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## ISLAM AND EUROPE HOW TO OVERCOME MUTUAL MISUNDERSTANDING?

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**NL** Sinds de jaren 1970 wordt de islamitische wereld gekenmerkt door een toename van religieuze referentiekaders en praktijken van vroomheid die samengaan met gespannen identiteiten en bewegingen van sociale en politieke strijd... Om de complexe heropleving van de islam te begrijpen, moeten historische, socio-antropologische en geopolitieke benaderingen aangewend worden. Ons werk toont echter eveneens het belang om de religieuze sociologie van de islam en haar wederzijdse verhoudingen met het Westen diepgaand te begrijpen als men erin wil slagen om een gemeenschappelijke verstandhouding op te bouwen voor het samenleven.

**EN** Since the 1970s, the Muslim world has been marked by an increase in religious frames of reference and pious practices overlapping with identities in tension, driven by both social and political protest movements... Historical, socio-anthropological and geopolitical approaches must be mobilized to understand this complex reaffirmation of Islam. Our research shows the utmost importance of seeking a comprehensive study of the religious sociology of Islam and its reciprocal relations with the West if we hope to find a way of mutual understanding, in the pursuit of a common life.

 Depuis les années 1970, le monde musulman est marqué par l'accroissement des référentiels religieux et des pratiques de piété qui s'imbriquent dans des identités crispées et des mouvements de contestation sociale et politique... Pour comprendre la réaffirmation complexe de l'islam, les approches historique, socio-anthropologique et géopolitique doivent être mobilisées. Mais nos travaux montrent également toute l'importance d'entrer dans une compréhension profonde de la sociologie religieuse de l'islam et de ses relations réciproques avec l'Occident si l'on veut parvenir à construire un terrain d'entente pour la vie commune.

### THE LONG STORY OF ISLAM

To understand the depth and relevance of the contemporary issues in Islam, including in Europe, requires a long-range historical perspective. In the centuries of grandeur and power which followed the message of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (d. 632), Muslim societies confronted and then resisted to Europe at the time of the Muslim conquests and during the Crusades (7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries). During the Mongolian invasions of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, these invaders from Central Asia were, finally, Islamized. The Ottomans too were in full expansion until the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and in the following decades. The geopolitical tipping point for Islam coincided with the opening of the Atlantic route by Christopher Columbus. The heart of Islam's territory was gradually marginalized, even if Ottoman grandeur and that of Indian Islam under the Moghul dynasty continued in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Europe in the meantime experienced the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Hence industrialization and the rise of Nation-states, which made it a new power imposing itself on the world through colonization. From 1830 on, except for a few

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territories, most of the Islamic countries came under colonial domination: the French in North and West Africa, the English in Egypt and the Indian peninsula, the Italians in Libya, and the Dutch in Indonesia.

What amounted to a military and political invasion, took considerable cultural, civilisational and religious tones - generating armed revolts and contesting

movements with a nationalist-religious ideology. But it above all precipitated what was seen as a spiritual, intellectual - and even political - enterprise of the renewal of Islam. Brotherhoods were founded, movements were born hoping, through a return to the sources of Islam, to restore the vigour of a religion they considered attacked by colonial modernity, secularism, as well as catholic and protestant Christian missionary. That renewal was also intellectual, with the creation of reviews among which the short lived *al 'Urwa al-wuthqâ*, *The Indissoluble Bond*, in Paris in 1884, to disseminate ideas of reform.

## DES MOTS / Le kaléidoscope de l'islam

Besides different religious offers provided by certain Muslim countries, the "offers of Islam" are also structured in many organizations; they maintain affinities or proximities with each other, but fragmentations also appeared between them, and even conflictual relationships. The majority of Muslims are not members of these organizations, but they are likely to be influenced by one or the other, or even several of them, in extremely varied ways. It is worth noting that aside from the mystical organizations, the other organizations are modern: they began in the 20th century, when the Muslim world was becoming aware of the need to confront political and cultural modernity, notably conveyed by colonization.

