CHAPTER 8

FROM TRANSNATIONAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS TO INDIVIDUAL RELIGIOSITY: THE CRISIS OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN WESTERN EUROPEAN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Islam has evolved in form over recent decades in Western European countries, where its lack of institutionalization and official representation allow different ideological trends, movements, and religious organizations to compete for orthodoxy. This paper first proposes to synthesize the development of major religious trends within Islamic communities in the West over the last three decades. It drafts a tripartite periodization of dominant Islamic trends represented by Embassy Islam, transnational religious movements, and new types of local grassroots associations that are often youth-driven and mostly independent from Islamic organizations. The study assesses how these three steps represent a common evolution across various European countries. The paper first argues for a distinction between the Islam of the initial migrants and the Islam promoted by transnational religious organizations such as the Tablighi, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the various currents of Salafism. Secondly, it shows how even these transnational movements and the organizations underpinning them have already lost much influence due to Muslim citizens launching many Islamic associations and charities totally independent of both transnational religious movements and foreign religious organizations. Often associated with reformism, this trend implies a religious and ideological rupture with previous religious institutions. Different factors should be considered such as a global crisis of authority in Islam, the diversification and multiplication of religious sources of knowledge, and finally an individualization of religiosity in order to help understand the transition from the domination of transnational Islamic movements to the multiplication of religious actors and ideologies. Finally, this paper aims to inspire further research to explore new ways of understanding Islam in the West and to understand the latest interactions among Islamic schools of thought, ideologies, theology, and activism within social and political spheres.

Keywords: Activism, charity, Islam, reformism, religious movements, Salafism, faith-based organizations

1. Introduction

Three main religious phases can be identified over recent decades within Islamic communities in Western European countries. Initially, Islamic associations depended on the institutions from migrants' home countries (César, 1998). Next, the development of Islamic organizations became connected to transnational religious movements such as the Tablighi movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Salafism, all of which more specifically addressed young Muslims who had been born in those countries (i.e., second-generation immigrants). Their religious approach was particularly differentiated from the Islamic trends the migrant parents had followed, as they implied activism within the country of residence and rejected ethnical boundaries (Amghar et al., 2007) Thirdly, a new type of local grassroots associations arose, often youth-driven and mostly independent from the Islamic movements mentioned above (Barylo, 2017; Brodard, 2023). These three steps represent a common evolution observed in various European countries over the last three decades. The first purpose of this paper is to outline recent shifts in the Islamic ideological influences in mosques and religious discourses over recent years in Western Europe by highlighting the transitions between these three phases. The second purpose concerns the new challenges that have issued as a result of the decline of traditional authorities and that are expressed alongside the increase of personalized discourses on Islam and the multiplication of religious offers.

1.1. Overview of the Academic Output on Islamic Movements in Europe

Islamic movements and organizations in Europe have been studied over recent decades. However, most research has focused on specific Islamic movements and organizations and failed to provide an overall insight into Islamic trends within a country or even a city. Indeed, studies have mostly described specific movements such as the Tablighi and the Muslim Brotherhood through the lens of their concrete activities within deprived neighborhoods, mostly in France (Kepel, 1987; Khedimellah, 2001). Other studies have indirectly addressed transnational organizations and religious movements while focusing on specific subjects such as religious education or social welfare services (César, 1998). In the British context, Hamid's (2016) book *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism* offers an apt description of the main ideological and organizational influences on the Islamic landscape. Samir Amghar (2013) also provided an accurate presentation of influential Islamic movements in Europe by focusing on activism and political Islam but extending his description to other transnational movements. Two limits can be identified in his work. First, most

of his research focuses only on the French context, despite its European purpose. Secondly, the macro perspective of the research mostly approaches the studied phenomenon from the top down. Amghar studied the strategies and objectives of Islamic organizations under the assumption that these would materialize in concrete actions. However, contrary to what this approach suggests, I would argue that these ideologies and religious norms observed or articulated at the level of Islamic organizations or by those individuals who claim some form of Islamic or religious or scriptural authority for their views are not simply or blindly implemented by the actors who follow or appear to follow them. While they may incorporate these norms, they can also transform and redefine them according to their own particular context and interests. I identify a gap in the academic literature between macro research studies grounded in political science, which provide an insight into the main Islamic organizations and religious movements exploring their global strategies, and micro-empirical research that uses ethnographic tools and study concrete local phenomena such as the influence of Islamic discourses among youth. However, these latter studies often fail to connect their findings to ideological religious trends that have been implemented from above. Therefore, to complete such a top-down approach to the field, it needs to be investigated using qualitative methods such as observations and in-depth interviews in order to identify concrete practices and discourses beyond the official statements and top-down strategies and norms articulated at the organizational level and by the organizations themselves.

1.2. Methodological Approach

This paper aims to provide a rare but much-needed longitudinal view on Islamic ideological trends and their influence in Western European countries, in particular in France and Switzerland. In this respect, the paper references the academic literature as well as numerous field observations made from 2005-2018 in different countries such as France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Belgium. This field research is grounded in an ethnographic approach and includes both participant observations and informal interviews.

