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Muslims in France and Great Britain: Issues of Securitization, Identities and Loyalties Post 9/11

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Abstract:

The September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States have liberated an encompassing rhetoric globally which designates all that is 'Muslim' or perceived to be such as a threat. The securitizing perspective, intertwined with debates over Muslims' integration and increasingly visible religiosity has led to growing suspicions regarding Muslims' loyalties in Europe. This analysis seeks to characterize this securitizing perspective and considers on the one hand, the inherent equalisation of increasing Muslim identity awareness with disloyalty and on the other hand, the depiction of Muslims in Europe as a homogenous block which facilitates constructing them as the 'Other'. As an illustration, this paper focuses more particularly on France and Great Britain.

Introduction

The September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States represented a defining moment for American foreign policy and the launching of the 'War on Terror'. The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the 'Global War on Terror' ramifications also extended to Muslims in Europe. How did 9/11 impact the way European Muslims are framed in relation to their respective national community? For Jocelyne Cesari, "Muslim immigration to Europe and North America can be seen as the foundational moment for a new transcultural space- a space where individuals live and experience different cultural references and values that are now disconnected from national contexts and boundaries"[1]. This transcultural space is characterized by the forceful emergence of a transnational religion, Islam, in a secularized public space, Europe which necessarily leads to tensions[2].

The 9/11 attacks have implied very concrete security repercussions and have accentuated the problematization of Muslims in Europe under the security paradigm[3]. The securitization grid predominance, which carries debatable ontological and epistemological assumptions- especially in terms of assumed homogeneity of European Muslims, has impacted the way Muslims are considered as political actors; it has translated into an inherent equalisation of increasing Muslim identity awareness with disloyalty. Such reinforcement of the securitizing perspective has taken place via an essentialist homogenisation facilitating the

construction of European Muslims as the 'Other'. Thus, Muslims, or communities perceived as such, are defined exclusively by their religious identity and are therefore excluded from the national 'imagined community' as their faith would imply divided loyalties. This paper seeks to characterize this securitizing perspective and the assumptions it carries.

After developing these statements and as an illustration, this paper focuses more particularly on two countries, France and Great-Britain to identify situations raising loyalty debates. Both countries have been subject to post-colonial migration and present a relatively liberal citizenship policy. However, individual integration into a civic culture, secularism and a resulting strong rejection of public displays of religion characterize the French model whereas a community-based integration model recognizing collective rights and ethnic and religious groups characterize the British model[4]. The present inquiry dwells upon these two very different models to capture the expression of the securitization of Muslims in each country and the perceptions implied.

Conflicting Identities

As noted by Dalia Mogahed, "few constructs are more self-evident than the one dividing Islam and the West" and "Muslim minorities in the West are often scrutinized through this paradoxical prism".[5] Events such as the Salman Rushdie affair, the 9/11 attacks or the Danish cartoons have revealed "the connections between Muslims in the West and the global Muslim world".[6] Global debates such as the question of the compatibility of Islam with democracy also extend to the situation of European Muslims and their integration[7]. The frontier between the local and the global is blurred so that no understanding of the local can happen factoring in the global

The debate over integration is essentially structured around the question of the compatibility of religion and national identity[8]. Religion is conceived as the element preventing a full integration as shown by the belief held by European general populations that removing public signs of religiosity is necessary for integration[9]. Europe is largely secularized and majorities living in European countries do not consider religion to be important in their lives[10]. However, 76% of the German population, 64% of the British population, 67% of the Spanish population and 53% of the French population said in 2006 that "Muslims in their country want to remain distinct from the larger society"[11].

If the problematic nexus between religion and national identity crystallizes the debate over Muslims' integration, this is also because there has been an increasing Muslim self-identification. The question of identification constitutes a crucial issue regarding divided loyalties and the articulation of religion and citizenship as complementary or on the contrary, competing concepts[12]. General populations in Spain, Germany, Great Britain and France all identify first with their country rather than their religion[13]. On the contrary, Spanish, German, and especially British Muslims tend to identify first as Muslims rather than with their nationality, at a level similar to that in Pakistan, Nigeria and Jordan and at a higher level than Egypt, Turkey and Indonesia; in 2006, this was the case for 81% of British Muslims, 69% of Spanish Muslims, 66% of German Muslims but only 46% of French Muslims[14].

Having said that, what shapes the interpretations of these figures is whether respondents considered there is a conflict between being a devout Muslim and modernity[15].