**Mysticism, including Sufi brotherhoods:** From the 9<sup>th</sup> century on a spiritual manner of living the faith developed within a community of Muslim believers; a master initiated his disciples in a particular way of communicating with God. Among brotherhoods which represent inevitable, transnational, social, and even political forces, we find the *Naqshbandiyya* (fierce guardians of Islamic orthodoxy in Turkey, Central Asia and the Middle East, and who promote an inner meditation), the *Tijaniyya* (which especially inculcates moral rigorism and a keen sense of excellence on the African continent), the *Mourides* (which develops a mystique of work among Wolof populations), the *Bouchichya* (a rather traditional Moroccan brotherhood which promotes an awakening and purification of the heart), the *Barelvis* (a widespread Indo-Pakistani current declaring a great personal devotion to the Prophet and the practice of venerating the saints), the *Alevites* (an eclectic mysticism issuing from Twelver Shiism and the Bektashi brotherhood of the 15<sup>th</sup> century which proved to be a significant breeding ground for poets and musicians), etc.

**Preaching movements:** With the increased confrontation of Muslim peoples with models of life and thought different from Islam (colonization and Christian proselytism), leaders aimed at reislamisation through preaching (*da'wa*) and by a return to the fundamentals of Islam, respect for prohibitions and moral conduct. In the Indian context, around 1860 the movement *Ahl-i-Hadith*, the People of the prophetic tradition, was founded. The teaching network of the *Deobandis*, was founded in those same years. Since the 1930's, the very large scale *Jamâ' At-Tabligh* movement, the (Association for Disseminating the Message), fosters a faithful imitation of the Prophet's behaviour among poor and illiterate populations throughout the Muslim world. Other movements such as the *Nurculuk* or *Gülen* in Turkey are aimed at more educated populations. As for the messianic and peace movement, *Ahmadiyya*, it is rejected by orthodox Islam because its founder is therein considered the new Messiah. Finally traditionist Salafism (non-political and non-jihadist) concentrates its efforts exclusively on a "pure" tradition issuing from the Koran and the Prophet's traditions while following the teachings of the "pious predecessors".

**Movements with political orientations:** In the colonial context, political and revolutionary projects with religious connotations were elaborated to achieve independence and a renaissance in Muslim societies all the while mobilizing a strong vision of a state which «controls all political life»: M. Mawdudi and Jama'at-i-Islami in Pakistan, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and, elsewhere, the Imam Khomeini in Iran, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Milli Görüs, and now the AKP in power in Turkey. To achieve these political goals, these movements invest in the conscientization and social work in the most varied forms. But cer-

## TWO PATHS TO AN AWAKENING

From the 1920s on, a major awakening of the Muslim world was under way. In the wake of the Ottoman Empire, as the symbol of sunni Muslim unity and facing the apogee of the west's colonial domination, the Muslim world asked itself haunting questions: how are we to understand the vertiginous fall of Islam, how can we resist the West and at once restore Islam to its former grandeur? Two ways of responding to these challenges stood out.

One consisted in engaging in the secularization process of Western modernization while nurturing a national movement and a renaissance. That secularized route was usually imposed by coercion, as in the "Arab resurrection" which inspired the Iraqi and Syrian Baath regimes and the creation of the Turkish Republic by M. Kemal, leading to numerous resistance movements.

The other route consisted in returning to the sources and vital references of Islam, in valorizing the specificity of the Muslim path via *da'wa*, mission. For the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, S. Abû l-A'la Mawdûdî or M. Ilyas in India, this movement involved re-islamizing Muslims, recreating a Muslim society, relying on a Muslim state, through a renewed momentum in preaching and action inspired by Islam. With respect to independence, all of these

movements – secularized nationalist or Islamist, compete to convince destabilized populations. But the Islamist movements were not the only ones working for pan-Islamism; attempts at federating the world's Muslims were also incarnated in the actions of certain states, among others Pakistan and the Saudi State. The latter, created in 1932, unified a good part of the Arabic peninsula, setting itself in opposition to M. Kemal's model of secularized nationalism in Turkey. In the 1960s, it also confronted the lay hegemony exercised by Nasser through promoting a fundamentalist doctrine against traditional and popular forms of Islam, as well as against secular ideologies, adopting the Koran as its only Constitution. That model of the state was not without an impact on the construction of Muslim political thought in the 1930s. A fortiori, since it had the prestige of becoming – by force of arms – the “guardian of the holy places”, sustaining major institutions which financed through petrodollars a planetary Muslim identity.

### MULTIPLE VECTORS OF THE RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL RESURGENCE OF ISLAM

Le principal vecteur de la résurgence de l'islam est celui d'une vision globale : un grand élan collectif d'affirmation de l'islam.

