
In most respects the situation of the more than four million Muslims in France — mainly from North Africa, Turkey, Senegal, Mali and the Lebanon — is similar to the condition obtaining elsewhere in Europe: Even though only 31% pray every day and only 16% attend Friday prayers, there is a visible return to Islam as a provider of identity. Like elsewhere, although the French Muslims are organizationally divided into more than 1400 associations and lack a representative umbrella organization, they are striving for the acceptance of *ḥijāb, ḥalāl* slaughtering and Islamic burial. They, too, suffer from centuries-old anti-Islamic prejudices, generation conflict, and disproportionate unemployment. In France, as elsewhere, the state can rely on some fringe figures such as Mohamed Arkoun, to promote assimilation. Nevertheless, Islam in France has its own peculiar problems:

- Due to the French citizenship law, virtually all young Muslims in France are French citizens.
- France, apart from Mexico, is perhaps the world’s only country where, since 11 December, 1905, there has been absolute separation between state and religion.
- Because of France’s moral hang-up over its colonial failure in Algeria and the fact that Algerians form the largest Muslim group in France, all Muslims of that country are hostages to what unfortunately happens in Algeria.
- The French have a special term for young immigrants from the Maghreb, *beurs*. As for fundamentalism, they call it “*intégrisme*”.
- The Great Mosque of Paris was built by France in recognition of the sacrifices made for that country by its Muslim soldiers during World War I and is therefore staffed by persons from Algeria. Currently, its rector is Dr. Dail Boubakeur. He is son of Shaykh Sir Hamza Boubakeur, a translator of the Qur’ān into French, and former rector of the Paris Mosque.

In commenting on the situation, Tariq Ramadan is content to see a movement from talking about “Islam en France” to “Islam de France”, i.e. from an imported to an incorporated phenomenon. Indeed, he is not unhappy with the legal framework of *laïcism*. He urges the French Muslims to profit as much as possible from the neutrality of the French state *vis-à-vis* religion, its protection of religious freedom, and of the independence of religious communities. In fact, he sees less of a problem with the French law as such; the main problem, in his opinions, lies with the way the French interpret it.
From my annual attendance of the conference organized by Dr Larbi Kéchat at the Mosqué ad-Da’wa in Paris, the largest active mosque in that city, I know what the author means. In spite of its supposed neutrality, the French government tends to decide from above what Muslims “really” need when following the tenets of their religion (\textit{adhān}, \textit{scafà}, \textit{ḥālāl} meat?); and officials tend to raise as many administrative obstacles to the construction of mosques as their fellow German municipal bureaucrats. The crunch comes when laïcism is invoked in order to preserve the “French identity”, a simple way for unhinging the constitutional. In this respect, as Ramadan points out, there is a vicious misunderstanding at work: Rather than seeing the demand for mosques, Islamic schools, and Islamic burial grounds as a welcome sign of the immigrant Muslims’ readiness to \textit{integrate}, such demands are seen as attempts to subvert the French culture (p. 39). Typical of that trend is what is now labelled “Islamic scarf” (p. 42).

While Ramadan does not consider a central, unified Muslim voice in France as essential at this juncture, he provides some information on a great variety of Muslim organizations. The credit of being the pioneer Muslim organisation goes to the “Association of Islamic Students of France” (AEIF), which was founded in 1963 by Dr Muhammad Hamidullah, who has been active in Paris since the 1950s. Regrettably, the Turks in France have not taken any appreciable part in the Islamic activity.

Moreover, the French State, which in theory should keep its hands off religion, has made several attempts to manipulate the establishment of a central Islamic organization in France. In 1989, Pierre Joxe, Minister of Interior, founded CORIF (\textit{Counsel de Réflexion sur l’Islam en France}), supposedly a think tank composed of nine “wise men”. But this effort, uncoordinated with the mainstream Muslims, remained as ineffective as its follow-up organisation, the 1993 \textit{Conseil Représentatif des Musulmans en France}.

It may be noted that after the appearance of this book, important developments have taken place in the relations between the Muslims and the government in France. On 28 January, 2000, the current French Minister of the Interior, Jean Pierre Chevénement invited 18 Muslim personalities to Paris where they signed a document on the “Principles and Legal Foundations of the Relations between the State and the Muslim Cult in France”. In this document the following principles were recognized:

- everybody’s right to freely choose his religion;
- equality of men and women under the law;
- the inadmissibility of using mosques for political purposes; and
- that the questions of head scarf and \textit{ḥālāl}-slaughtering were to be ruled by the legislation in existence.
In return, the signatory Muslims were assured that the building of mosques was only to be limited by the existing building laws and that the Muslim could organize religious matters at will — both banalities and no concessions whatsoever.

This governmental initiative was heavily criticized especially by the Muslim students’ organizations — none of which had been invited — including the *Etudiants Musulmans de France* (EMF) and the *Jeunes Musulmans de France* (JMF). These organizations were incensed by the fact that the Muslims had been singled out to reaffirm specific parts of the Constitution, something which had never been demanded of either Catholics or Jews. The banning of “politics” from the mosque, not only because this goes against the grain of Islam, but also because it is a vague formula which virtually invites governmental intervention.

But there are also positive Muslims assessments, stressing that there was now a relatively representative Muslim premium as counterpart to the French government, a step that might prove to be of historic significance if only the Muslims are able to play the game well. These Muslims know that the time was not necessarily on their side. As Ramadan points out, there is an alarming rate of mixed marriages, alarming because in 41% of all cases, in violation of the *Shar’ah*, Muslims girls in France accept non-Muslim husbands.

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The story of modern Persian literature spans the course of the twentieth century and is closely connected with the political history of Iran, from the end of the Qajar dynasty and the rule of the two Pahlavi monarchs to the current Islamic regime. The phenomenon of the break with traditional forms and motifs and the emergence of modernity in Persian literature has only recently become a serious subject of study, the most detailed and recent work in English being Ahmad Karimi Hakkak’s *Recasting Persian Poetry* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1996). Taking the narrative further in time,