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Changes among Islamic organisational structures in Europe*

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Many types of Muslim organisations have been founded by some of the 11–12 millions Muslims living in Western Europe. They co-exist, exercising influence on many levels and interacting more or less intensively and regularly. Only organisations depending on intra-European Muslim dynamics are considered in this article. Muslim organisations more related to strictly external processes, whose influence seems to be on the decline, are disregarded. The same goes for the institutions supposed to represent Muslims vis-à-vis the state because they tend to be the outcome of a process mostly set in motion by the governments themselves.

In fact, we will deal with local associations set up to provide a place for worship and teaching the Quran and also others, ever more numerous, that have widened the scope of their activities.

Beyond taking root in European cities, these associations are often affiliated to diverse religious movements either mystical, missionary or sometimes politically oriented. These trends will be pointed out because they illustrate the variety and the dynamism of contemporary Islam.

Finally, in order to clarify the situation, major changes and evolutions will be indicated.

Establishment and internal organisation of mosques

Western Europe possesses approximately 6400 mosques or prayer rooms[1]. Mosques, often mono-ethnic and/or recognised as favouring a particular interpretation of Islam, constitute local organisations disposing of a wide, and sometimes complete, administrative autonomy. And being connected to or belonging to a particular religious movement does not necessarily mean that they are influenced by any federative structure.

Persons in charge of mosques, almost exclusively men, often exemplify the first generation's monopoly, even if some evolution is perceptible. Usually appointed through a consensus of members, they start the mosque off: they establish a place for meetings and worship and choose which services and

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[1] This figure is derived from the national experts' data collected for the report mentioned.

activities to organise. But as soon as the mosque becomes more important, it fulfils other functions too, organising courses in religion and Arabic, offering advice to young people to help them find professional training, establishing a library etc.

The men in charge employ people as teachers and/or volunteers – whose role nowadays may turn professional, where visiting prisons and sick persons in hospitals is concerned – and supervise the religious staff, especially the imam[2]. Sometimes they have recourse to one of the wider organisations, which may be in competition with each other. On one hand, the authorities of the countries of origin may be involved through their own consular services; for instance the Diyanet Isleri Türk Islam Birligi, an imposing administrative body linked to the higher authorities of the Turkish state, exerts wide influence. Beyond controlling half the Turkish mosques in Europe, it had 760 imams attached to it in 1995[3]. Another example is the Great Mosque of Paris, whose rector appoints a hundred imams, often paid by the Algerian state. On the other hand, they resort to important international Islamic organisations sometimes dependent on political bodies in Muslim countries. For example, the Islamic World League emanates from the Saudi leadership: it established the Superior Council for Mosques in Europe in 1982 in order to found or restore mosques and promote their activities. As for the Muslim World Congress, it reflects Pakistan's particular orientations and tries to affirm itself in discrete competition with Saudi Arabia.

Emergence of associations

Noteworthy is the increase since the mid 80s of associations that have taken over the central role of mosques, while reinforcing the importance of the latter at the same time. Consequently there are now approximately 3000 associations in France[4] and more than 2000 regional organisations in Germany[5].

These associations are active in various fields: religious and cultural, social, political, educational, sport and even leisure. Youth associations promote activities linked to the second generation's needs, whether remedial classes, sports grounds, publishing and bookselling, organising conferences, helping families in trouble, marriage guidance etc. They usually focus on the improvement of daily life in the neighbourhood, and so they may receive government grants. Now and then, these associations are linked to an international organisation or to a specific Islamic movement, unless they hold a position at the regional or even at the national level, like the UK Islamic Mission or the Union des Jeunes Musulmans, which is close to the influential Union des Organisations Islamiques de France.

In this framework, new leaders emerge. No matter who they are – former students from abroad, children of immigrants who may have followed some courses abroad, converts – they try to establish a position in a very open and competitive market[6]. They are basically new mediators, charismatic personalities who put forward a pragmatic discourse[7] while challenging the scholars' position, but not their knowledge. They present themselves as referents for young people who are torn by questions about their insertion in society at large, or about reconciling the practice of citizenship with worship, and thus they reinforce the re-Islamisation process[8].

