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# Being Muslim in a Secular State: History, Sociological Realities, and Institutional Issues – The French case

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Islam in France covers a demographic, social, and religious reality that is resolutely plural. Its historical roots go back to the genesis of the French colonial empire (Luizard 2006; Vermeren 2016), while its contemporary extensions largely echo the history of migratory cycles, particularly from the southern Mediterranean countries, and their progressive sedentarization. If Islam is now part of the religious landscape of contemporary France, its presence still fuels many controversies and also questions the way in which the French regime of secularism takes note of this religious reality.

In this chapter, we will review the situation of Islam as a religious community in a deeply secularized French society (Portier and Willaime 2021), the place of Muslims as a minority demographic (Bucaille and Villechaise 2020) component of the French population, and the institutional and political issues raised by this Muslim presence within the framework of a secular state.

## **1 Genesis of the Muslim presence in France and demographic data**

Continental Europe today has more than 44 million people of Muslim culture (Pew Research 2011) which represents 6% of its overall population, but only 3% of Muslims worldwide.

This socio-demographic reality constitutes, along with the loss of social control by churches (unchurching), one of the major characteristics of the European religious landscape compared to other more religious societies such as the United States (Berger and Fokas 2008).

With an estimated 8,8% of the population, France is the European country with the largest number of Muslims in terms of volume, after Sweden (8,1%), Belgium (7.6%), the Netherlands (7,1%) and Austria (6,9%), United Kingdom (6,3%), Germany (6,1%), Greece (1.5%), Italy (4,8%) and Spain more than 2% (Pew Research Center, 2017).

### **1.1 The colonial episode and migration cycles**

If the first moment of the Muslim history of Western Europe coincides with the beginning of the Muslim presence in Spain between 711 and 1492, and in various other points of settlement, in Italy (Sicily) as in the South-East of France, the second strong moment of the meeting between Islam and the European continent will be carried out via the European expansion of the Ottoman Empire. This expansion took place from 1402 (the beginning of the expansion of the Ottoman power towards the Danube, the Aegean Sea and the foothills of the Balkans) to the first third of the 20th century (1919-1923), with the birth of the Turkish Republic of Mustapha Kemal.

The confrontation with the Muslim world, also occurred in reverse, from the West to the Muslim world, via the colonial empires (Maréchal 2002).

From the end of the nineteenth century until the very beginning of the twentieth century, it was through the expansion of certain European powers outside the Old Continent that Islam made its

return to European history through its colonial side. This was of course the case for France, notably through its expansion in the Maghreb and in West and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the case of France, this colonial experience, particularly in Algeria, proved to be foundational in that it was to have a lasting influence on the way in which the Republic intended to manage its relations with Islam as a religion in metropolitan France (Luizard 2019).

Finally, Europe's relationship with Islam interferes with the more recent history of different waves of migration, in other words, with the movement of populations between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Thus, the first arrivals of Muslims in France, on the metropolitan territory, were first in the form of military contingents, soldiers, on the occasion of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, then during the First World War between 1914 and 1918. Among the 800,000 colonial subjects from the Colonial Empire who arrived in France between 1914 and 1918, nearly half were Muslims (Katz 2018).

This war-related immigration was also coupled with a first labor immigration. This immigration from colonized Muslim societies developed especially from the 1920s. It increased with the end of the Second World War and continued until the mid-1970s. The government then tried to progressively limit immigration by setting up a policy of family reunification.

These waves of labor migration contributed to the creation of the first Muslim populations throughout Western Europe, and particularly in France.

## 1.2 From Silent Islam to the Claimed Islam

The installation of these immigrant populations from Muslim societies, in the French case, coming mainly from North African societies (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) and from sub-Saharan Africa, then from 1970 onwards, from Turkey, was to take place in different stages. Each of these stages was to result in different types of presence and different ways of declining to belong to Islam.

Thus, the decade of the 1960s was characterized in France by an Islam so called as "Silent Islam" in the sense that it did not show itself (invisible Islam), and did not leave the closed and private space of immigrant workers' homes. Moreover, it was lived in a transitory mode (transplanted Islam) with the ultimate perspective of returning to and settling in the country of origin.

