



International Conference Working Paper
On
Islam and Political Islam in Europe
Transformations and Adaptations
Venice, December 15-16, 2017

Overview

Muslims in Europe are facing many challenges especially nowadays that the religious and the political are confused in an unprecedented way. Islam has become a political card some parties pretend to represent while others pretend to represent and protect European societies from it. Due to globalization, overlapping between societies and individuals has become very complicated, especially with the emergence of social media which have deeply affected the concept of citizenship that is geographically defined, so that the overlapping between societies and individuals having the same belief or the same cultural or religious roots is rendered smoother and more synergetic. Thus, the exchange of concerns, problems, and interests creates social and identity entanglements that transcend geographical boundaries, which reinforces the isolation of minorities and their separation from national frameworks, and the values and traditions of the societies in which they live. In Olivier Roy's view, "globalization has, through all its mechanisms, pushed

the religious phenomenon to the extreme, to the extent that the national attribute is no longer connected only with the people's movement as much as it is connected with the movement of ideas and cultures". The outstanding example of the aforementioned is "Muslims in Europe", in consideration of the effectiveness of Islamic movements' projects in expressing an important part of their general imaginary, and of the capacity of "Jihadist" movements in attracting some young people and inculcating in them hate and terror ideologies. Additionally, what the Sunni world witnessed after New York and Washington attacks, on September 11, 2001, was a shock and a phase that the Pakistani researcher Sheema Khan summarized when he warned against the consequences of "hijacking Islam", as there was a transition from criticizing the Political Islamic movements for consecrating "hijacking Islam" alternative to "Jihadist" movements riding the hijacking wave with an aggressive ideological arsenal that has drowned many parts of the Islamic and western world in extremism, in the context of what Radwan Al Sayed described as "fighting for (representing) Islam". The phenomenon of hijacking Islam and seeking to represent it exclusively has increased after the events of "the Arab spring" which has made closer the realization of the Islamic movements dream to reach authority and establish a "state of Sharia". The Arab Spring coincided with a remarkable development of the new rivals, such as Daesh and al-Qaeda, and other movements called Jihadist to compete for an objective and a reference, with different mechanisms and contexts, without neglecting the variety of paths and transformations.

If political Islam has a part in the transformations, at least on the level of discourse surface, through the interaction of its network of organizations, institutions, centers, and individuals with European reality, and through its working in a competitive reality for "representing Islam" and the making of the joints of Muslim community in Europe and its objectives, some slogans, organizational and ideological connections with "mother group", beg the question about the extent of

responsibility of these movements in the failure of integration politics and in the dispersal of diversity values. Undoubtedly, there is also a responsibility of the politics of European countries in this failure, with varying degrees depending on the difference between these countries. Yet there are other reasons that an objective approach requires for research and discussion, namely the responsibility of political Islam, with its capacities for organization and formation, in impacting on Muslims' ways of life in the European societies and on the style of representing the European "other", especially if we recall conceptions that consider Muslims in Europe, in addition to these movements, a transient existence which does not require thinking of belonging to the European space or of the question of citizenship in the "reception countries", but requires devoting time and effort to benefit from the characteristics of these countries, including benefitting from the atmosphere of freedom to serve the objective of the movement politically, economically and through media. This poses some important problematics and questions such as a concern with identity, the reinforcement of the culture of isolated entities, and the failure of social integration in those countries.

The existence of islamists in Europe and their organized activism for years led to their proliferation and dominance over an important part in the Islamic space in Europe; the islamists in Europe represent more than just a minority as they are connected with mother communities and have an institutional and financial basis in Europe and outside. As to their political objectives, they do not necessarily connect with the country they are living in but they directly connect with the Arab countries. This picture, on the one hand, puts Islamists in the heart of Europe and the Arab and Islamic world in what regards their capacities in impacting on Arab societies and their political systems, and, on the other, it demonstrates their desire to monopolize the representation of Islam to influence Muslims in Europe, and to exploit the problematic of social integration considered by the specialized researchers as one of the causes of religious extremism. As much as observers point to issues of

emigration and asylum legislation and policies, and the responsibility of Western countries politics in the failure of social integration, it is not clear what role Islamic movements play in this critical crisis.

Therefore, there should be a discussion about the role of “Muslim minority jurisprudence in the West” or the consideration of European countries as the “abode of covenant”, as it is common in the Islamist discourse, with Muslims simply as passers-by in European lands, when social integration fails and an identity crisis deepens in the emerging generations.

The Islamist movements, and especially the Muslim Brotherhood, in Europe have shown considerable power to adapt to the recent developments in the European context and invest them in their interest. These foreign branches in Europe have benefitted mother movements with effective tactics and strategies in the Arab countries; they are allegedly consonant with the Western context. They have moved from being hostile to democracy to demanding, through furnishing their discourse with political rights and freedoms, which has added more legacy internationally to their existence and strategies in achieving their objectives. This raises another important question about the movements’ intellectual “reviewing” [i.e. adaptations] because there should be an investigation into the extent to which the reviewing discourse is harmonious with its intent, especially in the absence of topics such as equality and freedom of belief. In the light of continuing to invest in the traditional literature of this movement, namely the literature of Al-Mawdudi and Sayyed Qotb and others, a literature that entirely contradicts their modern political adaptation. That is, it is necessary to read this phenomenon epistemologically by an objective, comprehensive study of the context of forming ideas and adopting an approach of “critical discourse analysis” and “discourse content analysis” in examining its formations and structures, its making and production mechanisms.