As for Muslim women appearing in the public sphere, the process is still very slow but it has started, partly through the constitution of informal

[2] Landman N. (1996), «Imamopleiding in Nederland: kansen en knelpunten», Utrecht, OC en W.

[3] Manço U. (1997), «Des organisations socio-politiques comme solidarité islamique dans l'immigration turque en Europe» in *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam*, n°4, Paris, pp. 97-134.

[4] Islam de France, n°4, p. 12.

[5] Karakasoglu Y. and Nonneman G. (1996), «Muslims in Germany, with special reference to the Turkish-Islamic community» in Nonneman G., Niblock T. et Szajkowski B. (eds), *Muslim communities in Europe*, United Kingdom, Ithaca press, p. 255.

[6] Dassetto F. (1996), *La construction de l'islam européen. Approche socio-anthropologique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, p. 152.

[7] Roy O. (2000), «L'individualisation dans l'islam européen contemporain» in Dassetto F. (ed), *Paroles d'Islam – Individus, Sociétés et Discours dans l'Islam européen contemporain*, Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose, p. 90.

[8] Reeber M. (2000), «Les khutbas de la diaspora: enquête sur les tendances de la prédication dans les mosquées en France et dans plusieurs pays d'Europe occidental» in Dassetto F. (ed.) (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 244.

groups. A double dynamics now set in motion seeks to realise two distinct aims. First, there are personal initiatives taken to solve concrete social problems or stimulate women's autonomy within Muslim communities. They are still extremely rare but one exemplary case is the association Al-Nissa, created in London in 1985: it advises women about their Islamic rights, offers them training to increase their self-esteem and teaches them how to play a role within their community. The other kind of initiative stems from ideological networks, which create branches for women and prompt them to organise activities. Beyond internal ideological or organisational reasons, this initiative may be explained by pressures of the environment inducing a wider representation of women in return for a possible acquisition of any privileges. The Turkish Millî Görüs federation stands out for 445 of its 791 local branches having a women's section; it is well aware that girls, as future mothers, will have a leading role to play in the transmission of Islam[9]. These groups represent both a frame for religious reference and a space for exchanging knowledge and experiences. Within other tendencies, Sufi groups, such as the 'Alawiyya, and modernist Islamist movements seem more disposed to such openness. Some examples are the Jamâ'at-i-Islami or the trends inspired by the Muslim Brothers, even if nothing concrete has apparently yet been achieved.

Diversity of ideological-religious trends

This panorama aims to represent major and/or symptomatic trends present in western Europe while taking diverse origins into account.

A few preliminary points have to be made. First, it is notable that very few movements are Shiite. Only minor trends exist, perceived especially as mystical movements. Examples, in order of importance, are Alevis, of Turkish or Kurdish origin, who accord Ali a central role, Ismailis mainly of Iranian origin, and Bohoras and Khodjas coming from the Indian Ocean – not counting the groups considered as deviant sects, that is, the Ahmadiyya movement, whose doctrine is condemned because its founder questioned the dogma of Muhammad being the Seal of the Prophets, and the Baha'is who present themselves as a universal pacific and egalitarian religion with adherents engaged in an independent search for the truth from the Scriptures.

A second point concerns the official nature of the trends. Turkish Islamic trends are especially fixed, in the eyes of others, because they have to take a position about the government line on Islam maintained by the Diyanet and even state control. Indeed, the state disseminates a loyalist Islam and has succeeded in gaining a strong institutional position. Nevertheless, by keeping Turkish immigrants focussed on Turkey and maintaining them on the fringes of integration processes within European societies, it risks facing more difficulties in the future.

In fact, diverse trends may be distinguished by many criteria, such as the attitude towards fundamental ideas, world visions, ideological sensitivities, practices, orientations and terms through which religious activism is elaborated, relations with the West[10] etc. Beyond the intrinsic variations of the movements, five major types of religious organisations may be distinguished in Europe.