From the mid-1970s onwards, with the implementation of family reunification policies, the logic of sedentarization gradually took precedence over that of displacement. Islam was lived in a more family mode, but in the intimacy of the home.

It is from the beginning of the 1980s that we witness the emergence of Islam as a collective religious reality and no longer as an individual one that remains limited to the family. Islam then left the circle of families and groups of practitioners began to request and obtain the opening of prayer rooms in their places of work and residence. An Islamic association fabric began to be structured, largely supported financially by Gulf States. It was also during this decade that some of the major Islamic federations in France were created. In 1983, the Union of Islamic Organizations in France was founded, which later became the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF), and then *Musulmans de France* (MdF), reputed to be close to the religious and ideological movement of the Muslim Brotherhood and the conservative Gulf monarchies (Maréchal 2009). The National Federation of Muslims of France (FNMF) was created in 1986, at the instigation of a French convert and with the support of the World Islamic League (WIL). This originally multi-ethnic federation sought to counter the Algerian influence of the Grand Mosque of Paris on the French Islamic landscape. This federation was to undergo various splits over the course of its history and became, particularly from

the 1990s onwards, the main channel of expression in France for official Moroccan Islam (Frégosi and Tozy 2017).

The decade of the 1990s was more clearly marked by an increased visibilization of Islam, which among the youngest elements will sometimes take the form of a reislamization. This was manifested, for example, through the development of gestures, language and clothing practices considered Islamic (*hijab*, *niqab*, etc.), and through the insistence on combining scrupulous fidelity to religious teachings with the demand for a more active citizenship.

Islam has thus become, in France, as in the rest of Europe, for the younger generations a privileged mode of self-affirmation, the expression of an identity that is both individual, the fruit of a personal belief, and at the same time collective, in its relationship to political citizenship and to the community of believers.

With the decade starting in 2000, we entered a new stage in the history of Islam in France. As in the rest of the European continent, we witnessed the gradual emergence of an indigenous Islam that thinks of itself more European. This Islam in the process of taking root directly challenges the States and, through them, the different classical modes of regulation of religious pluralism in force in the European space (Bastian and Messner 2007).

## 2 The religiosities of Islam at the heart of controversies and recompositions

The visibility of certain practices such as wearing the simple (*hijab*) or full veil (*niqab*) and demands for the organization of hours reserved for women in public swimming pools, or the development of businesses that are supposed to sell legal products (*halal*), often make headlines and are a source of numerous controversies.

### 2.1 Controversies around Islam

The historical sequence we are going through has also been punctuated by mobilizations of an islamophobic type (Goldman 2012). This is notably carried in France by political parties such as the Rassemblement National (RN), and more recently, by the Reconquest movement created by the far-right journalist Éric Zemmour. This climate of obsessive fear and moral panic against Islam (Marwan and Hajjat 2013) is maintained and fed by certain intellectuals and essayists (Geisser 2003). It also feeds on the political exploitation of jihadist attacks committed in France during the last decade (2012, 2015, 2020), as well as more recently on the crisis of refugees fleeing conflict zones (Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan...), and misery (sub-Saharan Africa, Horn of Africa...). A interpretative framework is gradually spreading among certain political elites that tends to associate the two phenomena, maintaining the amalgam between the terrorist threat, the presence of rooted Muslim communities and migration.

Controversies about Islam are legion (Göle 2015). These, most of the time in France, concern the points of divergence, of tension between certain intensive practices of the religion and the rule of secularism, such as the question of the veil. The controversy around the veil has thus led to the vote of two laws limiting the visibility of this type of clothing, on the one hand the law of March 15, 2004, which banned the simple veil from public school-space of elementary schools, colleges and high schools, then the law of October 11, 2010, which prohibits any full veil in the public space.

More recently, since the attacks of 2020, the controversies have focused more on the reputedly dominant place within the Islam of France of the most conservative Muslim currents (Rougier 2021). These are suspected of being at the origin of a multiform process of promotion of the Islamic reference (wearing the veil, Islamic schools, halal butchereries...) and are also denounced for their supposed ideological complicity, and the links maintained with the most radical currents, following

the example of the jihadist movement which sanctifies the recourse to violence within the French society (Kepel 2015).

