

postal addressP.O. Box 11089
2301 EB Leiden
The Netherlands**telephone**

+31-(0)71-527 79 05

telefax

+31-(0)71-527 79 06

e-mail

isim@rullet.leidenuniv.nl

www

http://www.isim.nl

6-7**Gudrun Kr mer**
The Use and Abuse
of the Study of Islam**9****Patrick Chabal**
Africa: Modernity without
Development?**22****Sonja Hegasy**
Transformation through Monarchy
in Morocco and Jordan**37****Leyla Bouzid Discacciati**
The Image of Women in Algerian
and Tunisian Cinema

The presence of a rather important Muslim population in Western European countries is a consequence of a recent voluntary immigration of workers coming from the Middle East, North Africa or South Asia. Their administrative status and social integration vary considerably from one country to the other (often citizens in France and UK, rarely in Germany). Until recently they kept a low profile. But through upward social mobility or the 'brain-drain' from the rest of the Muslim world, a Muslim intelligentsia has slowly emerged in Europe and is now more vocal in calling for a recognition of the Muslim presence, triggering heated debates in European public opinion.

Muslims in Europe: From Ethnic Identity to Religious Recasting

OLIVIER ROY

What do we call a 'Muslim' in Europe? This is a seldom-asked question in response to which there are two approaches: the ethnic one and the purely religious one. The more common approach in Europe is to consider Muslims as a quasi-ethnic group, identifying them with people originating from Muslim countries, as it is the case in Belgium.¹ Many

gists or social workers), Islam is embedded in such pristine cultures ('Arab', 'Asian'). But these cultures are not transmitted as such from generation to generation: language might be lost (as is colloquial Arabic in France) as well as dress and diet. A process of acculturation is under way, even if it does not lead to integration, but to other patterns of differences. The *beur* (slang for Arab) culture of the suburbs in France has nothing to do with Islam or even with Arab culture: the slang (*verlan*) is French, the diet and the clothing are American (Mc Donald's

What we have here is the fabrication of a neo-ethnicity. It may work, but has little to do with Islam.

We have to go back to a very basic idea: Islam is a religion, not an ethnic identity, not even a culture as such. But how can this religion be expressed as such? It is not a question of inter-faith dialogue: Europe is no longer a Christian society, it is a secular one. What we see is that Muslims do adapt, not by changing Islam, but by adjusting their way of thinking of themselves as believers.

'Born again Muslims'

A second consequence of the immigration is that there is no longer any social evidence of religion. Of course in neighbourhoods where large Muslim populations are concentrated, there is some social pressure to adopt a conservative way of life (especially for women). But there are no social constraints or even inducements to behave as a good Muslim; praying, fasting, eating halal require personal involvement. One has to re-create, on an individual basis, the patterns of an everyday life for a Muslim. Even if one joins specific communities (with or without a neighbourhood basis), this community is established on the basis of a volunteer and personal engagement. In fact, to be a 'true' Muslim is an individual choice, because it usually means a double break: with a too traditional familial environment and with the dominant secular society. Here we meet the phenomena of the 'born again Muslim', who after a very mundane and sometimes dissolute life (e.g. womanizing, alcohol, drugs) goes back to Islam, after a spiritual experience, on patterns very similar to many 'born again Christians': the emphasis is here on personal conversion, redeeming and expression of self, not on community and social conformism. The terms 'faith', 'salvation', that is the quest for identity and psychological balance, are more important than 'licit' and 'illicit'. Stories of conversions underline this quest for equilibrium and happiness. Fundamentalism, even in its stress on the communitarian nature of Islam, goes also along the individualization of social life, common to the western societies.

This lack of evidence can also be seen in the problem of authority: Who is entitled to teach Islam? The famous institutions of the Muslim world, like the University of Al Ahzar, in Cairo, retain some prestige but are unable to meet the religious needs of the Muslim in Europe: training of modern imams, adaptation of the curriculum of studies, etc. But the problem is not so much a lack of trained ulema: in fact the vacuum is filled by self-proclaimed thinkers, who, whatever their intellectual background, claim that they know and can teach 'true Islam'. The web is full of sites emanating from individuals or small communities, which share two patterns: a high level of fragmentation and the stress on



PHOTO: ANP MARTIN HOLLERING

Muslim girls and boys preparing food for 200 schoolmates in Deventer, the Netherlands, at the end of the Ramadan.

British Muslims are campaigning to make the 'Inter Races Relations Act' (which allows to sue for defamation) applicable to Islam. In this sense, being Muslim has nothing to do with faith and belief, but rather with origin and culture. The *stricto sensu* religious aspect is diluted in a larger form of identity.