In the interlude following the independence of a number of nations, born by secular visions – sometimes tinted by socialism (in Egypt, Syria and Iraq), in the 1960s the success of a growing islamization became undeniable. This was a critical turn in the contemporary Muslim world's future. In fact Islamic resurgence can only be understood in the convergence of a number of vectors, without a causal hierarchy, both inside the Muslim world and in the encounter between Muslim societies and Western societies, themselves in full transformation.

Above and beyond all other vectors, the principal one is perhaps having *a coherent global vision*: a grand collective momentum affirming Islam, with the idea of proposing a counter-model to the Western model. The increased visibilisation of Islam in building mosques, wearing Islamic headscarves, expanding the *halâl*<sup>1</sup> market and theories of the “Koran's scientific miracles”<sup>2</sup>, and even certain aspects of Jihadi combats (even if the jihadist drifts like those of Daesh leave many Muslims quite perplexed), may be seen as signs of the growing success of this historical vision, one hundred years in the making. But other vectors combine themselves with this collective momentum of affirming Islam. Within the Muslim world, *sociopolitical vectors* have played an important role in the return to Islam: faced with the disappointments of unemployment and the political deadlocking of newly independent states, it is seen as supplementary or even a utopian refuge at the basis of protest movements, or even rebellion. *Socio-anthropological vectors* have intervened in the search for meaning and/or values in family structures transformed by a rural exodus, demographic explosions and the intolerable environment of shantytowns, as well as the schooling of women. In reaction, more or less recently urbanized social actors have rehabilitated the patriarchal family in developing mutual aid and support arrangements, while at once reaffirming a hierarchical structure. *International vectors* also appear to have contributed to the installation of an ideology of armed struggle, already present since the 1940s. We might point some of them out, such

1 F. Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le marché halal ou l'invention d'une tradition*, Paris, Seuil, 2017. The author shows that this dynamic is jointly supported by commercial logics and political or literalistic visions of Islam.

2 F. El Asri, « Discours musulmans et sciences modernes » in B. Maréchal & F. Dassetto (dir.), *Adam et l'évolution – Islam et christianisme confrontés aux sciences*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Academia-Bruylant, 2009.

● Pour les diverses variantes de l'islam sunnite, il n'y a pas de pouvoir religieux plus légitime que d'autres.

as the negative spiral the State of Israël and the Palestinians have been embarked on for over fifty years, the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 in order to consolidate a faltering Communist regime there, but also the war launched by G. Bush and T. Blair, together with their allies, against Iraq in 2003, in accusing that dictatorial regime of complicity with Al-Qaïda. Along with other social, economic and political factors, the latter resulted in the complete disruption of that country. Increasingly strained relationships between Shiites and Sunnis<sup>3</sup> and the setting up of armed movements has – one thing leading to another – resulted in increased radical-jihadist capacities and the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate in 2014.

### IMMERSING OURSELVES IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ISLAM

But these various vectors will not suffice in interpreting the contemporary dynamics of Islam if we neglect the *intra-religious sociological vectors* structuring the dissemination of the religious offer, and the moral economy of authority, at once unified and diverse. The sociology of Sunni Islam reveals a considerable number of paradoxes.

On the one hand, Sunni Islam is profoundly unified by the founding act of faith (*"There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger."*), the belief in the direct divine revelation, the prophetic tradition, Sunna, the rituals, the liturgical calendar and a common reference to the *Umma*, the "community of believers", certainly imaginary but not devoid of a concrete foundation in political, affective and economic solidarity.

On the one hand, according to the logic of the absence of a centralized legitimate authority and the shared, but personal, responsibility of each believer as to Islam's future, Sunni Islam is characterized by a great organisational polycentrism, competitions between currents of ideas but also between leaders always trying to form a consensus around them themselves<sup>4</sup> (to understand this polycentrism, see the inset "Words"). To grasp the complexity of these various currents of Sunni Islam, sociological analysis cannot avail itself of the category of "sect" used in the sociology of Christianity because there is no religious power more legitimate than another, able to define what is orthodox, and yet despite these divergences, Muslims see themselves as living a fraternal unity, real or ideal<sup>5</sup>.