In addition to these background data, the paper mainly references empirical data collected through a doctorate research study (Brodard, 2023) focusing on Islamic organizations that provide social welfare services. These data are based on the in-depth case study held from 2016-2018 in Switzerland and Britain focusing on grassroots Islamic social work organizations and charities that implement social welfare services for both Muslims and non-Muslims. That research was mostly based on ethnographic immersion and participant observation, which allowed data to be collected far beyond official discourses. From that perspective, informal interviews were particularly needed to explore the hidden practices and discourses often not highlighted in

official discourses nor in semi-structured registered interviews (Lanzarini & Bruneteaux, 1998). Finally, such qualitative research based on ethnographic tools led to a deeper understanding of the issues related to ideological influences and theological diversity within Islamic movements and organizations. The data and claims provided in this paper have been directly extracted from the field observations and interviews except where bibliographic references are specified.

1.3. Assumption

In addition to the academic literature, field research studies have led to the identification of major trends in Islamic thought within specific temporal and geographical contexts. At the beginning of the 2000s, what Islam had to offer in Europe was shared on one hand among transnational movements that were characterized by their activism and inclusiveness of Muslims regardless of one's ethnic backgrounds and on the other hand among Islamic organizations that depended on foreign states. The first outcome of this paper is to present these main Islamic movements and their features by focusing on their implication in social areas.

Furthermore, the paper argues a new configuration to have been entered, one in which transnational movements and the organizations underpinning them have already lost much influence, although they still offer numerous services and activities. Over recent years, Muslim citizens have launched many Islamic associations independent from both transnational Islamic movements and foreign religious organizations. They designed some to meet social and educational needs and others to focus on advocacy and the inclusion of Muslims in society. Their major feature involves a religious ideological rupture from previous Islamic organizations. Hence, new ways to understand Islam and to follow religious norms have arisen, particularly among youth. Observations show these new youth-led organizations to still search for ways to approach Islamic knowledge and to navigate among various religious influences. Their common trend is their desire to understand Islam in light of their local culture and society, which implies the contextualization of certain Islamic norms. In this respect, their quest for knowledge contests the traditional frameworks they had previously encountered in mosques.

The study will use Islamic social work as an example to illustrate this shift. Two ethnographic studies (Brodard, 2019, 2023) show that Islamic associations involved in social work are increasingly independent from transnational movements and religious organizations. They shed light on a new religiosity that goes hand in hand with Muslims' growing independence from the major Islamic religious organizations and movements.

More broadly, the development of such independent Islamic associations is an expression of the increase in new ideologies and trends within the community. Over recent years, Islamic

discourses have become increasingly spread through the Internet, leading to the success of independent preachers whose reformist views compete with traditional and mainstream Islamic teachings. In brief, this shift within the trends observed in European Islamic communities revolves around three main aspects:

- *Personalization and individualization of religiosity*. In a secular environment, many Islamic interpretations are available on the market. Muslims can therefore choose and build their own religiosity (see Roy, 2001).
- *Crisis of authority*. The diversification and multiplication of religious sources of knowledge, coupled with their free access, gives many options to Muslims searching for Islam. This leads to the individualization of religious choices.
- *The integration of Muslims in Western societies contributes to defining a local Islam.* This local Islam tends to claim independence from both foreign organizations and transnational movements. Islamic texts are then read in light of the new context (see Hamid, 2008).

In this context, the multiplicity of religious offerings and Islamic positions leads to competition for orthodoxy in the construction of a new Islamic normativity, or conversely in the maintenance of previous religious models.

2. Islamic Organizations and Transnational Movements: Religious Activism and Welfare Services

This section aims to present recent changes in Islamic ideologies and their influence in mosques and public discourses over recent years in Western Europe. Firstly, it will address the transition from foreign Islamic organizations (i.e., Embassy Islam) to transnational Islamic movements. Secondly, it will explore the development of local associations and their new role within Muslim communities.

In Western Europe, Islamic collective engagement has been largely structured into organizations and have often been penetrated by transnational religious movements. The landscape of Islamic movements slightly differs depending on the country. However, the main transnational movements are active in most Western Europe countries, and common trends can be identified beyond national borders.

2.1. From Migrants' Organizations to Transnational Islamic Movements

In some countries, particularly in France, some researchers have drawn a distinction between the Islam of the initial migrants (i.e., fathers' Islam; Césari, 1998), logically linked to

their home countries and highly dependent on national structures, and the Islam followed by their descendants who were born or at least raised in Europe and often influenced by transnational religious movements. The Islam of the initial migrants has generally remained discreet and confined to the organization of worship, giving rise only to rare demonstrations in public spaces. In France, places of worship were at that time created around an ethno-national reference, with migrants constituting different mosques according to their origins (Césari, 1997, p. 46). In contrast, the Islam promoted by transnational religious organizations that often proselytize tends to involve broader activism and engagement in both the Muslim community and the public sphere. Moreover, Césari (1997, p. 48) mostly associated Islamic practices and religious trends to a generational belonging that opposed the religious practices of migrants in line with their previous education in their home countries, with an understanding and practice of Islam as adopted by their descendants born in France. Often breaking with the family's religious background, many of these young French Muslims have followed one of the dominant transnational movements at least at once in their lives.

