

Islam in/of France: Dilemmas of Translocality

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Immigrants, from wherever they come, are challenged to reimagine who they are and how they should live. Muslims coming to Europe face problems specific both to features of Islam and to the particular countries where they come to reside. I address one dimension of Islamic reimaginings in contemporary France: the tension between demands to maintain the translocal orientation of Islam and demands to develop an Islam proper to France. The tension creates debates among Muslims about the normativity of certain ways of speaking and acting, leads to accusations of insufficient assimilation by non-Muslims, and produces ways of speaking that index these tensions. To illustrate, I refer to issues of language, praying, and jurisprudence. I argue that these tensions are not transient in a history of immigration, but are bound to persist as a sign of competing attachments to Islam and to France. In the end, I contrast this condition of normative intermediacy to the adaptive networks that have formed the main object of study under the rubrics of transnational or global forms of Islam.

Two Poles of Identification

Muslims in France include converts, second-generation French residents, and immigrants, most from North Africa. The majority of Muslims in France either speak Arabic or had parents who do so, but only about one-half of those who heard Arabic regularly at home in turn speak it with their own children. Muslims attending a mosque or a lecture in France usually include both people with little Arabic and people with little French, a distinction strongly correlated with age. For this reason, many public events must be held in two languages, or risk appealing only to one generation.

The normative qualities attached to speaking each language have meant that each continues to assert its claim on Muslims. Practically, the education of younger people in Islamic affairs must proceed in French. Moreover, assimilation, as defined and implemented in France by immigration officials, schoolteachers, and scholars of immigration, is most succinctly defined by the command a resident has of French. Those who follow naturalization decisions up close say that an applicant's command of French (as reported by or to the local police) strongly affects his or her success in obtaining French nationality. More broadly, deliberation about Islam in French

is taken by some Muslims, and probably by most others in France, as a sign of Muslims deciding to build their Islam in French terms, an Islam de France rather than the merely transplanted Islam en France.

However, the language of Islamic scholarship and worship remains Arabic, and the highest authorities on Islamic topics are Arabic speakers who rarely are fluent in French. If Islam de France lies wholly in France--a part *enti_re*--then Islam in general lies elsewhere, in the networks of scholarship stretching across North Africa to the Gulf states. Islam, even of France, must in some respects continue to develop in Arabic.

Although most Islamic leaders who currently take public positions in France on these issues agree in advocating an Islam de France, they emphasize one or the other of two poles in their public deliberations: either the diasporic networks of Muslims in Europe, Africa, and Asia, united by Arabic and by common political as well as scholarly visions, or the hexagonal framing of Islam within France, distinguished by a commitment to *laïcité*. The "diasporic" pole relies on experts from Arabic-speaking countries, many of whom gather in the European Council for Fatwa and Research, led by the renowned Syeikh Yusuf al-Qardawy, whose opinions are diffused in Arabic through television, web sites, and word of mouth. The UOIF (Union des Organisations Islamiques de France), the largest of all the Islamic associations in France, is generally seen as standing for this emphasis, on display in the form of books, lectures, and objects offered at its annual gatherings held in hangars near the old airport of Le Bourget.

At the "hexagonal" pole is the emphasis on French language use. The review Islam de France perhaps best represents this pole, with its secularist discourse and condemnation of the UOIF for being "close to the Muslim Brotherhood", the phrase of disapproval used by those at this pole (and by non-Muslim French experts on Islam). Many Muslims with university positions find themselves here; they urge Muslims to follow a French lifestyle in France, shaping their Islam around either private prayer or an appreciation of Arabo-Muslim history and civilization (e.g., Babès 1997).

This polarity of positions developed out of the colonial relationship of the French state to Islam, articulated in particular through France's changing relationships to Algeria through the course of the 20th century. The so-called Grand Mosque of Paris, established in the 1920s, continues to be governed indirectly by Algeria (a nice complementary reversal of colonial policy). In less visible fashion, other foreign states finance mosques, train imams, and create schools for Muslim children. Even today, nearly all the imams and the teachers of Islam working in France received their educations outside the country and retain their original nationalities (Frégosi 1998). As a result of this continuing history, most Muslim leaders in France at one and

the same time condemn foreign influence in France, and yet depend on foreign assistance for building Muslim institutions in France.