The prevailing perception of Muslims in France is therefore most often that of a human group supposedly growing in population on the one hand, and that is sometimes denounced as a tyrannical minority (Zarka 2004), apprehended through the prism of religion alone and regularly asked to renounce certain forms of visibility in the public space and to reform their approach to Islam on the other.

## 2.2 Muslim religiosities in question

A resolutely sociological analysis of contemporary Muslim belonging in France, far from referring to a monolithic and homogeneous religious reality, invites us to specify that the people perceived as Muslims in France by the rest of society are not only Muslims. Their religious identity is only one of the components of their overall social identity. They are women and men, young and old, students, employees, and workers, unemployed and members of the middle classes, French descendants of immigrants, converts or foreigners, etc ... Their objective relationship to religion refers to a contrasting universe and to different understandings of this Islam that is supposed to characterize them exclusively.

It is preferable to reason in terms of Muslim religiosities, by putting forward differentiated modes of affiliation to Islam, of mobilization of Islamity (modes of being a religious, cultural, secular, political Muslim...) and of contrasting religious experiences in the space of the city. The polymorphism that is materialized by the plurality of the modes of being Muslim is prolonged by a no less astonishing polyphony, by a plurality of readings made of Islam and of the enunciations of the Islamity by the interested parties themselves.

Like Christianity (Lagroye 2009) or Jewishness (Memmi 2010; Guland and Zerbib 2000; Podselver 2004), Islamity, the fact of being Muslim and of considering oneself as such, cannot refer to an essence, nor can it be reduced to the only religious belonging or affiliation. Far from it!

In spite of the commonplace that would like Islam to be "one" in the same way that "God" is supposed to be "One", there are in reality different ways of calling oneself Muslim, of living (positively, negatively or in a more contrasted way) one's relationship to this religion, and to its history, which has espoused very different cultural, political and social contexts.

This issue of belonging and affiliation to Islam is particularly topical in France, at a time when people of Muslim culture are sometimes the subject of prosecutions (alleged incompatibility between their membership in Islam and some of their practices with a set of principles such as equality between women and men, freedom of conscience or the secular conception of the State).

The question of Islamic belonging is also relevant from an intra-Islamic perspective. This is the case if one observes the deployment of literalist currents of the neo-Salafist type (Adraoui 2013), which cling to an exclusivist and standardized vision of belonging to Islam and use anathema against other Muslim religious currents castigated as heterodox and deviant from an orthonormal (orthodox and orthoprax) conception of Islam, not to mention violent and armed currents (Jihadism).

The acuteness of this question also stems from the emergence of claims and demands for recognition of pluri-membership at the very heart of Islam, such as that carried by the gay Muslim movement which is beginning to emerge in France<sup>1</sup> and in the rest of Europe via the CALEM<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.homosexuels-musulmans.org>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.calem.eu/francais/home.html>

confederation. It is the same with the structuring of a Muslim movement that promotes the accession of women to the imâmat. Since January 2017, two projects of so-called inclusive mosques and carried by three women have thus emerged in France. The first project called the Fatima Mosque (Bahloul 2021) was initiated by the French-Algerian Kahina Bahloul, the second, the Sîmorgh Mosque, is carried by two converts, Eva Janadin and Anne Sophie Monsinay (Janadin and Monsinay 2019). These two projects clearly raise both the question of the effective mixing of prayers in mosques (without spatial separation) and that of the legitimate accession of women to the imâmat. The preaching can be provided alternatively by a male imâm and a female imâm. On Saturday, September 7, 2019, Eva Janadin and Anne Sophie Monsinay led for the first time a mixed prayer time in front of eighty faithful and received the support of other women imâms from the USA and Germany and the reinforcement of a homosexual imâm who had been the first to open an inclusive mosque welcoming anyone regardless of gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs (etc...) in 2012 in Paris.

### 2.3 Various ways of being Muslim ...

In France, all the studies related to Islam, whether it is the 1992 study conducted within the National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED) which focused on the integration of immigrant populations, or the 2008 study on *Trajectories and Origins* (TEO) (Tiberj and Simon 2010), as well as regular surveys conducted between 1989 and 2011 by IFOP for the daily newspapers *Le Monde*, *Le Point* and *La Croix*, as well as monographs targeted at certain components of the Muslim population (young people, women ... ) provide us with some useful information on the forms of identification with Islam among Muslims in France (Tribalat 1995).

