dimensions did become important issues in relations between Muslim communities and European societies since the contact surface had been greatly expanded. Islam is a major aspect of this settlement process in terms of the increasing need for mosques, halal butcheries, Koranic schools or Muslim cemeteries.

Around these issues arise questions, doubts, and sometimes-violent oppositions, all linked to the integration of these newcomers in different national communities. The confrontation no longer has the temporary, discreet or even shameful character as it did in the 1950s. Islam is a stable religion with adepts that demonstrate a growing will to be recognized. Muslims are becoming increasingly politically active, reinforced by the emergence of the 'second generation'. This is why the main migration issues are now cultural and political, not only economic. It is noteworthy that it was not until the '80s that Islam became the focus of attention. This resulted from a number of international incidents, such as the Islamic revolution in Iran, the civil war in Lebanon, the Rushdie Affair, the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Empire. It was suggested that a connection existed between Islamic fundamentalism, as it was developing in many Muslim countries, and the migrant groups in Europe. This contributes to Islam still being defined as a 'problem'. Often only conflict situations, as seen in the Rushdie Affair in Britain or the 'headscarves affair' in France, are taken into account to define Islam in Europe.

This Islam-as-a-threat approach implies a major misperception. It neglects the important transformations in Islamic identity in general and among the new generations born or educated in the West in particular. With the settlement of Muslim groups, the controversial question of Islam and modernity is actually transferred from the Muslim context to that of the West. The key debate on compatibility of Islamic values with secular organizing principles of Western societies, a debate very well known to the Muslim world, is still going on, only this time within the Western democracies. In Europe, the debate does not concern Islamic governance as it does in Muslim societies, but rather the experience of pluralism and democracy. This question must be placed in a dynamic perspective, taking the new context into account. In other words, being a minority in Europe implies deep change in Muslim identities and practices, especially among the new generations born in the West. A relevant analysis should thus take into account changes that concern not only the Muslim groups, but also the host societies. In this perspective, multiculturalism seems to become a real issue, redefining public space as it now means competition amongst differing claims to universalism. Embracing this new phenomenon requires an integrated approach to the main features of Muslims groups and European societies as well. This scientific posture goes beyond the simplistic vision of Islam as a threat; it considers Islam as contributory to the process of integration.

A point worthy of mention here is the competition between ethnic and Islamic ties, which is responsible for the most important cleavages among Muslim communities in Europe. This can be partly attributed to the emergence of 'new Muslims'. This means, on the one hand, new elaboration and discussions on the minority condition, and on the other had, new practices and identifications to Islam.

Pluralism in the Context of Globalization European Muslim Youth

With reference to the minority condition, the introduction of Islam into democratic societies contributes to changing the terms of the ongoing 'Islam and democracy' debate as far as tolerance and pluralism are concerned. This may pose a challenge as most European Muslims come from countries where Islam is either the religion of the State or the majority.¹ New ways of reflecting upon the Minority condition are now in debate among Muslims in the West by which conventional interpretations of Islamic tradition are being reformulated.²

Concerning practices, the major change is in the process of individualization and privatization of Islam. Membership to a post-migration religious minority affects the Islamic identification among contemporary Muslim youth. New forms of religiosity defined by individualism, secularism and privatization replace with increasing frequency the uprooted Islam of the first generation. This emergence of the individual is partially the consequence of the migration process. The process engenders differences in value transmission. For example, among North African migrants, the gap between the values of the first generation and those of their children is more pronounced than among other migrant groups. Parents, for instance, belonging to the working class in French society, have struggled to maintain the cultural system of their country of origin; while their children have been more socialized by French institutions such as schools and social work. Arabic language capacity as well as various cultural practices are lost. The growth of a 'vernacular' Islam in Europe is the most interesting sign of this change. Increasingly, sermons, literature and public discussions are being conveyed in the local European language.