### ISLAM AND THE WEST: THE MUSLIM SOCIETIES OF EUROPE

The Muslim world's religious dynamism must finally be considered in the encounter between Muslim populations and the European societies accommodating them. Muslim communities joined the intrinsic diversity of Europe, particularly since the mid 20th century following the influx of labour and family migrations, encouraged by the European states. These populations further complexify the sociology of Islam, since the migrations are forged by various sociological generations of

3 For a study dealing with methods for transforming relationships between Sunnis and Shiites, see this collective work directed by B. Maréchal and S. Zemni (eds), *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships – Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*, London, Hurst, 2013.

4 F. Dassetto, *La construction de l'islam européen : approche socio-anthropologique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1996 : 94.

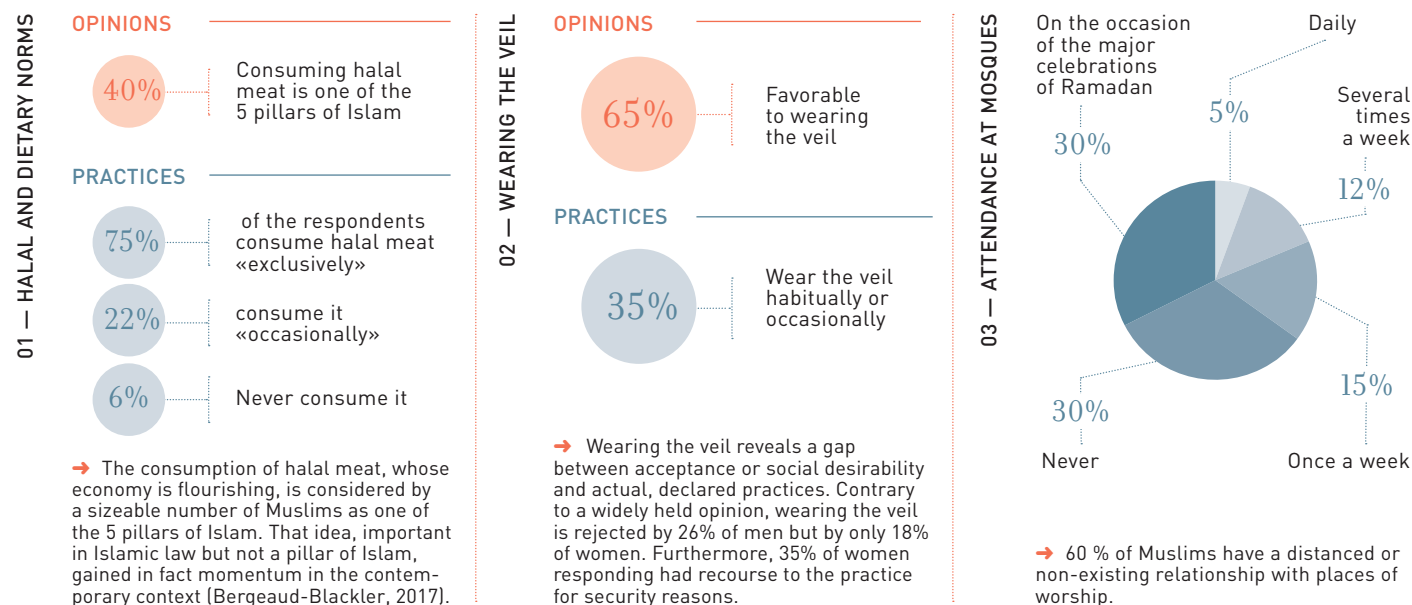
5 Even if Shiite Islam maintains above all a religious and political messianism around the Imam, the concept of martyrdom and resistance to the Sunni majority and the West.

*Les réalités économiques, culturelles, sociales et politiques des musulmans d'Europe engendrent une pluralisation de la manière d'être musulman.*

people with quite diverse histories and heritages which are superimposed on and crisscrossing one another, henceforth constituting an unprecedented diversity. The various economic, cultural, social and political realities themselves generate a pluralisation in ways of being Muslim, which testify to very different postures on the relations with modernity, culture, and relations between the religion and politics, on the conceptions of public space and freedom of expression, man-woman equality, the legitimacy of democratic or, rather, traditional power, and individual rights, etc. (see the inset "Figures" here below).

This encounter of civilizations initially took place rather serenely in the 1960s, in a reconstruction context in the aftermath of World War II -, during which the universal declaration of human rights and new ways of thinking alterity were elaborated. The relations between European societies and the "first-comers", (who usually only arrived for what was considered a temporary stay) above all testify to a reciprocal, relative indifference. On the level of inter-individual and institutional relations, reciprocal adjustments usually took place rather satisfactorily, <sup>6</sup> for example with the establishment of a Royal Commission for Immigrant Policy and official recognition of the practice of Islam in Belgium in 1974.