All these surveys on Muslim populations confirm the multiple contours of the identity of Muslims in France (Khosrokhavar 1997; Flanquart 2003; Venel 2004; Hajji and Marteau 2005, Kakpo 2007) and the fact that secularization in terms of the weakening of religious practice is far from being uniform among them. It even seems that certain components of the Muslim population present more observant profiles against a background of identity recomposition (Lagrange 2014).

No more than they rigorously observe all of its religious precepts (five daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, dietary prohibitions, rules of dress...), they do not agree on the content of what Islam covers.

The Muslim world in France is a heterogeneous human, social, cultural, and religious reality that includes the intimate Islam of simple believers, the externalized Islam of practicing believers, the more "virtual" Islam of people of Muslim culture, and finally, the "rejected" Islam of those who declare that they have broken with this religion while continuing to refer to it negatively.

Thus, the IFOP survey for the daily newspaper *La Croix* published in July 2011 (La Croix 2011) in the form of an opinion poll conducted among a sample of 537 people from a Muslim family living in France shows a significant evolution (in percentage) of the trends between the different ways of belonging to Islam in France.

The increase observed for several years in the indices of religiosity (daily prayers, prayers at the mosque, observance of the fast, *halal* fooding...) has resulted in a significant increase in the percentage of regular practitioners, estimated today at 41% compared to 33% in 2007. This increase in religiosity varies in intensity and time depending on whether one considers the daily prayer or the Friday prayer or the five daily prayers. According to this survey, the five daily prayers concern 39% of Muslims, which represents a significant increase of 6 points over a short period of time, between 2001 and 2007. As for the Friday community prayer (at the mosque), it is currently around 25%.

Unlike the daily prayer, its increase is staggered over time: over a sequence of twenty years it has only increased by 9 points!

This survey also shows that if 41% of Muslims recognize themselves as practicing believers, 34% declare themselves simply believers, 22% define themselves as of Muslim origin or culture, and finally 1% would have opted for another religion and 3% would have renounced any religion.

## 2.4 ...and to mobilize in the name of Islam

Islam in France is in fact today crossed by five dynamics that translate the multiple possible readings of Islamity.

Most Muslim religious currents tend to promote a resolutely ritualistic and normative reading of Islam. This leads to a total refocusing of Islamic belonging on the ritual sphere alone, to an over-coding of all acts of daily life, and even to a withdrawal into the doctrinal sphere in terms of exclusivist orthodoxy. This religious declension tries to ward off the dissolving effects of secularization by overvaluing the ritual device and reinforcing the doctrine.

The other religious alternative consists in a reinforced spiritualization of the reference to Islam. It tends to affirm the primacy of an Islam of the interior against any attempt to reduce Islam to a system of normativity dominated by the sole logic of *halal* and *haram*, licit and illicit. This spiritualization of Islam corresponds to the mystical path (Sufism), a plural expression of an individualization of belief within a restricted elective and emotional group based on an interpersonal attachment to the person of the *sheikh*. But it can also take the form of an ethicization of Islam which could lead to a liberal or reformed Islam similar to what liberal Judaism represents in the Jewish world. This approach is part of a logic of self-centered development that tends to relativize any externalization, any excessive effusion of religion in the century in favor of spiritual self-realization or the return to an ethical and intellectualized (rational) version of the Islamic faith.

But Islam in France is also expressed through currents structured around a resolutely political understanding of belonging to Islam. For them, being Muslim is not limited to praying within the narrow walls of mosques, but to engaging in the city in the name of values and principles supposedly derived from their understanding of Islam. A first dynamic is then emerging which promotes a citizen religiosity. This is what is notably carried by the young French (and European) Muslim associative fabric in the form of a claim of belonging to Islam in a non-Muslim and religiously pluralist environment combining the act of believing and a determined social action (link between faith and social justice, liberation from consumer society, reopening the question of meaning in secularized societies...). This more socio-centered logic leads to the claim of a civic Islam, for which there can be no Islamic consciousness without social consciousness and therefore a political consciousness (Ramadan 2003).

The other political alternative in the name of Islam is carried by currents directly linked to Islamic movements active in Muslim societies, which are often in direct confrontation with the regimes around the conquest of power by legal means, or on the contrary, on the basis of armed mobilizations.