One outcome of this uneasy situation is that nearly all Muslim leaders call on the French government to give them a way out. The efforts by successive Interior Ministers to create a representative body of Muslims in France have been met by criticism for their specifics (in particular when Charles Pasqua was at the same time arresting Muslims and banning Islamic publications) but widespread approval for the general principle (Bowen forthcoming). When, as in this past year, both the sending of French Muslims to the pilgrimage and the provisioning of animals for the sacrifice were disastrously mismanaged, the general response was that the state ought to do more for Muslims. One can see this call as a kind of acculturation of Muslims to the state saturation of French life, but it also results from the desire to have a financial alternative to foreign governments.

This foreign/local tension emerges in particular combinations of languages and objects at Islamic events. Thus, the UOIF promotes French state control of internal Islamic affairs and denounces foreign involvement in those affairs, but also produces a resolutely diasporic and transnationalist presentation of Islam, particularly at its annual Muslim gathering at Le Bourget. In his final speech to the 2001 assembly, the UOIF's director emphasized the importance of creating an "Islam de France", and that "it is you, and not the ambassadors, who will shape it", the line that received the strongest applause from those attending. However, most of the speeches were in Arabic with minimal translations. In the auditorium, when speakers were not on stage, a video loop was continually running, which showed Syaikh al-Qaradawy attending the previous year's gathering, giving an interview, walking off a stage, and giving a lecture, all in Arabic. The sounds and images corresponded to what Muslim secularists and non-Muslim French observers think that "diasporic" events ought to look like, emphasizing Arabic language, appeals to aid to Palestinians and Chechens, booths selling the mishwak (a stick used to brush the teeth, also used by the Prophet), and people wearing "Muslim dress."

Transgression

Non-Muslim French expectations from Muslims are strongly shaped by the idea of *laïcité*, the idea that public institutional life in France should be devoid of religious representations, because citizens are to fashion themselves through their participation in these institutions. French Islam troubles this idea. Let me offer the example of the highly visible speaker and writer Tariq Ramadan, the very image of a cultivated European advocate of a modern Islam, tailored to European conditions, but who nonetheless does not disavow his grandfather, Hasan al-Banna,

the founder of the aforementioned Muslim Brotherhood, and who urges Muslims to demand their rights to publicly practice their religion. For many Muslims at the "hexagonal" pole, and most non-Muslim French observers, Tariq Ramadan suspiciously transgresses the lines between the available models of Muslim ways of speaking. Here are some remarks of Olivier Roy, someone I respect as one of the most subtle students of Islam in the world, who nonetheless is situated within the French polarity:

"Tariq Ramadan; he is very fluent, a good speaker; he is unpleasant, not arrogant, but he has two languages; he plays on several registers, because he says on the one hand that we need to live in Europe, build an Islam here, but then in other contexts he says things like girls should wear the foulard, and he tells schoolboys to organize a demand for halal meat. That is betraying laicity. He may not see these as different registers, but they are. [JB: Is this his double discourse?] It is what people call his double discourse. He is, in fact, a communitarian [here he hesitated and then came back to affirm it more strongly], because he addresses himself to the Arabophone population. He wants to renew the grandeur of the Arab world. He does not speak to the convert at all. Really a Swiss model he follows, of ethnicizing religion."

Although Tariq Ramadan's lectures and publications are in French, and their content is about how Muslims ought to adapt to France and to Europe, Roy interprets his insistence on public religious expression as a desire to reach across the borders of France to the habits and thoughts of Arabic peoples, and, perhaps, to the ambitions of Islamic movements (see also Roy 1999). Similar reservations were expressed by Father Christian Delorme, who once led the movement to bring Muslims, including Tariq Ramadan, into dialogue with Christians. Delorme accused Ramadan, Larbi Kechat of the rue de Tanger mosque in Paris, and the UOIF, of "preaching a transnational Islam, which would rid Muslims of their cultural attachments" (Le Monde, 3 December 2001). The one implies the other, within this ideological framework (see also Fr,gsi 1999).

Translation

Sustaining a religious reference beyond France requires a process of continual translation across languages (as well as across social norms and legal systems, topics to be explored elsewhere), and this requires innovation, not always with smooth results. Three examples will suffice here.