## FIGURES / The criteria of Islamicness, from opinions to practices



Source: El Karoui H., *Un islam français est possible*, Institut Montaigne, September 2016. Available on:

URL <http://www.institutmontaigne.org/res/files/publications/rapport-un-islam-francais-est-possible.pdf> (1029 personnes ont participé à cette enquête) (1029 persons participated in this survey)

## AN ONSET OF MALAISE

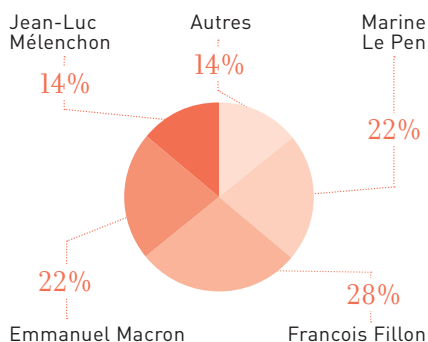
The malaise began appearing in the context of sizeable rises of unemployment in Europe, and the failure of development policies in the Muslim world. The closing of borders by the European States in 1974 following the oil crisis and family reu-

<sup>6</sup> Three CISMOC research projects relating to reciprocal attitudes and relationships (realized in 2006, 2014 and 2015) and emphasising these aspects in public enterprises, hospitals and schools, etc..

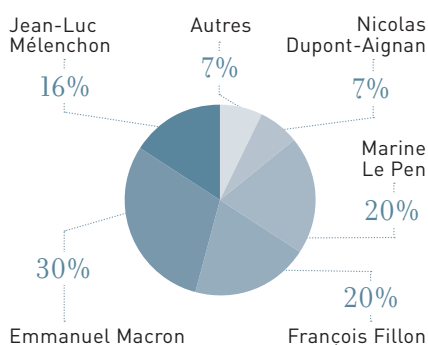


## FIGURES / Votes and beliefs in the 1st tour of the French presidential elections of 2017

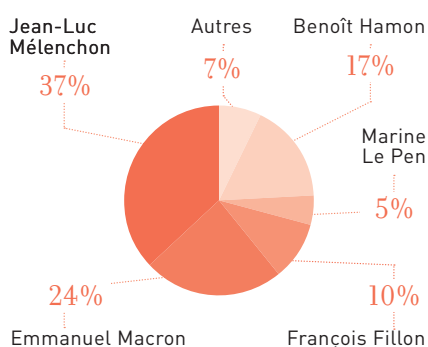
### CATHOLIQUES



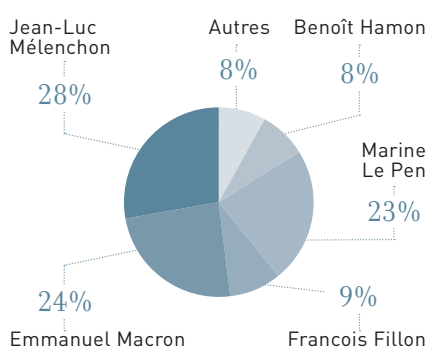
### PROTESTANTS



### MUSULMANS



### SANS RELIGION



Source: IFOP for Pèlerin, Believing voters in the 1st tour of the French presidential elections April 2017. Available on: URL [http://www.ifop.fr/media/poll/3750-1-study\\_file.pdf](http://www.ifop.fr/media/poll/3750-1-study_file.pdf) (5770 persons participated in this survey)

nification transformed the migratory project. The presence of Islam became permanent. Overseen by the countries of origin, the Muslim families concerned themselves with transmitting their Arabo-Muslim heritage to their children while, at the same time, various actors aware of the awakening of Islam across the Muslim world increasingly extended their efforts to impact the social lives of Muslim communities in Europe.<sup>7</sup> The religious thus gradually came to appear as quite valorized within Muslim communities in Europe, and a fortiori after the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, notably under the influence of increase in religious offers particularly tinted with political Islam, and then Salafism. Additionally, we must pinpoint that this change took place in a way that was almost inversely proportional to the secularization of European societies which accelerated since the 1970s, generating a widespread incomprehension. Islam had remained largely unthought-out by European societies until the late 1980s but, from 1989 on, attitudes seemed to change, marked by an increase in identity tensions and an accentuation of new issues involving society as a whole. The problematic wearing of headscarves in public institutions - and notably at school - questioned the concrete methods of autonomisation of public institutions and even the more general principle of the reciprocal autonomy of politics and religion. The Rushdie Affair and its aftermath awakened memories of Nazi book-burnings. Numerous polemics appeared daily, related to the return of religious and food prohibitions or, for example, involving gender relations.