Finally, one of the effects of the secularization of Islam in France could be the "exit from religion" through the ethnicization of the Islamic referent, which becomes a substitute for identity (nominal Islam), the equivalent of a community marker that social actors mobilize according to circumstances, depending on local or international issues, independently of any actual practice. This is the case with the "virtual Islam" of certain young people in the suburbs who express themselves rhetorically and by adopting coded gestures (hand on heart) and episodically in a vindictive mode (provocative Islam)

in the form of slogans referring to Iraq, Palestine, or Bin Laden. This category also includes the "minimal" or "residual" Islam of secular Muslim elites who do not give up emphasizing their Islamic origins in order to better distinguish themselves from all radical contemporary Islamic expressions. Finally, another variant can be found in certain types of intellectual discourse that do not want to be associated with religious classical Islam. According to this view "religious normality" today resides in a necessary distancing from any practice, any attitude and any claim using religious vocabulary (Bidar 2004). What amounts to postulate, as far as Islam is concerned, that by ricochet, the "deviant" religious form, the religion out of the norm, would paradoxically be the various expressions of orthonormed if not orthodox Islam.

It is around this delicate question of the redefinition of the contours of Muslim communities in France that the future of the reference to Islam in the north of the Mediterranean basin is at stake.

While literalist currents consider that Islam must be observed to the letter in all its normative dimensions without taking into account the local or national environment, without even tolerating other readings of the same tradition in the name of a supposed original purity, others consider it necessary to cut back the horizontal, normative and constraining dimension that Islam comprises in favor of its inner dimension, of the spirituality of questioning, or even to bring about the emergence of a new Muslim consciousness (Geoffroy 2009).

Some religious leaders believe that the progressive integration of Muslims passes by the production of an adapted Islamic normativity which guarantees a minimal orthodoxy in a secular society (sharia of minority! Oubrou 2019), while others believe that the faith, in Islam, passes by an immersion in the social.

Finally, secular intellectuals speak out against any overly religiocentric approach to Islam and boldly call for the liberation of Islam from any logic of submission (Bidar 2006; 2008).

These Muslim religiosities in France, as elsewhere in the world, are there to remind us how much Islam, under the guise of a call for communal unanimity, is indeed a bearer of plural singularities.

### **3. Governing Islam in France?**

It should be noted that one of the specificities of Islam in France is also that this religion has developed within the framework of a secular system, without any real equivalent in the rest of Europe.

In this system, the State is supposed to be religiously neutral, and no public support, notably in the form of compulsory public funding, applies to religions, which are supposed to organize themselves freely according to their own rules and customs (Messner et al 2013).

As far as the situation of the Muslim religion is concerned, it must be noted, however, that we are faced with a secular state which, for the past thirty years, has regularly intervened to forge an official representation of this religion, and still seems reluctant to consecrate in practice the autonomy of Islam in relation to the public authorities (Frégosi 2012).

#### **3.1 The colonial moment and the pursuit of the institutional fabrication of the Islam of France**

In a pioneering study on colonial Algeria, the historian Oissila Saadia (Oissila 2015) describes the different stages and motivations that presided over the invention of the Muslim cult from 1851. This was mainly summarized in the production of a classification of Muslim religious buildings, the establishment of a hierarchy of personnel serving these religious spaces and a process of appointment by the colonial administration, without forgetting the establishment of direct financial links at the end of which the servants (imâms, readers of the Koran, guardians...) were salaried by the



administration to whom the said buildings belonged from then on in place of the traditional system of pious foundations. Beyond this process of concordatization without a real Concordat of Islam in Algeria, which was to survive the vote of the law of 9 December 1905 on the separation of religions and the State (never extended to the three Algerian departments!), a public logic of surveillance and systematic control of the public exercise of the Muslim religion was deployed. This process was accentuated as the Algerian national movement developed (Achi 2007).

This dynamic of governance of Islam found its metropolitan extension with the erection of the Muslim Institute of the Great Mosque of Paris (IMMP) in the 1920s. This building, which was initially intended to honor the memory of the soldiers of the colonial armies, was to serve as a showcase for France's colonial enterprise, which was presented as respectful of the religious needs of its Muslim subjects, while at the same time being resolutely in line with a policy of control and surveillance of the population through the religious sphere in the metropolis, even though religious life there was most often embryonic (Sellam 2006).