In what concerns the organizational aspect, and like some Islamist movements in the Arab world, the European arena has known a separation of the Islamic Organizations Union in Europe from the international organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, bearing in mind that this Union joins hundreds of organizations spread in most European countries and it is considered the European arm of the Brotherhood. While the latter shows discontent for this separation and propagates the idea that this weakens and divides their solidarity, some observers doubt this separation and consider it simply a tactic intended by the Brotherhood to lighten the external pressure on it and avoid involvement in lost battles after a rise in demands for uncovering its activities and propagation.

For a scientific approach to these topics, within a framework of interaction with them, and keeping away from dispersing research axes, comes this international conference organized by the Institute of Research and Higher Studies of Granada, the University of Padua, The Interuniversity Center for Culture, Law and Religions, the Fondazione Giorgio Cini and Mominoun Foundation without Borders for Studies and Research. The International Conference will take place in Venice, Italy, on December 15 and 16, 2017, with the participation of academics and specialist researchers from Europe, the Arab world, and the United States of America, to theoretically contribute collectively to reading the reality of Muslims in Europe as well as the reality of the political Islam current that is strongly present in the European arena where it exercises an important influence, besides the study of the subject of “European Islam,” through working on the following major axes:

1. Islam and Political Islam in Europe: History and Transformations

This axis aims at discussing the reality of Islam and Muslims in Europe and the history of the formation of a unified activist Islam. It also deals with the dialectics of Islamic use (the Western use of Islamists), its benefits (the benefits of Islamists from

the European contexts), and its adaptation (motives for adaptation, its effects on the strategy and perspective of political Islamic communities in Europe, and the repercussions of these transformations on the discourse of political Islam in the Arab world).

2. Political Islam in Europe: Organizations, Conceptions, and Strategies

This axis aims at drawing a map of institutions, centers, and actors in the landscape of activist Islam, of their location and impact on the Islamic space in Europe, and of their strategies of circulation and control. Who are the pivots of their supporters from countries, politically and economically, and the relation of that support with regional and international states, the interests shared and the effect of that on the Islamic space in Europe?

3. Political Islam in Europe: Transformation and Trajectories

This is an axis about the presentation of the important theoretical and ideological paths and transformations that have stamped the reality of Islam in the European continent, in parallel with the paths and transformations that have specifically impacted on the landscape of activist Islam (Muslim Brotherhood as an example) intellectually and politically. Then, the axis aims at showing the extent of uniformity between thought and political practice and the effect of transformations and developments on them as a result of their interaction with the European contexts.

4. Political Islam and the Problematic of Integration in European Countries

The objective of this axis is to present the impact of the literature and the strategies of political Islam, its interests, its objectives and discourse on the reality of Muslims in Europe, their social integration, the making of their identity, the development of this path in the light of globalization, and the introduction of new rivals with

extremist tendencies in the competition “market” for the “legacy” of representing Islam, if not hijacking Islam and its reference.

5. Islam and Political Islam in Europe: a Forward-looking Vision

This axis aims at presenting a forward-looking vision in what concerns “European Islam” and the future of Islam in Europe. It also targets the study of the new transformations in the European Islamic space after the last international developments: the increase in terror inside and outside Europe, the growing of Islamophobia, and the effect of that on Muslims in Europe and on the paths of transformation and adaptation for the communities of political Islam, from an organizational and political perspective.

Information about the Conference

- **Conference Title:** Islam and Political Islam in Europe: Paths of Transformation and Adaptation
- **Location:** Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, Italy.
- **Date:** December 15-16, 2017
- **Participants:** Academicians and researchers specialized in Islam and political Islam
- **Organizers:** the Institute of Research and Higher Studies of Granada, the University of Padua, The Interuniversity Center for Culture, Law and Religions, the Fondazione Giorgio Cini and Mominoun Foundation without Borders for Studies and Research.
- **Conference Axes**

Axis 1: Islam and Political Islam in Europe: History and Transformations

Axis 2: Political Islam in Europe: Organizations, Conceptions, and Strategies

Axis 3: Political Islam in Europe: Transformation and Trajectories

Axis 4: Political Islam and the Question of Integration in Europe

Axis 5: Islam and Political Islam in Europe: a Forward-looking Vision

- **Working Languages:** English and Arabic
- **Scientific Committee:**
 - Enzo Pace, International Association of Religion Sociologists
 - Stefano Allievi, University of Padua, Italy
 - Mohammed Bensalah, Faculty of Governance and Economic and Social Sciences, Rabat, Morocco
 - Francesco Piraino, KU Leuven, Belgium
 - Mohammed Khalid Rhazzali, University of Padua, Italy
 - Roberto Mazzola, University of Eastern Piedmont, Italy
 - Mohammed Hashas, LUISS University of Rome, Italy

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