In France, as in other European countries, three major transnational movements have been particularly influential since the end of the 20th century: the Tablighi, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Salafism. As the Tablighi and Muslim Brotherhood organizations have had the greatest impact in the public arena, particularly in France, their case is discussed in more detail below.

2.1.1. The Tablighi Movement (Tablighi Jamaat)

The Tablighi Jamaat is a transnational Islamic movement, founded at the beginning of the 20th century in the Indian subcontinent by Muhammad Ilyas (Khedimellah, 2001). Focused on preaching and having a puritanical apolitical discourse, it developed in many countries after the 1950s, particularly in Western Europe. The European headquarters are located in the small English town of Dewsbury, home to a large Pakistani community. In France, the movement has been active since the 1960s and been registered as an association since the early 1970s. Researcher Gilles Kepel (1987) devoted part of his book to this movement, considering its importance and rapid development. More than 20 years later, Kepel (2011) wrote again about the Tablighi in his considerable empirical study of the deprived towns of Clichy-sous-Bois and Montfermeil, situated in the suburbs of Paris. His survey collected the testimonies from residents speaking about the side effects of the religious movement's proselytizing activism in those deprived neighborhoods, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, the Tablighi played an important role against drug addiction and crime by attracting many young offenders to the daily consistent practice of Islam, particularly in the United Kingdom (Pieri, 2015, p. 24) and in France (Kepel & Arslan, 2012, p. 418).

Some publications reflect the perspective of others, such housing projects' inhabitants who often witness or have benefitted themselves from the activism of those Muslim groups. These testimonies highlight the good reputation and popular success of the Tablighi and other Muslim organizations by giving both factual information on the concrete actions of religious groups as well as the actors' subjective perceptions (Beaud & Amrani, 2004; Abd al Malik, 2004).

Khedimellah's (2001) paper is also a helpful tool for studying the Tablighi movement more formally by identifying several phases of engagement with the Tablighi movement in France. In their first phase, young men are far removed from any religious practice and live a life of deviance (mostly including petty crime or drug addiction). Next, they move onto a daily practice of Islam by regularly attending the Tablighi movement's activities. The author then indicated the last phase to involve a return to society for young Muslims who are then transformed by their investment in the Tablighi. This generally involves distancing from the religious movement accompanied by a more flexible religiosity.

Meanwhile, one French study highlighted the reorientation of many Tablighi followers toward Salafism (International Crisis Group, 2006). The same tendency was observed in my field studies (Brodard, 2023) in France between 2006-2011, as many former Tablighi followers tended to turn to Salafism and Wahhabism after a disagreement with the movement.

2.1.2. The Salafi Movements (Wahhabism)

Wahhabism (a branch of Salafism) has developed in recent decades in Western Europe in distinct and competing organizations. First, the terminologies of Salafism and Wahhabism are used here for the sake of precision, despite the refusal of some of their followers to be labelled as such. Salafism is commonly used by these groups as a self-definition; as a term, it is too broad and lacks precision: indeed, it encompasses different tendencies despite of its constant and interconnected features (Haykel, 2014, pp. 38-39). Moreover, it is often misused by the media and in political discourse. Salafism indicates a methodology and approach that promotes a return to the sources of Islam, which is therefore shared by diverse Islamic movements. Wahhabism refers more precisely to the religious doctrine formulated by Muhammad ibn 'Abd-al-Wahhab in Arabia in the 18th century (Farquhar, 2017, pp. 6-8). Wahhabism is therefore more appropriate and precise than Salafism in designating the movements and associated groups discussed below. Namely, Wahhabism is a more specific sub-branch of Salafism.

Although the researcher Sadik Hamid (2018) proposed a more complex division in the British context, Wahhabism and Salafism as currently present in Western Europe can be divided into three main currents:

- *Quietist and apolitical Wahhabism*. This leads to a withdrawal from the social and political space.
- *The activist Salafism of the Muslim World League*. This promotes activism and political participation as for the Muslim Brotherhood.
- *Jihadist Salafism*. This is subversive and promotes political violence.

Apparently apolitical and majoritarian, the first current involves strict adherence to several Muslim scholars who are generally linked to Saudi Arabia. This current implies a withdrawal from Western society, which is normally considered unholy, while promoting migration (*hijra*) to a Muslim land. Particularly influential among young people, it normally prevents social and charitable engagement in society due to how it follows a sectarian logic to promote withdrawal from societal space. Yet, like the Tablighi, it can have an indirect social effect, particularly in the context of neighborhoods that include many of its followers. Arslan and Marlière (2014) noted how the growing presence of Salafism and Wahhabism in the suburban town of Gennevilliers, France has led to a decline in traffic and in the use of hard drugs in popular neighborhoods. The perspective here is the same: Islamic preaching and the new religiosity promoted in these neighborhoods by Islamic movements have led to new social and individual behaviors that prevent drug consumption and crime.

The Muslim World League promotes a second current. Unlike the dominant quietist movement, it maintains more flexible relations with other Islamic movements, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood (Schulze, 2022). Amghar (2011) noted that the Muslim World League combines religious activism with social and educational activism, which brings it closer to the Muslim Brotherhood tradition. This proximity explains the development of activities that go far beyond worship, including intellectual, cultural, educational, and charitable projects.