In some mosques, sermons have begun to be given first in Arabic and then in French, transforming the standard dual structure of the Islamic sermon into something quite new, a bilingual edition. However, this innovation has offended a number of older worshippers.

Discussions in mosques or foyers often include interventions in French and Arabic, sometimes with efforts to translate back and forth. For example, the nearly weekly panel discussions at the Ad-Dawa mosque on the rue de Tanger, hosted by the mosque's director Larbi Kechat, nearly always include at least one non-Muslim (and non-Arabic speaking) authority on the topic of the week, and at least one Arabic-only Islamic authority, flown in from Syria, Egypt, or elsewhere. (I will be the non-Muslim speaker several weeks from now on a panel about Islamic jurisprudence). The panel design is intended to illustrate the possibilities for serious deliberation across religious lines, and given the way in which different competences map onto different languages, this line crossing also involves translations between French and Arabic. (The audience, as best as I can ascertain, usually contains people who can understand only one or the other of the two languages). On at least one recent occasion, the translator took it upon himself to render a very distinguished Islamic-expert visitor's words in such a way as to completely reverse their meaning, in an effort to prevent divisions within the Muslim community. More commonly, each intervention was reduced to a bare-bones translation of points of agreement and disagreement: reference shorn of rhetoric.

At the school I have been studying, the Institut d'Etudes Islamiques de Paris, currently housed in St. Denis, north of Paris, the instructors, all native Arabic speakers trained in Tunisia or Saudia Arabia, have tried to combine two contrasting relationships to their texts: a linguistic exegesis of the Arabic text, and a simultaneous explanation of the ideas of those texts as they are read in French translation by their students, mainly children of immigrants who, raised with little religious instruction and less Arabic, now wish to (re)discover "their religion," which they now must do in translation.

Prayer and Assimilation

In a place where the habitus is an excellent native social theory, it is unsurprising that one's everyday conduct would be inspected for signs of one's cultural allegiances and predispositions. Some of these signs are secondary aspects of religious affiliation, such as certain styles of beard; others are conceived of by many Muslims as primary religious obligations, such as wearing headcovering. Both practices have been interpreted as signs of insufficient assimilation by some French non-Muslims, and in both cases debates among Muslims about the advisability of having a "Muslim appearance" continue.

Let me consider an example that does not involve the issue of public appearance, that of the performance of the salat, worship or prayer. Salat is prescribed for Muslims in Islamic law. It is not primarily a way to communicate propositions to God, but to carry out obligations of regular

prostration, renewal, and reminding oneself of duties and humility. Precisely because its propositional content is relatively fixed, the very fact of praying, or the manner in which one prays, may be taken to indicate something about one's religious or political allegiances, piety, or identity.

In France, the frequency of performing salat was taken by one government body to indicate the degree of one's assimilation into French culture. The Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (INED) defined "assimilation" as the disappearance of culturally specific features, the convergence of behaviors onto a general French model, and a mixing of populations (Tribalat 1996:254-55). Assimilation implied the reduction of religion to the private sphere and a lessened intensity of religious practices, "in sum, a laicization of behavior" (254). Specific indices of assimilation used in the report include praying less frequently, not following the fast, abandoning polygamy, and making fewer visits to the country of origin.

Even among some younger Muslims, being a pratiquant has become identified with an antiquated, insufficiently French form of self-identification. In 2000, A friend of mine, a Muslim convert, active in Islamic education and publicity, described the strategy behind a new magazine, La Medina, as "aiming for the non-pratiquants" who identify with Islam. "The pratiquants see what we write about and dismiss it, but this other group will read it." My friend was in fact a regular observer of Islam ritual duties, and frequently excuses himself to pray during our conversations, as he did during this one. Nevertheless, he identifies "non-pratiquant" with someone interested in participating in France social life, and "pratiquant" as indicating a closed mind.

Notice how this equation of religious practice with insufficient assimilation is not, as is often written about France, a sharp division into public and private spheres. True belonging to the "community of citizens", a phrase of Dominique Schnapper's (1998) which has become part of the orthodox vocabulary, implies private assimilation to a secularized version of religion as well as public conformity.