72% of French Muslims and 74% of the French general public said they saw no conflict between being a Muslim and living in a modern society whereas 47% only of British Muslims and 35% of the British general public did so[16]. 76% of the German population, 64% of the British population, 67% of the Spanish population and 53% of the French population said that "Muslims in their country want to remain distinct from the larger society"[17] In comparison, 30% of German Muslims, 41% of British Muslims, 53% of Spanish Muslims but 78% of French Muslims said Muslims wanted to adopt national customs.[18] As a consequence, such figures can reveal very different realities.

Identity is in fact complex, plural and composed of different layers; in their study on British Pakistanis, Hussain and Bagguley show the expression of a multi-ethnic citizenship identity where religion, in conjunction with the ethnic background provides a sense of cultural identity, especially for younger generations who not only consider themselves as British citizens but also "members of religious, racial, ethnic and linguistic groups".[19] Having said that, even now, as noted by the Gallup Coexistence study, "in Europe, 'immigrant' is virtually synonymous with 'Muslim'".[20] In parallel, there seems to be an exclusive perception of religious identification, as if it were detached from other identities and individual experiences.

'European Muslims' or the Denial of Pluralism

The term 'Muslims' itself can acquire very different meanings. One of the common uses of the term aims at referring to individuals with a Muslim background without necessarily referring to religious practise. Laurence and Vaïsse, in their study over Muslims in France, specify their approach as follows:

> Although this book refers to 'Muslims', what is actually meant are those individuals who, by dint of their national origin or ancestry, are of Muslim culture or sociological background. The population of course includes many secular-minded citizens who would object to being primarily classified as Muslims. In that respect, the book's main theme is itself a concession to viewing integration problems from a religious perspective.[21]

Though they recognize that their study "admittedly succumbs to the convenience of shorthand and so emulated the recent trend among policymakers and community activists", it is difficult to proceed differently as in all ethnic studies.[22] This necessary concession for the sake of a better understanding coupled with the necessity of embedding research on Muslims in the West in the framework of global Islam can lead to essentializing and homogenizing Muslim minorities in Europe as well as marginalizing their other identities[23]. If most studies assume a "uniform discursive framework" when it comes to Muslims,[24] they are in fact fragmented in several organisations not only between the different European countries but also within each country.[25] The main obstacle for a Muslim mobilisation at the European

level is their heterogeneity. Islam in Europe is a plural entity divided along ethnic and national lines[26]. Experiences vary in each country.

The lack of a pan-European Muslim interlocutor also entails that the national level remains the key level to understand relations between European states and Muslims. National differences have different impacts in terms of the conceptualization of multiculturalism and can be distinguished by different "philosophies of integration". Despite attempts by European governments to establish a single organisation that could represent Muslims in their respective territory, there is no Muslim interest group.[27] The absence of any clergy in Islam is one of the factors explaining this lack of organisation and the obstacles to building a representative instance.[28] The settling of Muslims in Europe has brought about an individualisation of religion which is the basis of an argument in favour of a specifically "European Islam".[29] Therefore, Muslims should not be treated in isolation of the rest of the political community when analysing their political participation and mobilisation.[30] Islam should not be taken for granted and to this purpose, a dynamic view is the best way to avoid any essentialism.[31] However, an increasingly homogenising view is the conduit that facilitates the construction of Muslim minorities as elements situated at the margins or even in opposition to the national European communities.

Islam as a Threat, Muslims as the Domestic Enemy

The increasing Muslim identification as mentioned earlier has brought about increasing feeling of belonging to the *ummah*, or the "global community of the faithful", which includes all Muslims. This is an essential element in connection with international issues. Two global trends can be identified in this regard; a diasporic Islam linked to the country of origin and transnational Islam emphasizing the relation to the *ummah*[32]. European Muslims are mostly to be situated in the second trend, and this is especially mirrored in younger generations' experiences. The re-islamization of youth without link to the parent's homeland but defined by the adherence to transnational Islam and the emergence of radical Islam activism at the same time lead to an 'infernal couple'" - the association of Islam to terrorism and suspicions regarding Muslims' loyalty, which adds another constraint for integration[33]. The situation of European Muslims is apprehended through the international context so that Islam constitutes not only a foreign, external threat but also a domestic threat, from within. The political participation of immigrant or ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims, is itself perceived as a threat.[34] Muslims themselves are increasingly perceived as a threat from within and constructed as the "other". The threat to secularism is particularly emphasized through Muslims' apparent lack of integration and multiple allegiances. Though the perception of religious 'otherness' as a threat concerns a minority of general population, the latter are more likely than European Muslims to think that people with other faiths threaten their way of life, and this is especially the case in the United Kingdom[35].