The third current of Salafism promotes the political and military struggle against Arab regimes and others. It includes so-called jihadist groups of Salafist inspiration such as Al-Qaeda. Because of its minority status, illegality, and withdrawal from the public sphere in Western European countries, it has not been developed in this paper.

2.1.3. The Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood is a transnational Islamic organization founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan Al-Banna, which has subsequently expanded to several other countries (Ortega Rodrigo, 2014, p. 7) including in the West (Maréchal, 2008, p. 27-29). In Western Europe, most organizations related to the Muslim Brotherhood movement are independent and take

different names. Therefore, identifying them with the Muslim Brotherhood could seem difficult, especially as some of their leaders publicly deny this connection. Concretely, this means that Muslims often attend mosques or associations without knowing they are connected to the Muslim Brotherhood movement. However, several social scientists have written about the Muslim Brotherhood movement and its influence in Europe, highlighting the link between Islamic organizations and the transnational movement (Maréchal, 2008). From a macro perspective, political scientist Amghar (2007, 2009) broadly described the Muslim Brotherhood and its network in Western Europe. Another methodological approach (De Lavergne, 2003; Hamid, 2016, Dazey, 2019, Brodard, 2023) used ethnographic tools to explore local organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood from a micro perspective. This can therefore complete the macro data provided by Amghar's (2007, 2009) studies and similar research, highlighting concrete discourses and practices in mosques and grassroots organizations.

My previous ethnographic research studies and field works (Brodard, 2008 and 2011) in France[1] from 2007-2008 and from 2009-2011 discussed mosques and showed how the Muslim Brotherhood was the first Islamic movement to implement social and educative projects, particularly in deprived neighborhoods. These observations were in line with the quotes found in Kepel's (2004, p. 309) work, which highlighted social activism from Muslim Brotherhood organizations within society. However, Kepel considered social work and activism in society as tools for Islamization. He then seems to believe in the existence of a hidden agenda, which is in line with Davis and Robinson's (2012) popular thesis. Further interesting to note is that the Muslim Brotherhood in Western Europe generally targets a more educated and privileged public than the Tablighi and Salafi movements, whose supporters and members come from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.1.4. Other Islamic Movements in Western Europe

The three Islamic movements described above have been the more predominant and visible in Western Europe countries for over two decades. However, other foreign and transnational movements are found that are more or less locally influential depending on the context and the city.

In addition to the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism, and Tablighi, al-Ahbash has also become one of the most influential Islamic organizations in several European countries, including Switzerland, France, and Germany (Avon, 2008). Officially named the Society of Islamic Philanthropic Projects, this Lebanese association combines Sunni traditional views in *aqidah*

1 Other short consecutive field studies were occasionally conducted to monitor the evolution.

[creed], *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence], and Sufism (Hamzeh & Dekmejina, 1996). Al-Ahbash have opened mosques and Islamic centers in Europe and North America, where it offers a religious education that confronts Wahhabi views. Al Adl wal Ihsane is another Islamic organization that comes from the Muslim country of Morocco and has spread to different Western Europe countries with a significant Moroccan diaspora, such as France and Belgium (Yafout, 2017). Based on the view of its Sheikh Abdessalam Yassin, the organization combines a Sufi perspective with activism in a way similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In addition, a resurgence of a traditional Islam (Van Praet, 2018) can be observed in various European countries, particularly in France. This commonly refers to affiliation with one of the four schools of thought (*madhhab*s) regarding *fiqh* and adherence to the Ash'arism or Maturidism doctrines. Traditional Islam is also called neo-traditionalism by other scholars (al-Azami, 2019; Quisay, 2023), whose representatives include Hamza Yusuf in the USA, Bin Bayyah and Habib al-Jifri in the UAE, and 'Ali Gomaa in Egypt, among others. To refer to the same theological trend currently opposed to Islamist ideologies, Thomas Pierret (2011) used the denomination of Maddhabism. While traditional Islam has always been widespread in the United Kingdom, it has long been eclipsed in France by the above-mentioned transnational movements. Traditional Islam was then only visible among first-generation migrants, in the manner of the Islamic embassy mentioned earlier. In recent years, however, traditional Islam has been revitalized among youth, where it competes for orthodoxy against Salafism (Van Praet, 2018).

This descriptive part of influential Islamic trends and currents in Western European countries is important for understanding the local Islamic landscape and competitive relationships among ideologies. Furthermore, it helps one grasp the organizational frames in which political, social, and charitable projects have been launched within an Islamic framework. From this perspective, the Islamic movements and organizations outlined above have competed in Western countries in the quest for legitimacy and for clients.

2.2. Loss of Influence in Transnational Islamic Movements and the Development of Local Muslim Associations

While Islamic engagement in France and other European countries remained closely confined to religious organizations that were linked to a few well-defined transnational Islamic currents in the early 2000s, the emergence of Muslim associations in the social work sector a few years later in France (Brodard, 2011) as well as in Great Britain (Warden, 2013; Barylo, 2017) reveals an increasing tendency toward independence from Muslim groups. This trend

could be considered a significant step toward the development of an indigenous Islam that can gradually break away from foreign influences.