This judgment of assimilation can have very practical consequences for the individual. Each year the French government refuses about one-third of the applicants for admission, and some of those refusals were of candidates who met the formal conditions for naturalization (Lib,ration 5 April 2000). The candidate must show "good morals" but they can also be rejected on grounds of insufficient assimilation. Some highly-educated Muslim candidates have been rejected on those grounds (D. Bourg, personal communication, 20 August 1999), as have candidates who, though themselves not part of a polygamous marriage, came from a society where polygamy was permitted (decision upheld by the administrative court of Nantes, 1990).

The idea of regularly practicing one's religion can, then, in the eyes of some government observers and some Muslims, indicate an incomplete adaptation to modern life, or to French life. Too much prayer, the wrong clothing, too many trips back to the old country, all suggest that the person is a bit too transnational to be properly national. Despite public assurances to the contrary (e.g., Frégosi 2001), it is possible, and perhaps likely, that a growing adherence to Islamic norms of ritual practice will continue to conflict with (some) French ideas about the appropriate everyday behavior of French citizens.

Fiqh in one Country?

Finally, I wish to consider the idea of developing a jurisprudence de France. Should Islamic law be universal, or adapted to fit the norms and conditions of life in different countries or regions? It was Syeikh Yousuf al-Qaradawy who initiated this discussion. In October 1999, the European Council for Fatwa and Research, headed by Qaradawy, responded to a question about the status of mortgages by approving them for Muslims in non-Muslim countries who seek to buy their first house. They cited the doctrine of extreme necessity (darurat) and the principle that while in non-Muslim countries, Muslims may make contracts that violate Islamic law.

The ruling declares that Islamic law is not evenly applicable to Muslims everywhere, and implied that, indeed, there could be a fiqh de France, or at least, of Europe. I sought out opinions for and against the ruling. One of the Council's members, Dr. Ahmed Jaballah, explained that the Council talked with people who knew how Muslims lived in Europe, that many Muslims live in poor neighborhoods, "and the only way to improve family life is to move out, and the loan helps them do that. But many in the Muslim world [NB that he used this expression frequently to refer to places other than Europe] objected to the fatwa because it approved interest. They do not understand what social life is like here."

Later the same day I attended his evening class, on fiqh, which forms part of the UOIF-sponsored Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines de Paris, an evening school for Muslim men and women similar to the IEIP mentioned earlier. The evening was focused on the flexibility of the sharĕ'a. Islam is "valid for all places and times", he explained (writing out the phrase in Arabic), but it is also adaptable to all contexts. There are universal elements and those which we change. Most things are not prescribed nor proscribed, thus they are in the large domain of "le licite", a legal vacuum. He drew a circle, with a shaded portion being those acts for which there are texts, and the much larger remainder being that vast area of "le licite".

This approach allowed Muslims in France a great deal of leeway. Other Muslim scholars were opposed, however. Hichem el-Arafa, the head of the IEIP, had been asked to speak to a group

of Tunisian students in a university residence in the suburb of Antony on the fatwa. "Everyone has heard about it; if you played "micro on the sidewalk" and asked people coming out of a mosque if they had heard of it [the fatwa] they would have. So they asked me about it. [and were you opposed?] not clearly against it, but I wanted to consider other arguments. I think that it does not lead to creativity in thinking about these issues. For example, the few experiments we do have in Islamic banking, we would not have had them if Muhammad Abduh had said that you did not need to come up with something new. And the experimentation is good, many fail and some succeed and we have new institutions."

Alongside of el-Arafa's pragmatic arguments against allowing mortgages, others opposed the idea of a non-universal fiqh. Dhaou Meskine runs an evening and weekend school, "La Réussite", in Aubervilliers, north of Paris and east of St Denis. (The school began this fall to offer one class as a state-recognized school, *sous contrat*, the first such arrangements for Muslims in France.) "There are too many families in France who are in debt," he said, "and 4,000,000 who have been unable to repay their debts." He went on to explain that there are other, creative ways of obtaining money, such as repaying the seller of the house gradually, perhaps at a higher price.

But Meskine also objected to the very idea of different laws for different places: "Syeikh Qaradawy says that interest in Europe is acceptable because Europe is not a Muslim land. But laws must be universal: if it is haram to steal, or lie, or falsify papers, or to make illegal marriages in Muslim lands, then it is also the case for Muslims living in Europe, in the "dar al-ahd", *terre de pacte*. That is the nature of religion, intended to apply everywhere."