This fundamental problematic is related to the question of loyalty. As noted by Salvatore, "Islam increasingly represents the internal religious other in Europe, which is caught in the dilemma of being recognised as a legitimate minority culture, while escaping the predicament of being a minority to watch and monitor, continuously needing to prove its

loyalty".[36] The Gallup Coexistence Study, nearly eight years after 9/11, has shown that majorities of the general population in France, Germany and Britain do not think or are not sure that Muslims in their respective countries are loyal to them, contrary to the opinions of the majorities of European Muslims surveyed.[37] Between 35% and 45% of the overall populations in Germany, France and Great-Britain said they thought Muslims living in their country were loyal to the country whereas 73% of Muslims in Paris, 74% of Muslims in London and 72% of Muslims in Berlin thought Muslims were loyal.[38]

The consequence of such construction is that terrorism and the veil end up being situated on the same level of analysis as violence against European values and principles.[39] Such construction could only be more resilient after the impact of the 9/11 attacks and the consequent debates that ensued in terms of 'clash of civilizations'. Real or assumed solidarity with the *ummah*, understood here as a component of identity, not as a catalyst which translates into political mobilisation, is equated with disloyalty, an equation given full legitimacy after the 9/11 attacks. This implies for example a portrayal of Muslims in the media as a threat from within or a fifth column[40] despite the fact that for example, for British Muslims, a stronger sense of Islamic identity does not necessarily mean a rejection of British identity as there is an accommodation of the "universalism of citizenship claims with particularism of their ethnic identities" and no conflict between transnational Muslim identity and British citizenship.[41]

The veil issue is representative of this internationalisation whereby transnational actors transform a priori national and domestic issues into questions of foreign policy[42]. This blurring between domestic and international issues also comes from the duality of Muslims' identification, national and transnational, both as British citizens and members of the *ummah,* which entails political interests that are "both internal and external to the UK".[43] Muslims' foreign policy interests are thus also subject to the securitization framework. If the literature on ethnic groups and foreign policy is vast when it comes to the United States, it seems this relation has been quite overlooked in Europe. However, the political impact and foreign policy opinions of Muslims in the West now constitute a growing topic of research.[44] Silvestri refers to "almost an obsession with 'Muslim attitudes' to British and American foreign policy".[45] However, again, the securitization lens has strongly shaped considerations over this issue.

The closer perspective to studying Muslim groups and foreign policy deals with security issues in the post 9/11 context. Aggestam and Hill place at the core of their study the relation between multiculturalism and foreign policy as they consider the 2005 London attacks perpetrated by "home-grown" people in the context of Europe as a potential target of terrorism.[46] In his study "Bringing War Home", Christopher Hill is driven by security concerns and the issue of fundamental terrorism; thus, his prescriptions so as to preserve stability highlight the necessity of the governments' recognition of the interdependency of foreign and domestic policy issues as well as the necessity of a dialogue with ethnic communities in Europe as a priority on the European agenda.[47] It is an American scholar, Francis Fukuyama, who put forward the hypothesis that France opposed the 2003 War in Iraq because of its important Muslim community. He declared that the "French government's stance against the Iraq war and US foreign policy more generally seeks in part to appease Muslim opinion"[48]. Projections are often made in order to predict domestic and foreign

policy implications of a higher number of Muslims and consequently, of Muslim voters. The result, often embedded in the clash of civilizations framework, generally points at increasing ethnic cleavages[49] and the soon to come dominance of domestic and foreign policies of European states being more cautious from fear of their "Muslim Streets". Such thesis culminates in the 'Eurabia' theory which considers Europe as a dependency of the Muslim and Arab world.[50] However, all these conceptions rely on the assumption that Muslims place foreign policy issues at the top of their concerns, which is not the case. Muslims in Europe are first and foremost concerned with economic issues and especially unemployment.

Re-contextualising Muslims in Europe: the French and British Cases

The 9/11 attacks brought about increasing securitization, especially through a range of anti-terrorist legislation and policies in the months following the attacks in 2001. This securitization has liberated an encompassing rhetoric constructing Muslims in Europe as enemies of European societies. The heterogeneity and complexity of what is implied, when referring to 'European Muslims' as well as the relevance of the national contexts, should be fully acknowledged. What has securitization implied in antagonistic environments such as France and Great-Britain?

