Pluralism in the Context of Glocalization: European Muslim Youth

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 1970s. In 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 butchers, Koranic schools or Muslim cemeteries.

Around these issues arise questions, doubts, and sometimes violent oppositions, all linked to the integration of these newly formed different national communities. The confrontation no longer has the temporary, discreet or even non-existent character it had in the 1950s. Islam is a stable religion with adepts that demonstrate a growing will to be recognized. Muslims groups and European societies as well. This new dimension of Islamism comes from countries where Islam is either the religion of the State or the majority. 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 reformed. This process of individualization and privatization of Islam. Membership to a post-migration generation of European Muslims. New forms of religiosity defined by individualism, secularism and a privatization replace with increasing frequency the uprooted Islam of the first generation. This generation of the individual is partially the consequence of the migration process. The process engendered 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 France, have not transmitted the Islamic 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 new Muslim generation in Europe is the most interesting sign of this change. Increasingly, more serious, literature and public discussions are being conveyed in the local European languages.

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 consisted of 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 religious experiences among the young. Like ‘consumers’, people are increasingly choosing which tenets and rules of their religion to recognize and which to ignore. The incitulation of Western values through the educational systems certainly has an influence and can explain the emphasis on critical debate and reflective 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 observance are also the outcome of individual choice. Thus, within one generation, one can simultaneously observe an abandonment of Muslim attachments and the attraction of Islam as a global symbol of resistance to Western political and cultural hegemony. Our own field experience allows us to assert that the rediscovery of Islam can take various forms. First, it is a form of resistance. Many young people 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 in a classificatory use of religion as salvation. Second, most of these ‘new Muslims’ actually come from EuropeanMuslim societies. They re-affirm 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 accommodation of values. This 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 France, have not transmitted the Islamic 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 new Muslim generation in Europe is the most interesting sign of this change. Increasingly, more serious, literature and public discussions are being conveyed in the local European languages.

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 Musim 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), Tagalog and Anarcho-liberal reflections on the position of Muslim populations under non-Muslim rule, in: Lev-It and Schnapper, D (eds) (1994). Muslims in Europe, Peter Lang, p. 18.
2. See for example, the Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs published in England.
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. Creutz, Musulmans et Republicains, les jeunes, l’Islam et la France, op-cit.