Ideas of place and universality run through these discussions in complex ways. One might at first glance think of Ahmad Jaballah, who thinks that fiqh ought to be adapted to France, as someone contributing to an Islam de France perspective. But he argues for this flexibility in fiqh not so as to adapt to French norms, but simply because life here is difficult. His ways of speaking signal his diasporic perspective: France is not part of the *monde musulman*, the Muslim world, and so Muslims cannot be expected to live according to *shari`a* in France. Dhaou Meskine takes the opposite side, arguing for a universal Islamic law, and against mortgages, and one might initially think of him as reasoning from a diasporic perspective. However, because he does not rely on a contrast between Muslim and non-Muslim worlds, one can read his style of argument as more favorable toward Muslim adaptation to French life: *shari`a* is the same, so we must be innovative in France in order to deal with life as it presents itself here.

Transnational and Translocal

My argument has been that key normative elements identified with French and Islamic institutions have created a specific set of tensions, to which I have attached the label of "translocality." My examples also lend themselves to arguing that the real issue is transnationality: the question of to what extent Muslims should refer and defer to national culture, law, and social life in thinking about Islam.

Why, then, "translocality". I use the term to signal that the Muslim predicament in Europe is not only one of deciding about national cultures and laws, but it is also a sociological and psychological predicament of locating oneself in multiple networks of movement, communication, and imagination. The Muslims I encounter in Paris and elsewhere in France are in some sense committed to transience, either with specific goals, such as study, work, or burial in mind, or with an idea that a properly Islamic country lies out there, somewhere, to be discovered and enjoyed, or with the idea that only continual movement around the Muslim world can sustain the building of an Islam de France, through continually bringing Islamic perspectives elsewhere into contact and conflict with those that are likely to grow up in a French environment.

Other scholars also have emphasized the importance of Muslim networks in and outside Europe. Some of this research emphasizes local adaptation, particularly work on the United Kingdom and on Sufi-oriented groups, and it reconciles the anthropological focus on locality with the Islamicist focus on broader institutions and norms (Nielsen 1999; Werbner 1996). From this perspective, one can study Islamic groups as engaged in the "production of locality" (Appadurai 1996), or in the emergence of new identities in urban neighborhoods (Baumann 1996), and also take account of their links to groups elsewhere. Some of the research concerns movements such as the Tablighi Jama`a, for which the fact of residing in one or another country has no normative value, and, accordingly, research on these movements emphasizes their quality of transnational institutions (Masud 2000; Metcalf 1996).

The situation presented here is quite different, in that it is not about "adaptive networks", but about the normative intermediacy and existential translocality of individuals and institutions caught between two (or more) sets of demands. The essential feature of this second type of translocality is the normative reference to sources of authority, models for conduct, types of knowledge, that are to be found, and will continue to be found, elsewhere. It is not about producing locality, but about the limits of settling into a locale. In many ways it is closer to the older idea of a diaspora, but without necessarily evoking the nostalgia for a distant land often associated with that term (and applicable to some Muslims, yearning for a properly Muslim country.)

I have found myself misrecognizing contiguity as the "production of locality". St. Denis, where I spend as much time as I can, not only has a sizeable Muslim population, but it had, by 2001, attracted a number of Islamic institutions to a small area at its center: two schools mentioned above (the IEIP and the Paris branch of the IESH), the Paris office of Tariq Ramadan, the office of the publication La Medina, the major certifier of hallal meat, A Votre Service, a facility used for Friday prayers, an agency that arranges repatriation of corpses, and several bookstores. In my wanderings around this small area, I began to think of it as the "village equivalent" that I had been missing in my efforts to figure out how to conduct fieldwork in Paris.

It turned out, however, that I was quite wrong, and that I was the one making the connections: I had to show Tariq Ramadan where the La Medina office was (one block away!); the head of each school did not know where the other was; and neither knew about the prayer facility. The IEIP school was housed at the hallal meat certifier out of convenience, but was going to move to a new location in Paris sometime in 2002.

