Islam in France

Revue *Ethnologie Française*

The presence of Islam in France is not a recent phenomenon. Indeed, it became established as early as the 19th century[1], alongside the occupation and colonization of Algeria from 1830 to 1962, Tunisia from 1881 to 1956 and Morocco from 1912 to 1956. As is well known, the Muslim faith is multi-faceted, and its expression also varies from one geographic zone to another.

Paradoxically, academic studies on Islam, an established field of research for decades now, seem to be mostly conducted by Islam specialists, historians, political scientists (who are very present in the media and thus occupy a prominent position in the debate), jurists, philosophers and sociologists. The research is quite prolific and addresses a variety of topics: the Salafi movements, Jihadism, Islamic law, the history of immigration and of the Muslim presence in Europe, the study of the financial flows between France and Maghreb countries, normativity, the "Arab Springs" seen from Europe, *etc*. But it leaves aside the everyday aspects of religious practice and family life. Thus, national religious communities[2], as well as the forms of practices which they rest on, are little addressed by researchers in social sciences.

Indeed, sociologists mostly focus on the issue of the "suburbs" and "problem areas" or "ghettoes" and merely broach the question of Islam on the fringes of their analyses, which most of them bear on exclusion, uprooting and rioting.

Anthropological studies mainly deal with sacrificial rituals and halal, while the study of Muslim societies has flourished since the end of the 1970s (not forgetting colonial ethnography in Maghreb countries, naturally).

In addition, priority is often given to the study of textual data and, as a result, the ethnographies of religion in daily life are not considered. One frequently hears about a so-called "Muslim orthodoxy," which is an inappropriate terminology since institutions such as the council or the synod, the Church or the Pope have no equivalent in Islam. There is no single leader designated to speak the "Truth." This supposed "orthodoxy" is frequently considered to be Hanbalism or Wahhabism, a recent movement that propagated at the beginning of the 20th century, presented as a "reform movement" (*islâh*) hostile to marabouts, "saints" and the concept of intercession, although they are common beliefs, notably in Maghreb countries. Wahhabism denounces so-called "popular" Islam issued from Sufi science (hagiology) as nonsensical lies and

[1] The relations between France and Islam go much further back, but the presence of a large number of Muslims started with the colonization of Algeria. Egyptians settled in France after Bonaparte's expedition, *i.e.* much earlier than the Algerian colonization, but in much fewer numbers.

[2] In addition to the national communities linked to French colonial history, which are all Maliki, one also finds Pakistanis, Turks and Iranians.

superstitions. Research in social sciences focuses almost exclusively on this particular reform movement[3], leaving aside mainstream movements, their religious practice, and the way the latter articulates with everyday life in a secularized environment, in which the main references (public holidays, street names, *etc*.) are more often than not Judeo-Christian, and do not leave them much space.

This situation led us to prepare a special issue of *Ethnologie Française* in order to address the various French Muslim cultures from an anthropological point of view, not omitting the comparative perspective, as well as the tenuous but numerous links between these cultures and the so-called native and overseas countries. Another objective consists in creating a community of researchers and students, who often conduct their work in isolation.

Here are some of the key lines of research, although the list is non-restrictive:

Islam in France: Muslim religious practices, their diversity and their specificities.

The debated notion of "Islamophobia," to which the phrases "rejection of Muslims" or "discrimination against Muslims" should be substituted.

Islamic dietary laws: *halal* food, Ramadan, the anthropology of the market and of the *halal* food industry in France, and the controversies they raise.

The headscarf controversy and the way the Anglo-Saxons approach this very French questioning (*Why the French don't like headscarves*? by Bowen[4] for instance).

Islamic feminism in France.

The sexual normativities and their contestations.

Globalizing, and thus confusing, terminologies: immigrants, Muslims and Arabs, *etc.*

Believers and/or practicing Muslims: a major anthropological question.

The question of the "visibility" of Islam: mosques and prayer rooms, street praying.

The relationship to the body and to death: Muslim burial grounds, *etc*.

The analysis of the numerous preconceptions that systematically underlie discussions on the Muslim religion in France: communitarianism, power relationships, secularism, "Muslim origin and Muslim faith," *etc*.

The proposals are to be sent to Marie-Luce Gélard, invited editor of the journal, by **September 1, 2015**, accompanied with a title and a summary comprising a minimum of 800 words and a maximum of 2,000 words. The projects must feature

[3] Most of the studies are made by political specialists whose only paradigm is that of safety and control.

[4] John R. Bowen, 2007, *Why the French don't like Headscarves. Islam, the State and Public Space*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

information on the nature of the data, the ethnographical surveys conducted and the main underlying issues.

The list of selected proposals will be sent to the authors at the end of November 2015.

The finalized texts must be sent in September 2016.

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