1. Mystical movements. Mystical orders are distinguishable from each other by the way they propose to reach union with God, for instance through their particular chain of spiritual descent from the Prophet. Most groups, such as Darqâwi, Tijâni, Shâdhili and Qâdiri, meet informally with a very limited number of adherents. Among the most influential, the old-established Naqshbandiyya's moral influence has extended to the Millî Görüs and Süleymanci movements. The popular Barelwi movement, whose founder tried to oppose literal and modernist trends, is especially present in Great Britain. Keeping close links to the Indian sub-continent, it is mainly characterised by the intensity of its devotion for the Prophet and its tendency to rally around a spiritual leader

[9] Kandiyoti, (1995):318 mentioned by Timmerman Ch. (1999), «Islamism or the need for alternatives. The case of young Turkish women in Belgium» in Crul M., Lindo F. et Pang C. L. (eds), *Culture, structure and beyond – changing identities and social positions of immigrants and their children*, Amsterdam, Het Spinhuis, p. 185.

[10] Dassetto F. (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 181.

with recognised powers of intercession. The Murid brotherhood, of Senegalese origin, is centred around Sheikh Amadou Bamba. It promotes an oath of allegiance of disciple to master, a willingness to continue on one's way to God and the importance of work. Represented by university students, this brotherhood also brings together an important diaspora of interdependent hawkers. Finally, the 'Alawiyya brotherhood, of Algerian origin, develops a modern individualised mysticism, more focused on personal reflection and an intellectual relation between master and adherents than on a communal life and practice of collective worship.

2. Mystical reformist movements, rationalising and preaching. On one hand, the Deobandi movement, especially present in Great Britain, whose founders are both reformist Sufis and scholars in religion, propagates a strict Sunni orthodoxy. They reject local practices on behalf of universal beliefs and observances, but the unity they promote conflicts with their elitist aspect. They maintain close ties to South Asia and benefit from recruiting by Jamâ'at al-Tablîgh informal networks[11]. On the other hand, the Nurcu trend is mainly represented among Turkish communities. It proposes a neo-mystical approach emphasising personal piety and promotes intellectual activity stemming from its founder's writings on the Quran.

3. Preaching movements. Their strong missionary activity is meant to bring back to Islam those who have fallen away from it. One of the most informal and dynamic movements is the Jamâ'at al-Tablîgh, very popular in Great Britain among the Indo-Pakistani population, while it especially attracts North Africans in other countries. It aims at people on the fringes of society who wish to recover a certain respectability. Focussing attention on practice, active participation and changing the surroundings through preaching, it tries to revive religious life taking the Prophet's companions as an example. The Jamâ'at al-Tablîgh is mainly criticised by the Jamâ'at-i-Islami for its apolitical attitude, by some Barelwis for its supposed links to Wahhabism and by some Deobandi scholars for its promoting generalised preaching in public as a duty. Another movement is the Süleymanci, whose national associations have been federated at the European level. Very hierarchical and politically right-wing, this movement opposes the Kemalist approach to Islam. Although it nowadays shows more openness like Millî Görüs, they are competitors; Millî Görüs qualifies Süleymanci as mystical partly due to the importance it gives to personal piety. As for the Ahl-i-Hadîth movement, sometimes qualified as wahhabi, it considers hadith central for the interpretation of the Quran and rejects the authority both of diverse Sufi orders and of scholars of the classical schools of law. Unlike the Deobandis it accords the Prophet particular importance and it condemns the Barelwis' popular practices of devotion. Its influence is rather marginal, even in Great Britain, but it distributes literature and audio and video cassettes propagating separatist ideas with regard to non-Muslim society.

4. Politico-religious movements awaking consciousness. These are the most active in contemporary Islam; they carry out social and/or political action, basing themselves on the earliest period of Islam and aiming to restore its whole doctrinal foundations. Even if European Islamism turns its eyes towards Muslim countries, it is now deep-rooted and sometimes provides its own intellectual leaders. Among Turks, the Millî Görüs movement is particularly prominent. With its 791 mosques and 112 000 affiliated members, it is well established in 11 countries. In spite of its modernist discourse, its ideology is national and traditionalist orthodox, capable of satisfying some needs for identification and enhancing status. It subordinates national identity to religious identity and views Turkish culture from the standpoint of its rural tradition, its idealisation of the Ottoman dynasty sometimes reinforced by criticism of the West. But it is also changing, becoming an Islamic Turkish-European movement which reinforces its members' Islamic identity as the Muslim Brothers do. Not only does the Millî Görüs movement try to introduce Islamic references within families and personal behaviour but it fo-