Islam is now embodied in a paradigm of secularization that was, until now, the major specificity of Western society. This means the decline of religious references in structural differentiation of society. Individualization means a sharpening of self-consciousness, privileging personal choice over the constraints of religious tradition. This individualization is most often associated with privatization. This term means that religion is more confined to the private sphere and that religious values and rules are not placed at the centre of one's personal orientation to life, but rather is conceived of as a kind of annex or compartment. As with European Christians, many Muslims now experience religion only during large festivals, at birth, marriage and death. In this way, European Islam is similar to other European religions, especially among the youth. Like 'consumers', people are increasingly choosing which tenets and rules of their religion to recognize and which to ignore. The inculcation of Western values through the educational systems certainly has an influence and can explain the emphasis on critical debate and reflexive questioning.

But individualization as well as reflexive questioning can also be associated with collective and social identification to religion. In other words, fundamentalism or strict obser-

vance are also the outcome of individual choice. Thus, within one generation, one can simultaneously observe a wholesale abandonment of Muslim attachments and the attraction of Islam as a global symbol of resistance to Western political and cultural imperialism.³

Our own field experience allows us to assert that the rediscovery of Islam can take various forms. First, it is a credible option for those who experienced unemployment, drug and alcohol use, and delinquency. It enabled some youth to recover personal dignity and to project a better image of themselves. This is a classic use of religion as salvation. Second, most of these 'new Muslims' actually come from European societies' middle classes. They want to reaffirm their identity and live according to Islamic teachings, while trying to avoid the temptations of the non-Muslim environment. This identification to Islam, despite common opinion, is not exclusively the expression of an opposition to the West, but often results in an affirmation of self-confidence among young Muslims. Many of these latter are coming back to an Islam 'purified' from the 'accidents' of its traditional readings. For the more educated, it is no longer an Islam of the Moroccan, Algerian or Pakistani countryside, but rather a 'return to the basics' of Islamic teaching direct contact with its sources, the Koran and Sunna. Islam in the West should have a specific and appropriate actualization. This is the message the youth are clearly conveying.

The current reflection on the Koran and Sunna serves to question the relevance of the old concepts of Dar Al-Islam versus Dar Al-Harb. This classic terminology is no longer appropriate to describe the condition of Muslim citizens in the context of secularized democracies. Accordingly, opinions of the ulama in the Muslim world on the situation of Islam in Europe have evolved. Their perception of the European context along with the specific situation of the Muslims has forced them to re-consider previous assertions: to keep distant from the host society; not to take the nationality of a Western society; to keep in mind that they must 'go back home' as soon as possible. All of these statements, presented as fatwa, did not match the reality anymore and a considerable number of ulama have eventually come to the idea that the duty of Muslims in Europe is to reflect upon organizing their future in this area.⁴

So it is necessary to analyse these Islamic identities within the European context. It is impossible to understand the behaviour of new generation Muslims without keeping in mind that they now constitute a part of European youth. In the West, in general, there is a questioning of progress and modernity. When the collective landmarks provided by schools, political parties, and trade unions are weakened or missing and economy is insufficient to define social status, religious membership can contribute to shaping new collective identities for a growing number of young people from all religious groups, not only for Muslims. ◆

Jocelyne Cesari, CNRS - Groupe de Sociologie des Religions et de la Laïcité, Paris, Visiting Professor at New York and Columbia Universities.

Notes

1. This politicization of Islam in various countries of origin is a more accurate explanation than the one focusing on the fact that the minority condition within a voluntary migration had not been examined by Muslim Law. According to this explanation, this is because the latter was elaborated between the 8th and 9th centuries, a time when Islam was dominant both culturally and economically. This argument was brought by Bernard Lewis (1994), 'Legal and historical reflections on the position of Muslim populations under non-Muslim rule', in: Lewis, B. and Schnapper, D. (eds), 1994. Muslims in Europe, Pinter Publishers, 1, p. 19.
2. See for example, the Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs published in England.
3. About this complex and contradictory use of Islam see J. Cesari (1998), Musulmans et Republicains, les jeunes, l'islam et la France. Bruxelles, Complexe.
4. For a reflection on this change and the main political and cultural effects of this innovative debate on the relationship to Shari'a, in the French context, see also J. Cesari, Musulmans et Republicains, les jeunes, l'islam et la France, op-cit.