It is not insignificant to also note that, once it came under the control of the Algerian authorities during the 1980s, the Great Mosque of Paris retained this implicit social function of a religious authority in charge of regulating the Muslim religious services offered to the Algerian diaspora in France, while at the same time ensuring its loyalty to the regime in Algiers.

### 3.2 Top-down organization policies of Islam today

From the 1990s onwards, all successive governments in France have implemented particularly proactive policies towards Islam. The secular state thus took an active part in the process of institutionalization of Islam, to the point of making the public authorities themselves the main architects of the representation of the Muslim faith.

This is how the Conseil de Réflexion sur l'Islam en France (CORIF) was created in 1990, the Charte du culte musulman en France (*Charter of the Muslim Faith in France*) in 1995, and la Consultation des musulmans de France (*al istishâra*) in 1998, from which the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM) was created in 2002, following a process that combined state voluntarism and consultation with the various Muslim federations, not to mention the consultation of foreign chancelleries and experts.

The CORIF, created at the initiative of the socialist minister Pierre Joxe, was a simple ad hoc para-ministerial body, acting both as a collegial consultative body providing the minister with advice on practical aspects of the cult that might concern the administration (the setting of the beginning of the Ramadan fast, ritual slaughter, Muslim squares in cemeteries, etc.) and as a body responsible for thinking about the contours of a future representative organization of the Muslim cult. The Charter of the Muslim faith in France promoted by the Great Mosque of Paris was endorsed by Charles Pasqua, the Gaullist Minister of the Interior. This document was supposed to regulate the different sensitivities and currents crossing the Islamic communities in France and to define the relations between the State and the Muslim cult. The said charter, which was presented as the expression of the contractual character marking the situation of Islam outside the Muslim world, provided for the creation of a Representative Council of Muslims in France. Presented as the founding act of an Islam passing from the social status of a tolerated religion to that of an accepted religion, this charter was only ratified by a limited number of Muslim organizations. In reaction, a short-lived High Council of Muslims of France (HCMF) was created, which was at the origin of the constitution of a National Council of Imams of France (CNIF) whose only symbolic measure was to publish a fatwa (legal opinion) condemning the kidnapping in Algeria of the Trappist monks of the monastery of Tibéhirine in May 1996.

In November 1998, on the initiative of the socialist minister Jean Pierre Chevènement, an official consultation (*al istishâra*) was launched with the five main Muslim organizations of France with a religious orientation and reflecting the various sensitivities and ethnic components of the Muslim populations of France<sup>3</sup>, to which various Muslim personalities<sup>4</sup> and six major mosques and regional Islamic centers<sup>5</sup> were also invited. This consultation had a double objective: on the one hand, to complete the integration of the Muslim faith within the framework of the principles and rules of the law of December 9, 1905, and on the other hand, to create a central and confederal body for the Muslim faith. A framework agreement signed on July 3, 2001 set out the terms and conditions for the election of members of the French Council of the Muslim Faith by the places of worship. Nicolas Sarkozy took up this approach and made a few modifications (appointment of a good part of the members of the body by co-optation, nomination of a woman within it...) before the first CFCM was created in 2003. While failing to regulate the practice of Islam in France, this council was above all intended to spare the egos of Muslim notables, while at the same time ratifying the interests of foreign powers (Algeria, Morocco in particular) wishing to influence the governance of Islam, without offending the proponents of religious conservatism and their hexagonal relay (the UOIF). Algeria was to hold the presidency of the future council, its Moroccan rival and the more conservative Muslims two vice-presidencies, and the secretariat was to be provided by the representative of Turkish State Official Islam from Ankara.

The process of elaboration and consecration of the CFCM as the sole representative body of the Muslim faith in France turned out to be a process of selection of Muslim interlocutors deemed legitimate with whom the public authorities intended to dialogue and negotiate. In return, this meant formally disqualifying all the others who were kept on the sidelines, or who refused to participate in this original mechanism of production of an official Islam in a secular State. This was the case of the associations of young Muslims, critical of the Muslim notables chosen as partners by the public authorities, and of certain organizations grouping foreign Muslims, relaying in France political opposition movements such as the Turkish *Millî Görüş*, to which was preferred the official Islam of the *Diyanet* (Akgönül 2005).