[11] Nielsen J. (1992), *Muslims in Western Europe*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, p. 45.

cuses on youth to Islamise them. For the Arabs, the constant reference is the Muslim Brothers' movement, the source of Islamist ideology world-wide. It aims for a re-moralisation of society and encourages integration while keeping religious identity intact. Its major impact is linked to the spread of a modern discourse which promotes both an intellectual vision and unitarian and global conceptions of Islam. This makes it attractive to Muslims already well integrated into European societies, such as students. From an organisational point of view, it appears as a sphere of influence divided into diverse trends even if these aren't clear-cut. Although the action of the Muslim Brothers, based on preaching and especially education, rejects violence, a fringe of it has given birth to a radical ideology.

5. Militants for an Islamic society and state. Historically, the Jamâ'at-i-Islami is an intellectual re-Islamisation movement that aims to establish objective and social premises for Pakistan, based on a theological vision related to God's absolute sovereignty. It pays a formal tribute to Sufism, while avoiding it because it accords excessive importance to intercessors. The Jamâ'at promotes a missionary strategy and efforts for erudition; hence its affinities with the Muslim Brothers. But in Europe, outside communities coming from the Indian sub-continent, it has little success even if its political opportunism allows it to boast a high political profile in Great Britain[12]. Another movement is the Tebligh, sometimes called Khomeynist Movement. This trend is especially present in Germany and has a certain influence in the Netherlands. It comes from a split within Millî Görüs because Tebligh refuses to adhere to parliamentary means to establish an Islamic society. Moreover, its adherents are irritated by Süleymancis, whom they consider as over-simplifying the duties of the believers. But following many internal tensions, it now envisages a certain co-operation with Millî Görüs[13].

Finally there are minority movements, more or less clandestine, in the line of radical Muslim Brothers. On the one hand, Hizb ut-Tahrîr wishes to restore the caliphate and represents a kind of symbolic point of reference rather than a group to adhere to. On the other hand, there are some networks led by Islamist exiles: Tunisians belonging to Al Nahda movement, Algerians of the Front Islamique du Salut and Groupe Islamique Armé, Palestinians of Hamas or, for example, some opponents to the Iraqi or Syrian regimes, who are trying to support resistance and promote opposition among the civil society in those countries.

Pluralism of trends, connections and beyond

Whatever their differences, major areas of origin have seen the emergence of similar trends. Nevertheless, even if these trends recognise each other, thanks to the doctrine that variety is a source for enrichment within the Umma, different Islamic traditions are now competing directly in Europe. The complementary character of the trends in Europe is clear, but all of them are being put to the test, each with equal legitimacy but still carrying different weight.

Several processes are at work, showing how impossible it is to think of one particular organisation without referring to the whole. Firstly, two tendencies are visible. One works towards endless divisions arising from tensions sometimes as loud as they are ephemeral; the other affirms a unity as utopian as it is real, establishing a common identity and unifying processes. Secondly, the overall landscape is constantly shifting because of intrinsic changes in the movements. The major trend is thus not secularisation but pluralism and a differentiation of the religious offer, with new trends even appearing such as new age Sufi groups. Individuals are seen to come and go and some overlaps also exist between groups, caused by possible alliances and conflicts of influence.