2.2.1. New Islamic Social Work Associations in France

Between around 1980-2010, social welfare services Muslims implemented in the name of their faith were intimately linked to these religious movements that were particularly active in the public and community spheres outside of worship activities. In France, many cases of social, charitable, or educational projects linked to Islam concerned the associations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Islamic social work also developed informally at the local level around the projects and initiatives of Muslim groups that were not very institutionalized nor linked to important organizations. For instance, Bouzar (2001) conducted research in Lille on the role of Muslim preachers and imams in preventing and solving social problems such as urban violence and youth crime in disadvantaged neighborhoods. A few years later, Barbey (2007) also emphasized the role of Muslim preachers in civic education and in preventing incivilities and delinquency in the sensitive context of low-income housing projects in Marseille. In both these examples, religious work and education was supposed to impact the surrounding society and communities, particularly by preventing misconduct and bad behavior, as well as by providing youth with values and norms that would ultimately tend to benefit the whole neighborhood. In those cases, however, social work and civic education could be perceived more as a side effect than a purpose, because the main objectives of those mosques and Islamic associations remained the organization of worship and of religious education.

Conversely, several independent Islamic associations were set up after 2008 with the central aim of providing social welfare services to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Between 2008-2015, dozens of such associations were created in the Paris area, mostly to address homelessness and to provide poor people with free meals. One main feature of these associations was their independence from transnational Islamic movements and religious organizations. They gathered Muslims from heterogeneous theological and ideological backgrounds. Mostly launched by Muslims born and raised in France, these associations indicate a new step toward a contextualization of Islam within the country, one that goes hand in hand with distancing itself from the previous religious trends imported from abroad. Therefore, the important rise of new Islamic social work associations in France for a few years also suggests the decline of the transnational Islamic movements and organizations that have lost control over a significant part of practicing Muslims who now express their faith through independent projects and tend to construct their own Islamic reference system.

2.2.2. Youth-Led Islamic Organizations in Switzerland

In Switzerland, the Islamic landscape has also considerably changed over the last decade. Youth-led Islamic organizations have been created in many cities and towns in response to the monopoly of Muslim organizations controlled by first-generation migrants. As is the case in other European countries, the Muslim organizations migrants had founded were generally linked either to foreign states and organizations or to transnational movements. Conversely, the youth-led Islamic organizations are independent from any foreign movements and normally do not belong to specific theological schools. Rather, their projects are launched for specific purposes such as education, advocacy, or welfare activities.

Several such youth-led organizations can be named, such as Frislam in Fribourg, DIAC in Geneva, Ummah in Zurich, and Niya in Neuchâtel. Despite their differences, they all express independence from dominant Muslim organizations and foreign Islamic movements. Moreover, most have established partnerships and gather through the Young Swiss Muslim Network.

2.2.3. In the British Context

In the United Kingdom, Islamic social work organizations as well as youth-led Islamic associations have also been growing in number. The InTouch Foundation in Bradford is a Muslim charity created to feed the homeless. Kumon Y'All in Dewsbury addresses the needs of young Muslims and tackles not only extremism and radicalization, but also racism and exclusion. It aims to build bridges between Muslims and non-Muslims and to bring people together regardless of their origin or religion. Rumi's Cave in London is another interesting example of a youth-led Muslim association that develops a wide range of religious, educational, and social services also aimed at both Muslims and non-Muslims (Brodard, 2023). All these organizations focus on a specific purpose rather than theological or ideological affiliations. As a result, they can bring together Muslims of various denominations and sensitivities around concrete objectives related to their local context. In this regard, these organizations also contribute to undermining the influence of transnational movements by providing alternative ways to understand and practice Islam collectively.

Moreover, British scholar Sadek Hamid (2008) already noted how Salafism in Britain had split into several movements and organizations. The local context influences how Salafism is understood by its followers and has become for some more of a methodology than a theological movement, whose main teaching theoretically[2] prescribes the following of the Quran

2 Nevertheless, this theoretical injunction is being questioned by the strong prevalence of the influence of certain schools within the Salafist movement, such as the *Athariyyah* in terms of dogma and the *Hanbali madhhab* regarding the *fiqh* methodology.

and Sunnah without the mediation of dogmatic *('aqeedah*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) schools (Hamid, 2016, p. 141). Here again, older and formerly predominant organizations and transnational movements appear to have lost some of their influence, as local actors constantly redefine their religiosity.

In short, this paper highlights a new configuration of Islamic activism in the West, one in which transnational movements and the organizations underpinning them have already lost much influence despite still offering numerous services and activities. In recent years, Muslim citizens have launched many Islamic associations completely independent from both transnational Islamic movements and foreign religious organizations. Some are designed to meet social and educational needs, while others focus on advocacy and the inclusion of Muslims in society. Their major trend involves a religious ideological rupture from previous religious institutions. Arguably new ways of understanding Islam and following religious norms have arisen, particularly among youths. Observations show these new youth-led organizations to still look for ways to approach Islamic knowledge and to navigate between different religious influences. Their common trend is the desire to contextualize Islam in light of local social realities and their quest for knowledge to tackle the traditional frameworks they'd previously encountered in mosques.