But the problem is that nowadays pristine ethnic cultures are fading away, either through assimilation or because they are recast into new sets of identities. Nevertheless, for the first immigrants as well as the European public opinion (comforted by the culturalist approach of many anthropolo-

and baseball caps), the music is western (rap, 'hip-hop'), they are fond of dogs such as, for example, pit bulls. In fact, this is a typical western urban youth sub-culture: the terms used to qualify such groups might be taken from the ethnic register, but we have here the process of ethnicisation of a space of social exclusion along the patterns of a western urban sub-culture, and not through importation of patterns from the primary culture. In this sense, any endeavour to define a 'Muslim community' by retaining the criteria of origin, does not refer to Islam as such. It also does not refer to 'real' cultures.

Islamic identity

Believers who want to maintain a purely Islamic identity are also confronted by the fact that pristine cultures divide the Muslim community in Europe. Mosques tend to be attended in Europe according to common origin, dialect, or by belonging to community groups. There are 'Moroccan', 'Algerian', 'Punjabi' and even 'Kurdish' mosques. For many second or third generation Muslims, or even for 'born-again Muslims' identifying Islam and culture of origin is a mistake for two reasons: it is a dividing factor, but it also tends to embed Islam in cultural traditions which have little to do with 'true Islam'. The 'salafist' approach, which stresses the return to an authentic Islam, rid of local traditions and superstitions, fits well with the contemporary process of acculturation. Its proponents strive to build non-ethnic mosques and communities. To bypass the cultural divisions brought by pristine cultures, they tend to advocate the use of language of the host country (English, French, etc.), which is, by the way, the main if not the sole language understood by the youth, or to push for modern Arabic. In both cases, they go along with the process of acculturation and globalization. In this sense, modern fundamentalism is not a leftover of traditional cultures, but on the contrary, an expression of modernization and globalization. Religion is voided from its cultural content (there is no such thing, for a fundamentalist, as 'Islamic' music, or even an Islamic novel). Religion is assimilated to a code of behaviour ('do's' and 'do not's'), and not to a culture. In this sense, it can adapt to a world where national cultures are giving way to codes of communication and sub-cultures.

Continued from front page: Muslims in Europe / by Olivier Roy

true Islam. In a word, the modern community is virtual, and not embedded in a society or a territory.² This individual re-appropriation of knowledge and authority is also an indicator of the westernization of the relation to religion.

Of course, the 'salafi' or fundamentalist answer to westernization and globalization is not the only answer, even if it is the more visible. In fact most of the Muslims who would define themselves as 'believers' tend to find their own personal way of adapting to this western environment, which by the way is not a 'Christian' one, but a secular one. There is no symmetry between religions, because the western religions have left the public scene to become private. The process we are witnessing today is one of individualization and privatization of religious practices, of the relation of the self with religion.

Here we come to another issue. It is widely admitted, among western public opinion, that westernization should go along with an

aggiornamento in theology and religious thinking, a 'liberal Islam' as opposed to fundamentalist Islam. Of course there are many Islamic thinkers working on this issue. But their impact on the Muslim population seems rather weak. Any visit to an Islamic bookshop shows that the most popular books are not related to an 'enlightened' perception of Islam, but to basic or even fundamentalist description of what religion is and what the duties of the believer are. But this is not in contradiction with the 'salafi' trends within the Muslim populations. In fact, the two real trends which are working among the European Muslims are: firstly, a vocal fundamentalist school of thought, trying to build a reconstructed community by preaching individuals, and addressing the real concerns of individuals who lost most of their community links; and secondly, the silent majority of the believers, who found their way on the basis of compromises, adaptations, and makeshift

theology. The real processes at work among the Muslim are that of individualization and reconstruction of identities along different patterns, all phenomena that undermine the very idea of 'one' Muslim community in Europe. There is no Western Islam, there are Western Muslims. ◆

Notes

1. The confusion between religious and 'ethnic' groups, or more exactly the perception of a religious group as a quasi one has some antecedents in Europe: one can be an atheist 'Protestant' or 'Catholic' in Northern Ireland.
2. 'La communauté virtuelle: l'Internet et la déterritorialisation de l'islam' (2000). *Réseaux*. Paris: CENT/Hermès Science Publication.

*Olivier Roy is senior researcher at the CNRS, Aix-en-Provence, France, and is author of Vers un Islam Européen, Editions Esprit, 1999.
E-mail: oroy@compuserve.com*