### 3.3 A governance in crisis

Since its creation, the CFCM has seen its community legitimacy regularly and seriously weakened with each election. Some of the federations that participated in its foundation, such as the UOIF, the Muslim Institute of the Mosque of Paris and the Grand Mosque of Lyon, boycotted it, demanding a complete overhaul of its mode of designation. Most of the claims were in fact more about a rebalancing of the CFCM's membership in favor of co-opted personalities and about a reworking of the very principle of calculating the number of delegates in proportion to the floor space of places of worship, than about soliciting the direct vote of the faithful. A reform finally took place in February 2013 that reinforced the principle of collegiality by setting up a rotating presidency of the CFCM every two years, between the different federations participating in the elections.

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<sup>3</sup> Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF), Institut Musulman de la Mosquée de Paris (IMMP), Fédération Nationale des Musulmans de France (FNMF), *Tabligh*, and *Diyanet* (Turkish State Official Islam).

<sup>4</sup> They were Saada Mamadou Bâ CNRS ethnologist, Soheib Bencheikh Grand Mufti of Marseille, the scholar and editor Michel Chodkiewicz (replaced by Eric Geoffroy), Khaled Bentounès *cheikh* of the *Alawiyya Brotherhood*, the theologian Mohsen Ismaïl and Bétoule Fekkar Lambiotte director of the association "Terres d'Europe".

<sup>5</sup> The *Ad da'wa* Mosque in Paris (declined the invitation), the Islamic center of Évry-Couronnes, Mantes-la-Jolie Grand Mosque, Lyon Grand Mosque, and *Islah* Mosque in Marseille and the Grand Mosque of Saint-Denis de la Réunion.

This focus on the issue of the emergence driven by the public authorities of a body representing the Muslim faith is still relevant, as evidenced by the initiatives around the creation of a body for dialogue with Islam in 2013 at the initiative of the Minister of the Interior Bernard Cazeneuve, the more recent developments around the publication of the Charter of the Imam in France published in March 2017 by the CFCM, or the generalization of diploma training civil and civic for Muslim clerics (Bobineau 2010) and then expanded to other faiths. In July 2019, a circular from the Ministry of the Interior had been sent to all prefectures (state administration within a French department) to invite local Muslim associative leaders (in charge of mosques or simple Muslim collectives...) to participate in local dialogue instances and to reflect on a redesign of the organization of the Muslim cult from a departmental logic.

The development of jihadism in which young French people are involved (Truong 2017) has also contributed to giving the question of the administration of religion a strong security resonance. As various parliamentary reports attest (Feret et al 2016; Ciotti and Menucci 2015; Goulet et al. 2015), the time has come to mobilize all public state actors, and their private Muslim partners, in the fight against radicalization using an Islamic frame of reference. Muslim leaders, as well as imâms, are often invited to become auxiliary forces of public authorities in their fight against the supporters of radical violence using an Islamic frame of reference (Mamoun 2017).

The governance of Islam in France reached a new stage in 2021, with the end of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), announced by Gérald Darmanin, Minister of the Interior in charge of religious policies, and the announcement by the government of the creation in February 2022 of a Forum of Islam in France (FORIF), promoted as a new channel of expression of the relations between the public authorities and Islam. The CFCM during the last twenty years paradoxically embodied the official Islam of a secular state, enjoying the official recognition of all governments. In spite of this, it has not succeeded in gaining legitimacy, especially among the main people concerned, namely French Muslims.

As a showcase for an Islam of notables linked to the major federations of foreign states or embodying various transnational currents of Islam (pietism, Muslim Brotherhood, etc.), the CFCM has not taken up some of the expected challenges, such as the financing of the cult, the training of imâms, and the fair representation of all components of Islam and of Muslim generations (etc.). The initiative taken by the associative leader Marwan Mohammed (former president of the Council Against Islamophobia in France) in April 2019 to launch a vast online questionnaire relays this state of affairs. Internet users will criticize the CFCM, the interference of foreign states while pointing to the involvement deemed disproportionate public authorities in the organization of Islam in France (Doucouré & Trinh Nguyen 2018).