This increasing incomprehension was buttressed by transformations in international geopolitics: the civil war in Algeria, attacks in the Paris metro in 1995, those in the United States in 2001, Madrid in 2004, and London in 2005, without forgetting the assassination of the director Theo van Gogh taking place in the Netherlands in 2004, the virulent condemnations of the cartoons of the Prophet of Islam published by the Danish newspaper *Jylland-Posten* in 2005, or the recent authoritarian abuses by the Turkish regime which is moreover trying to re-profile itself as a major power of the Sunni world in mobilizing the *Diyanet*, its powerful transnational Directorate for religious affairs. The attacks carried out in Europe since 2015 in the name of Islam have run straight up against two values constitutive of democracy: the defence of freedom of expression and the struggle against anti-semitism<sup>8</sup>. And the violence which has dragged on in the last few decades in the Muslim world has reinforced the idea that the discourses, and even the practices of the radical movements dominate and are the most active within Muslim populations. Yet those radical movements are very much in the minority there.

### ESCAPING THE TRAP

The Muslim and Western worlds thus seem to be at a crossroads: in the context of an increasing incomprehension with regard to tensions and the complexity of the facts, the entire civil society must get a grip on itself, obtain information and act – and all the more so in that images of ‘the other’, are likely to get out of hand and lead to logics of strike and counterstrike. Hence it is important to take them seriously as they are too far from being just fantasies, but feeds of the horizon of meaning and

7 B. Maréchal, *Les Frères musulmans en Europe – Racines et discours*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2009.

8 N. Göle, *Musulmans au quotidien : Une enquête européenne sur les controverses autour de l'islam*, Paris, La Découverte, 2015.

● *Chacun doit comprendre la posture de l'Autre dans la construction de son propre jugement et de voies d'action pour l'avenir.*

#### TO GO FURTHER

Bocquet C., Maréchal B., Dassetto F. et al, *Musulmans et non-musulmans en Belgique : des pratiques prometteuses favorisent le vivre ensemble*, Bruxelles, Fondation Roi Baudouin, 2015.

De Changy J., Dassetto F., Maréchal B., *Relations et co-inclusion, islam en Belgique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2006.

Maréchal B., Djelloul G., « Muslims in Western Europe in the late twentieth century : Emergence and transformations in 'Muslim' revindications and collective mobilization efforts » in R. Tottoli (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West*, Routledge, Routledge : New York, 2014.

Maréchal B., Remy L., « Les Belges entre certitudes et indifférence : incommunication et identité hybride » in *Hermès*, n°77, CNRS Editions Paris, 2017.

For access to academic documents on Islam rigorously selected and copy-right-free, visit the webpage of the Centre of Documentation on Contemporary Islam (<https://uclouvain.be/fr/nstituts-recherche/iacchos/cismodoc>)

contribute to consciously or unconsciously orienting everyone's actions. They sometimes end up leading to mutual accusations while they are as false in their own right as they are counterproductive ("Muslims just have to blend in" - "Society is Islamophobic"). The ordinary Muslim - and this is an innovation - gradually becomes aware of the impasse in Muslim religious and political thought. Voices are raised to denounce certain outmoded religious practices, to challenge apostasy, the situation of women, homosexuality, etc. These interpellations remain timid and hardly find an echo among religious leaders, not self-critical enough and/or too uneducated to deal

with the complex questions asked with a new acuity in plural societies. Moreover, the violent interpretation of Muslim sacred texts poses a terrible challenge to religious authorities and Muslim intellectual figures: Can they have the boldness and ability to go beyond a simple denunciation in combating the religious claims made by the authors of the terrorist attacks and a Jihadi ideology abounding in citations from the Koranic corpus and the prophetic tradition? Will they also manage to avail themselves of the contributions of the social sciences which, with their questioning and methods of analysis allow a contextualization of the religious texts?