3. Traditional Authority's Decline, New Religiosities, and Contemporary Challenges

Based on the assumption that the major transnational Islamic movements have already lost part of their influence, this section explores the concrete and possible consequences linked to the multiplication of religious interpretations and associations that provide alternative ideologies. As mentioned above regarding Islamic social work and new independent associations, remembering that their managers generally share a deep commitment to Islam while refusing to belong to a specific religious movement is important, as was the case few years earlier. These empirical observations shed light on a new religiosity related to a certain independence Muslims feel toward the previous major organizations and religious movements. More broadly, the development of such independent Islamic associations is an expression of the increase in new ideologies and trends within the community. In recent last years, Islamic discourses have increasingly spread through the Internet, which has led to the success of YouTube preachers and 'independent' Imams whose reformist views compete with traditional and mainstream Islamic teachings.

As mentioned in Section 1.3 (Assumptions), three main factors should be explored to better understand the transition from the former domination of transnational Islamic movements to the more recent multiplication of religious actors and ideologies. These are: (1) a crisis of

authority in Islam, (2) the diversification and multiplication of religious sources of knowledge, and (3) religiosity and individualization as personal ways to interpret and practice Islam.

3.1. The Crisis of Authority in Islam

Hamid (2008) contended Salafism to be evolving in the United Kingdom, implying a distancing from formal movements on the part of Muslims who increasingly reject affiliation to a particular group or organization. He described this post-theological trend as "a literalist reading of scripture, but which is not aligned with any particular group or institution; or those who might be described as 'post-Salafi'" (p. 11). Hamid went on to emphasize a new trend among European Muslims and how they tend to move away from ancient Islamic movements and organizations and develop their own ways to understand and practice Islam. These comments converge with my field observations, particularly on Islamic social work as discussed above.

The decline in religious authorities from the previously dominant transnational movements implies a crisis of religious authority within Islam in Western countries, one which allows other interpretations and views to develop and seek their own public. Therefore, one could observe an increase in Islamic discourses held by organizations and independent preachers in some countries. In this context, denying that Muslims in the West are facing an increasingly wide range of competing Islamic interpretations seems impossible. To the extent that no religious institution can impose its own interpretation of Islam, consensus appears less regarding orthodoxy, and this is combined with a diversification of religious thoughts. Indeed, every preacher or organization claims their view to be in line with Islam.

In addition, importance is had in understanding that Islamic norms and views are not only implemented through a top-down approach. In the introduction, the critique of macro perspectives and the political science approach to Islamic ideologies and movements made clear that the analysis of organizations' strategies and preachers' speeches was not enough to provide a deep understanding of the subject. Complementing this with an examination of the concrete practices of Muslims is also crucial, and this justifies the use of ethnographic methods. Therefore, assuming that Muslims' practices simply reflect preachers' discourses is wrong. Rather, Muslims in the field redefine Islamic practices in line with their own context.

Referring to Asad (2009) as well as Amir-Moazami and Salvatore (2003) while talking about the German context, Bendixsen (2013, p. 284) explained how "youths' beliefs and practices (the religious culture) of Islam must be situated within a discursive Muslim tradition that is constantly subject to internal transformations." Discussing the young Muslims in Berlin, she added, "Their religious practices become localized within the Berlin context,

encouraging them to find ways to practice Islam in the manner best suited for their specific socio-cultural sphere" (p. 284). These comments converge with my field observations both in Switzerland and in France, where new ways to understand, live, and practice Islam are constantly being developed by youths according to their life context and personal experience. Based on this idea, understanding the distinction between the religious discourses and positions of theologian leaders such as imams and community Muslim scholars, which are based on religious reflection and tradition and spread from above through authority arguments and scholarly legitimacy, is important, as is understanding the religious culture and understanding of Muslims at a grassroots level.

From that perspective, sociologist Göle (2013) proposed a distinction between the production of an ideological corpus and that of collective imaginaries within the Muslim community. In her understanding, the Muslim habitus is not so much the result of the internalization of norms derived from the ideological corpus as it is adherence to the codes of a collective imaginary. This remark implies a certain gap between theological discourses from above that thinkers, theologians, or Imams convey and the popular views Muslims have about Islam. The latter refers to individual religious views that are not built on theological discourses despite being collectively shared. Göle thus emphasized these new Muslim collective imaginaries in Western Europe countries, in contrast to the theological norms conveyed and spread in the speeches of imams and scholars.

The individualization of religion implies the redefinition and re-appropriation of religion by believers, unlike vertical relationships in which the norm would pass through traditionally recognized authorities. The individualization of religion can naturally take very varied forms, but these remain paradoxically collective in the sense that they rally individuals who share the same understanding. This refers to the rise of new standards or the updating of old ones in the current context. These can range from the most stringent and restrictive postures to the most liberal and progressive opinions.