The tendency to make connections is observed on several levels, especially among young people, who accord less importance to the criterion of ethno-national belonging as a distinctive element of their belief. It is especially questioned by young Muslims who are broadening their knowledge about the Muslim world. This openness to a universal tendency is now taken into account by different groups. Another change is that Islamism as an instrument for mobilisation is concerned with the intellectual and spiritual developments of Islam in Europe and not only with a strict political and social activism, even if some movements compensate for the authorities' deficiencies. For example, the Muslim Brothers, Jamâ'at-i-Islami and Millî Görüs are getting closer and trying to meet the second generation's aspirations, especially in France and Great Britain, but also in Germany. Moreover, if the line between Islamist and preaching movements seems to be becoming blurred, this is to the detriment of the second such as the Jamâ'at al-Tablîgh. After a rapid growth in the 80s, it has declined since the mid 90s, due to its critical attitude toward western education and its refusal of dialogue. More and more young Muslims choose to follow higher education and thus prefer to opt for secularism or a more active Islamic group. As for the attraction of groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrîr for young people, it consists less in radical anti-western rhetoric than in the model proposed by the charismatic leaders, considered as sources of inspiration and/or imitation[14]. In addition, modernist changes in some brotherhoods should be noticed. For example, the Murids and 'Alawiyya are adapting themselves to individualised and cosmopolitan European societies[15]. In general, brotherhoods are understood as instruments of social resistance to surrounding individualisation. And due to their attraction for many young people seeking spirituality and community, it seems that attitudes towards Sufism in European post-Islamism groups are softening. They are seen as a factor able to consolidate Islam in Europe, and so flexibility and openness towards them become more important.

In fact, beyond the rapprochement between organisations, two phenomena may even indicate a further development: the transcending of links to organisations. Firstly, some young Muslims show no interest in the question of belonging to any ideological movement, preferring to tackle daily challenges such as racial discrimination and conflicts between generations or between systems of values and ways of life. Secondly, various people and groups more interested by the circulation of ideas than by explicit attachment to any specific movement are emerging. Ideological tensions are thus left behind as challenges such being able to live as a minority in harmony with the wider society are faced. As Muslims get used to apparently contradictory dynamics co-existing, maybe one can detect the first signs of an intra-Muslim reinforced unity, where universal data acquired from direct recourse to Scripture predominate. ❁

[12] Nielsen J. (1992), *op.cit.*, p. 136.

[13] Schiffauer W. (1997), «Islamic Vision and social reality: the political culture of sunni Muslims in Germany» in S. Vertovec et C. Peach (eds), *Islam in Europe. The politics of religion and community*, Basingstoke, Macmillan et St. Martin's Press, pp. 156-176.

[14] Sikand Y. S. (1998), «The origins and growth of the Tablîghî Jamâ'at in Britain» in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 9, n°2, p. 190.

[15] Hamès (1996) in Popovic A. et Veinstein G. (dir.), *Les Voies d'Allah: Les ordres mystiques dans le monde musulman des origines à aujourd'hui*, Paris, Fayard, p. 446.

Zusammenfassung

Vielfältig sind die von Muslimen gegründeten Organisationen in Westeuropa. Maréchal geht in ihrem Artikel nur auf die den innereuropäischen Mechanismen unterworfenen Organisationen ein, welche die Verschiedenheit und Dynamik des zeitgenössischen Islam zeigen.

In Westeuropa befinden sich schätzungsweise 6400 Moscheen. Nicht selten erfüllen diese heute nicht mehr nur den ursprünglichen Zweck: Kurse in Religion und Arabisch werden organisiert, jungen Menschen wird mit Rat geholfen, Bibliotheken werden errichtet.

Neue Führerfiguren etablieren sich – ehemalige Studenten aus dem Ausland, Kinder von Immigranten, Konvertiten. Währenddessen bleibt der gesamte Prozess für die Frauen noch immer langsam.

Der Verschiedenheit der religiösen und ideologischen Trends zum Trotz können in Europa fünf Typen von religiösen Organisationen ausgemacht werden. Von mystischen Bewegungen über reine Gebetsorganisationen bis hin zu den politisch-religiös und militant-islamistischen Bewegungen erstreckt sich die Bandbreite.

Die Autorin weist abschliessend daraufhin, dass die einzelne Organisation nur im Gesamtkontext des zeitgenössischen Islam gesehen werden kann. Speziell bemerkt sie, dass Islamismus als Mobilisierungsinstrument nicht nur mit soziopolitischem Aktivismus verbunden ist, sondern auch mit der intellektuellen und spirituellen Entwicklung des Islam in Europa. Speziell zu beachten sei, dass der Sufismus in Europa post-islamistische Bewegungen aufweiche. Hierin könnte man Ansätze einer verstärkten inner-muslimischen Einheit sehen.