For his part, the politician uses security instruments and adopts proactive policies, notably in obtaining a legislative and institutional arsenal to concretely fight discrimination. But in the end, doesn't he best meet the challenges of multiculturalism and radicalism by revalorizing all the structures of teaching and education, including higher education? Notably for better grasping the tumultuous and complex history of the confrontation of ideas and for taking a critical look at political modernity, which gave birth to our liberal democracies.

#### PROMOTING SOCIAL AND CIVILISATIONAL CO-INCLUSION

Respect for the freedom and dignity of persons as well as promoting tolerance - a concept often very badly understood - should be taken more to heart by each and everyone, by religious groups as much as by secular groups and constitutional democratic states.

To that end, it is important to finally dare to hold fundamental debates on the cohabitation of visions that are opposed on many questions: what is the place for individuality, communities and freedom of expression? How are we to make room for multiple pathways to female emancipation faced with the maintenance of various forms of patriarchy or inequalities? What is the place for debate between religious ideals and lay ideals without posing them as absolutes? How are we to understand history and think of the place of various civilizations in it? Etc. In this context, viewpoints that are seldom heard, like those of women and youths must find their place. But, more generally, a reciprocal co-inclusion of intelligences and imaginaries, including the intra-Islamic and intra-Western, must be capable of being promoted there. Indeed, no one can go on maintaining postures of transmission and decision riveted in his/her own reference frames without showing him or herself capable of taking a sidestep. Everyone must understand the posture of the Other in constructing her/his own judgment and ways of acting for the future. Among other things, these debates will favour the constitution of a minimal basis of trust. They will nourish the foundations of a common life and will lead to the emergence of

new forms of social life with common living practices and a shared social memory – meaningful for each and everyone.

Failing to leave closed ideological postures behind and to dare to advance in all these fields straightforwardly, with a critical spirit and civic responsibility, will empower the forces of co-exclusion to carry the day and lead to further enclaving.

## INTERPRETATIONS

### On the relations between religion and politics

The encounter between the Muslim world and the West raises the question of relations between religion and politics, which seemed to have been agreed on by modern societies. Conflicts of interpretations in the social sciences on religion and politics show the relevance of democratically debating this question.

Two major theses address the complex relationship between religion and politics in the current context<sup>1</sup>:

- Marcel Gauchet's thesis, according to which religion no longer has a political function in our societies. Politics alone will henceforth hold sway because human communities have an autonomous reflexivity for providing themselves with the conditions of their existence.
- Alain Caillé's thesis, according to which, on the contrary, the politico-religious nexus still exists and ensures the identity of a human group in its relationship with the others. Politics and religion both produce instituted sense and legitimate power. Caillé expresses doubts as to human society's ability to be instituted without recourse to the universe of invisibles, unless it sacralises politics or economy, with the risk that represents for democracies.

Gauchet, working uniquely on Christianity, seems to adopt an overly trenchant posture, which does not take the diversity of world visions into account and, specifically, the utopian potential of Islam and Buddhism, for example.

#### Religion and politics in Islam

For the sociologist Peter Beyer, religion contains a political component because it is directly involved in the creation, distribu-

tion and application of social power. That seems to be a fortiori the case in talking about Islam, since it may be described in a more or less extensive way at once as a source of salvation (*din*), lifestyle and daily civility (*dunya*) or a form of government (*dawla*). In Islam, relationships between religion and politics are ambivalent: for some, the believer must answer to God alone and thus finds a total source of freedom in Koranic revelation, particularly in dealing with the members of the clan and the powerful. However, Muslim theologians reaffirm the importance of respect for those in power (e.g. that unity is better than chaos) and others (among whom Islamists) reaffirming the sovereignty of God against popular sovereignty. Thus, everything depends on the diversity of interpretations, even if throughout the Muslim world, both secular and strongly religious regimes end up sacralising the state and leave little room for the autonomy of the democratic political field.

#### Religion and politics in our democracies

Our European societies are short of political breath and seem to have defined religion as something which exists radically outside and independently of politics, even considering it as a foreign and antiquated element in relation to politics and society. However, that division is being questioned in connection with the growing pluralism of our societies. The demarcation between the public sphere (a place for democratic debate, reason and law) and the private sphere (the place of intimate life, convictions and passions), modernity was built on, is being criticized - and even challenged - as the object of sole ideological stakes which do not take sociological realities into account.

<sup>1</sup> See, notably: Revue du MAUSS, *Qu'est-ce que le religieux? – Religion et politique*, Paris, La Découverte, 2003/2, n°22.

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