The national body has often become a recording chamber for the expectations of the public authorities, drafting various solemn texts, the latest being the Charter of the Principles of Islam in France in January 2021, at the express request of the Head of State. It was above all the permanent theater of quarrels of egos, of precellence between members who considered themselves to be all indispensable and representative and striving to compete in loyalty to the public authorities, against a background of rivalries maintained by various foreign financial backers. This CFCM was too pyramidal, giving too much room to individuals co-opted by the founding members, without the ordinary faithful or even the imâms having any say, under the interested gaze of foreign chancelleries. Everyone, starting with its historical members, have taken note of its demise, those who have greatly contributed to its disgrace and those who have hastened its decay.

Today, FORIF is about breaking away from the verticality of large federations, emanating from the Algerian, Moroccan or Turkish governments, or from conservative transnational religious currents, and making room for more horizontality. The forum is made up of about 100 people chosen by the authorities from lists provided by the prefectures. These personalities are divided into four working groups: the first one is focused on the elaboration of a future status for imâms in France (and their training), the second one is concerned with the issue of chaplaincies in public services, the third one with the securitization of places of worship and the fight against anti-Muslim acts, and the last one has to watch over the application of the law of August 24, 2022, reinforcing the principles of the Republic, which modified the legal regime of religions in France.

The public authorities, who had brought the CFCM to the baptismal font, are today pronouncing its political excommunication, and agreeing to new interlocutors deemed to better reflect the Islam of the territories.

But is there not a risk that the public authorities are once again preparing to select upstream the Muslim actors deemed most likely to correspond to their expectations, in terms of independence from foreigners or from conservative Islam? At no time was the idea of letting the Muslim faithful, following the example of the French Jews and Protestants, choose by way of elections those who will have the function of governing the community bodies from the bottom up, seriously considered.

At the end of this chapter, several challenges condition the future of Islam in France.

-The first challenge is that of radicalization. What happened in January 2015 (attacks against Charlie-Hebdo and the Hyper Cacher at Porte de Vincennes), then in November (shootings at the Bataclan and on restaurant terraces in Paris), and again in 2020 (the murder of Samuel Paty and three people in a church) leads us to reflect further upstream on the articulation between social and psychological data, context and various clues that mark out the paths of radicalization of certain young Muslims. In short, it is a question of trying to identify the type of demographic, social, even cultural, and psychological soil, the types of social and human distress; on which certain radical discourses instrumentalizing religion take root. The idea is not simply to identify possible religious currents supposed to be sectarian, but not to lose sight of the fact that what makes these currents attractive is both their capacity to surf on frustrations and social distress and their claim to produce meaning, to put words on the evils experienced or felt subjectively by individuals who are fragile, mistreated or simply lacking strong reference points. The question cannot be reduced to its exclusively security aspect (which remains indispensable!), it is also necessary to provide a social, political, and even religious response.

-The other challenge concerns secularism. We have observed that what is taking shape today is also the tendency, in the belief that we are responding to the process of increased visibility of the religious phenomenon in the public space, to react by reinforcing the secular legislative system through the vote of new restrictive laws on religious expression (with Islam as an implicit target!). The risk of deviating the secular ideal into a punitive device against religious minorities is real and risks feeding in return the machine to manufacture self-victimization among some French people of Muslim faith.

-Finally, everyone today seems to agree on wanting, for example, that imâms be listened to more, and that they take an active part in the fight against radical temptation, and that they benefit from civil training in France. They should have been involved in the governance of Islam at a much earlier stage, and not confined to the role of extras, spectators or, worse, the source of all the problems.

The same goes for the believers and users of the places of worship that are the faithful. Any reorganization of Islam in France cannot escape a re-evaluation of the role of the faithful, regular, or occasional users of the places of worship, and main financiers of the cult.

The government of Islam in a secular regime would gain in legitimacy if it were rethought in close association with the main interested parties who are the faithful on the one hand, and their imâms on the other.

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**Abstract**

This chapter points out the original situation of Muslims in France, settled and established in a deeply secularized society, and facing one of the more secular European State.

Different way of being Muslims within the society are analyzed as well as the different religious currents observed in France.

Finally, we focused on the main issue of governing Islam in the specific context of a State supposed to be neutral, protecting both freedom of religion and being separated from religious institutions.

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