Linked to the collective imaginaries, the Muslim habitus mentioned above is not clearly defined and above all differs according to context. Talking about it in the plural would be more prudent, noting how the emergence and affirmation of the Muslim habitus are always embedded in limited social, temporal, and geographical contexts. The Muslim habitus seems to somehow constitute religious trends, such as the adoption of certain modes of consumption and above all the prohibition of practices deemed prohibited by the group, regardless of whether the prohibitions are respected by the followers. For example, shaking hands with a person of the opposite sex may be considered religiously prohibited in some limited contexts,

and such a rule may eventually become the norm in some confined community environments. Various observations show that even those who openly violate the norm in those environments promote it in their speech. For instance, a woman who has physical contact with men and who does not dress according to the so-called Islamic standards publicly claims that shaking hands with the opposite sex is *haram* and that the veil is compulsory for women. Rather than her compliance to these practices, her statements and overall adhesion to the collective norms is what allows her to be considered a member of the community. Another example is the practice of the *muqabala*[3] as a legal way of meeting one's future spouse; this has spread in some Muslim youth circles in France to the point that it seems to have become a shared norm according to many Muslims. However, this practice was not a result of theological discourse. Rather, it began to be considered as an Islamic norm by some young Muslims who promoted this new practice around them until it was accepted as an Islamic practice. This is another example of the gap between Muslim cultures and theological norms. In brief, the Muslim habitus involves compliance with the specific discourses and practices that allow the mutual identification of actors as members of the imaginary community. From that perspective, the concept of subculture as illustrated in David Lepore's (1997) ethnographic study is very helpful for understanding these new trends and their expression in the public space.

Often in contrast to the discursive norms religious authorities disseminate, the Muslim habitus refers to a popular religiosity that evolves rapidly over time and space. Because of its independence from legitimate normative frameworks and scholarly discourses on Islam, it participates in both a personalization of religion and a communalization as it implies the sharing of characteristics at a collective level.

Roy (2001, p. 78) insisted on the "loss of religious evidence," taking as his main illustration the gap between the Islam followed by the first generations of migrants and that of their children born in Europe. He argued that re-Islamization is precisely a rupture with the forms of identity acquired as a result of the migration phenomenon. Roy (p. 80) gave three reasons to explain the change in terms of religiosity following migration from Muslim countries to the West: the "dilution of the identity and ethnic community of origin," the "absence of legitimate Islamic religious authorities in host countries," and the "impossibility of legal as well as social, community and customary coercion."

3 *Muqabala*, an Arabic term simply meaning meeting, refers in that context to the meeting between a man and a woman with a view to a planned Muslim marriage, conditional on the presence of a *mahram* (guardian) for the woman, in most cases her father or one of her brothers.

As a result, Muslims participate in the definition of their self-imposed standards by being able to use them over a wide range of religious positions. This shows a freer personal relationship with religion. Roy (2001) added that the individualization of religiosity also concerns the themes Muslims address in the West. Indeed, a rise has recently occurred regarding feminist demands in the Muslim community circles in Switzerland and other European countries. In some cases, gender theories inspired by neo-Marxism ideologies have been promoted, which shows how an ideology external from the Muslim community can redirect the Muslim debate in each context by fostering new norms that were previously foreign to the Islamic reference system.

Based on these remarks, the fact that the religiosity of Muslims in Europe increasingly depends on the personal re-appropriation of religious teachings available on a particularly heterogeneous and broad market becomes clear. That said, the major ideological movements and organizations that depend on them at different levels continue to transmit certain so-called orthodox norms their audiences accept.

In short, the individualization of religiosity remains conditioned by a field of possibilities and impossibilities, and this contributes to the maintenance of certain major rules and consensual positions. This takes one back to Talal Asad's (2009) concept of the discursive tradition, as well as to Esack's (1997) comment arguing that the Qur'an can say many things and open the field of possibilities far enough while also noting that the Qur'an cannot justify everything and that certain bases and limits remain in the texts despite the wide possibilities of interpretation.

3.2. The Diversification and Multiplication of Religious Sources of Knowledge

The decline in the influence of transnational Islamic movements and Embassy Islam has fostered the diversification of alternative Islamic viewpoints and teachings. If the Internet plays a crucial role in this multiplication of the sources of religious knowledge, the fact that the Internet only relays religious viewpoints that have previously been developed in the field, either in local mosques or in grassroots associations, is important to note. Indeed, the so-called YouTube imams are generally Imams who work in local mosques, who had been active for a long time in the community before being exposed online, and whose students often spread their conferences and speeches. Hence, these imams should be considered as religious thinkers and community activists before being viewed as YouTubers or bloggers. Nevertheless, the success of many has been possible only through the Internet, which has allowed them to dis-

seminate their speeches far beyond their mosque, neighborhood, and sphere of influence. Over the last decade, the democratization of the Internet has fostered free access to various Islamic sources of knowledge. Nearly every group, movement, and organization is active online. Field observations emphasize that many Muslims, particularly more among the youth, use the Internet on a regular basis for their religious education needs. They refer to the numerous imams, preachers, and activists they follow on social media. Mentioning some of these Imams whose views and understandings of Islam are independent from the traditional frameworks and major transnational movements mentioned above would be useful here.