In other words, this was mere propinquity, the site for a number of institutions that were locating and moving according to the availability of space. Each had its own connections, but these were as likely to be to institutions elsewhere in France or Europe, or in another country, as elsewhere in St. Denis. Caught between competing attachments, these Muslims could carry their internal struggle with them anywhere.

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Héran, Filhon, and Deprez 2002. Deciding who is "Muslim" for purposes of counting is, of course, contested; the government's recent decision to organize elections for the Islamic representative body around the mosques implicitly linked mosque attendance to the right to have a voice in this election, and thus to an idea of what is a "Muslim"; the decision was sharply criticized by some Muslims who do not attend mosques. Counts of Muslims vary widely, as the government does not collect census data on religious affiliation. A recent respected government report follows the general estimates of between 4 and 5 million Muslims, with between 1/3 and 1/2 having French nationality (Haut Conseil a l'Intégration 2000: 16-18).

As I mention below, this contrast is widely used in speeches by Muslims leaders, with the former phrase always preferred to the latter, and also by academic observers, e.g., Cesari (1999).

The avoidance of Arabic extends to attacks by the editors of *Islam de France* on the government project for a representative assembly, in a process called *La Consultation*, for using an Arabic translation of the same phrase, *al-Istichara*, for the on-line government journal about the process, a usage suspected by the editors of implying that Islam in France would not be totally French (Babès and Renard 2000; see Bowen forthcoming).

Although Ramadan has written a number of books on Islam and its future in Europe (and made dozens of cassettes on a wide range of topics), I find his books of dialogue with non-Muslim interlocutors the most interesting way into his thinking; see in particular Gresh and Ramadan (2000). See also his analysis of past Islamic thinkers, including his grandfather, in Ramadan (1998).

The speaker was the very well-known Syrian scholar Syech al-Bouti, who spoke of his complete disagreement with the very creative, "liberal" scholar Muhammad Arkoun; the event was in May 2001.

In West Africa and South Asia, for example, rival Muslim movements have used slight variations in the placement of the arms or fingers to indicate affiliation to one or another religious movement. Slight mistakes in pronouncing a verse can be taken as showing defects in one's piety, as in a celebrated instance in Indonesia that I have written about elsewhere (Bowen 2000).

Intense debates concerning the proper terms and frameworks for studying immigration continue to take place in France. The Left at one time favored the use of the term "insertion", often derided as "the anglo-saxon model", referring to a model in which ethnic communities exist within an overall political framework. After 1989, the year of the first election victories of the

Front National and the first round of battles over headscarves on Muslim schoolgirls, the Left changed its preference to "integration," a term which was preferred by the authors of the most recent report on Islam in France, the Haut Conseil a L'Intégration, but continues to be used by other writers. Complicating the situation are intense personal controversies, many surrounding Michele Tribalat and Hervé Le Bras, over the appropriate categories to use or not use in describing French society.

It is difficult to know the range of associations with the word pratiquant. On the one hand, one hears the use described above; it may be that the legacy of the word's use to describe a certain category of Catholics shades its meaning in these instances. On the other hand, when forced to choose between labeling oneself as pratiquant or merely croyant, believing only, many Muslims choose the former. The survey conducted in late September 2001 by Le Monde and others of Muslims and non-Muslims in France asked Muslims to choose a label for themselves, from "believer" (42%), "believer and pratiquant" (36%), or "of Muslim origin" (16%). The "believer and practitioner" category was equal to its 1989 level, but up from an intervening survey taken in 1994. We do not know how various Muslim respondents interpreted the question, which was posed in a face to face interview, presumably by interviewers from a range of backgrounds, nor if any of the respondents might have thought themselves to be practitioners but not believers, if given the opportunity. However, Le Monde (5 October 2001) interpreted the results as showing that Muslims in France are practicing their religion more, and better able to do so collectively.

In a parallel secularization of ritual, French authorities attempted to deal with the shortage of animals for Muslims to sacrifice on this year's Feast of Sacrifice by pointing to the large amount of hallal meat available for cooking at home, assimilating what is, for Muslims, an act of killing and giving away, to a special domestic meal.

The fatwa is available from the Council's website, www.fioe.org, under the listing of decisions taken at the Fourth Ordinary Session of the Council, in Dublin, 27-31 October, 1999.

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