For instance, Adnan Ibrahim has become a well-known imam and Muslim scholar. Employed as an imam in an Austrian mosque, he has acquired a great notoriety in many Arabic-speaking countries and beyond. In France, Mohamed Bajrafil is considered an important reference within the Muslim community. After having grown up in the Comoros Islands within a family of Muslim scholars who follow the *Shafi'i madhhab*[4], he came to France and began serving as an imam near Paris. His approach combines references to the Islamic tradition and critical stances, and his methodology implies a return to the Qur'an as well as to logical reasoning to sort out what is accurate or not in the tradition. Therefore, although he could be considered a *Shafi'i* scholar, this imam gives statements that often go against the dominant orthodox positions. Still in France, imams Tareq Oubrou and Islam ibn Ahmad can also be cited and have quite similar methodologies. Both believe in the Qur'an as a revelation and emphasize the sacred Book. However, they treat the other traditional texts carefully, including *ahadith*[5] and *fiqh* by estimating that some *ahadith* are not from the Prophet despite being compiled in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. Furthermore, they assume the *fiqh* literature to be a human production and therefore must be reviewed and criticized.

To sum up, the decline in the influence of dominant transnational Islamic movements and the rise of new Muslim thinkers have led to an increase in the diversity of religious offers. In this context, Muslims in Western European countries have access to a large set of religious discourses and ideologies. They also participate in the construction of new so-called Islamic trends by bringing their own understanding and reflection. This may involve the risk of an individualization of religion and thus raises the question of a possible dilution of Islam within relativist and subjective religiosities.

4 One of the four main schools of *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence].

5 Religious traditions and sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammed.

3.3. Religiosity and Individualization: Personal Ways to Interpret and Practice Islam

In the current context of Western Europe countries, the multiplicity of religious offers and Islamic interpretations has led to a competition for the orthodoxy in constructing a new Islamic normativity, or conversely in maintaining previous religious models. This multiplication of religious views within the Muslim communities also benefits marginal branches such as so-called progressive and liberal Islam, which is fostered by certain Western ideological trends. Therefore, not only imams and Muslim thinkers compete for legitimacy but also Muslim activists and a broader range of movements that strongly diverge from one another. So far, estimating the limits and consequences of this increase in Islamic trends and ideologies has been difficult. Mosques in Western European countries continue to be controlled and managed by the main Islamic organizations and transnational movements. However, feminist and progressive movements have also set up associations and grassroots projects in various towns, thus contributing to redefining the Muslim landscape.

For instance, some Muslim activists and preachers have campaigned for the right for women to lead ritual prayers. They argue that women should be allowed to be imams based on the rationale of gender equality. They have set up associations and sometimes even mosques to promote their views, generally benefitting from significant support from non-Muslim organizations. In Switzerland, a Christian organization's manager explained once that he expected his Muslim partners to comply with gender equality standards. When asked about the concrete modalities of such standards, he argued that it could imply the possibility of women being imams just as men can. Therefore, such partnerships that allow Islamic organizations to obtain funding as well as public recognition may also influence these organizations to orientate their discourses and practices toward specific directions. That such orientations, despite being in opposition to the interpretations of the vast majority of Muslim organizations, still find their place within some Muslim communities in Western European countries is interesting to note. This could raise the question of limits regarding the personalization and adaptation of Islamic norms to local standards and Western ideologies.

Finally, the reasons for the multiplication of Islamic views in Western European countries could be summed up in two ways that complete one another. Firstly, an individualization of religiosity occurs, as Roy (2001) already clearly stated. In a secular environment, many Islamic interpretations are available. Therefore, Muslims have the possibility to choose what is relevant to them and to build their own religiosity. Secondly, the integration of Muslims in

Western European countries has contributed to the definition of a local Islam, one which tends to claim its independence from foreign organizations and transnational movements. Islamic texts are then read in the light of the respective context.

4. Conclusion

The Muslim landscape has become increasingly complex, particularly in Europe. An overall insight into Islamic movements and their development over the last few decades in Western European countries has been needed to better understand the current challenges related to the evolution of Islamic thought in this part of the world. This insight has implied the need for a multidisciplinary approach deeply grounded in qualitative research, including participant observations and informal interviews. Moreover, it has required longitudinal insight, as it aims to apprehend the evolution of a phenomenon over time. Finally, it remains a subject of high importance, as new Islamic ideological and theological trends are expected to have a transnational impact and to contribute to the ongoing definition of the worldwide Ummah.

Several results can be emphasized. First, transnational Islamic movements have played a crucial role in Muslim communities of Western Europe for several decades. They have designed the major trends in Muslim communities, Islamic identities, and norms and taken part in building a strong Muslim presence in various countries and cities. Their transnational feature implies similarities beyond the countries and regions that have produced common trends in Western Europe despite national differences. Secondly, these transnational movements appear to have begun losing their influence and legitimacy in various countries, particularly in France and Switzerland. This shift has been explained above by different factors, including the rise of new discourse, the decline in traditional legitimacy and the multiplication of sources of knowledge related to Islam. The production of new interpretations of Islam constantly drives higher competition among thinkers, schools of thought, and organizations. Islamic legitimacy and religious scholarship seem to be increasingly deregulated in countries where Islam as a minority suffers from a lack of institutionalization and representation. Future and more in-depth studies are really needed to address this important topic in order to apprehend the ideological and theological diversity of Islam within non-Muslim societies and to understand the relations among religious actors, organizations, and religious movements.

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