It is often acknowledged that Britain has the most liberal citizenship regime in Europe.[51] Most of British Muslims are citizens and 46% are British-born Muslims.[52] The 9/11 attacks and the July 2005 London attacks amplified the concerns and led to questions as to multiculturalism and the integration of Muslims perceived to be on the margins of the national community.[53] The emphasis of the public discourse is now on civic integration, shared values and collective identity.[54]

On the contrary, France is the strongest representative of the assimilation model, usually perceived as being very rigid and known to reject any recognition of groups on an ethnic, cultural or religious basis and in the worst case, interprets such a consideration as a fig-leaf to racist intentions.[55] An acceptance of minority politics implies a form of renunciation, in the French imagined community, to the Republican myth of integration to the nation and to the general interest.[56] Having said that, France is a *de facto* multicultural country and public authorities have been increasingly aware of this characteristic of French society, whose strong assimilation model seems very isolated in comparison with other European countries. In fact, in her work, Catherine Withol de Wenden points out that:

> …multiculturalism has acquired some legitimacy under the pressure of immigration, of Europe and of globalisation, but also from the desire to assert the weight of local cultures in the patrimony of national culture.[57]

The media offer an interesting point of scrutiny to consider perceptions and questions surrounding Muslim minorities. Different events serve as defining moments for questioning the allegiances of Muslims within their communities. The inflation of polls and surveys enhance the questioning around Muslims' allegiances as they can provide for a handy simplification of reality if taken at face value.

In Britain

The British press allows for the identification of a public debate regarding British Muslims' loyalty. On the eve of the Afghan campaign after the 9/11 attacks, an article noted that "The international crisis does not have to present the great mass of British Muslims with a conflict of loyalties. But there remains a serious danger, if all are not careful, that it will do so".[58] British Muslims were perceived to be "on the wrong side".[59] In an article published in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Mona Siddiqui, quoted as a lecturer in Arabic and Islamic Studies and acting Vice-Dean in the Faculty of Divinity at Glasgow University noted that "British Muslims should be engaged in a constructive debate about loyalties and allegiances for diaspora communities".[60]

In a briefing paper published in January 2007, the Demos report pointed at the collateral damages provoked by a narrative encompassing indifferently all that is 'Muslim' or perceived to be so:

> …the government's tendency to hold the whole of the Muslim community accountable for the actions of the few – within an already tense climate of Islamophobia and alienation – has had the effect of driving a wedge between the Muslim community and the rest of British society, rather than between the extremists and everyone else. A lazy parlance in which the words 'extremist' and 'radical' have become interchangeable has meant that any Muslim expressing anything other than unremitting support for the government is under suspicion.[61]

The 2005 London bombings had indeed a huge impact on this discourse as perpetrators of the attacks were born on the British soil. The 2005 London bombings effect in Britain can be compared to the 1995 metro bombings in Paris. In France, the nineties were marked by the eruption of the Algerian conflict on the French territory when Islamist networks established as of 1993 sought to recruit followers, especially in France, to help the GIA (the Algerian Armed Islamic Group). This culminated in the Paris bombings in protest of the French support to the Algerian military regime. Khaled Kelkal, who led the operations, was born and raised in France. Another trauma in France took place with the Toulouse and Montauban shootings perpetrated by Mohamed Merah in March 2012.

Questions over loyalty arise most easily about the position of Muslims and Muslim organisations, wrongly assumed to represent all Muslims, regarding terrorist attacks. Two days after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the American soil, British Muslim leaders were considered to have given "a mixed reaction yesterday to the terrorist attacks in America. Some condemned the onslaught as evil and senseless, but others supported it".[62] This was despite the fact that the Muslim Council of Britain (referred to as representing the "majority of Britain's two million Muslims"[63]) condemnation of the attacks was reported, similarly to Britain's Federation of Muslim Organisations and the UK Islamic Mission positions.[64]

The expression of Muslim leaders was viewed as insufficient in terms of condemning terrorism as exemplified by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who stated that she had not "heard enough condemnation from Muslim priests" and that "The people who brought

down those towers were Muslims, and Muslims must stand up and say that that is not the way of Islam".[65] They were seen as "less vocal on the essential first step from the Muslim community itself; widespread and unambiguous condemnation of the terrorists and those who support them".[66]

The question of loyalty is also concretely linked to the relation of British Muslims with the British Army. Events such as the killing of five British soldiers in Helmand by an Afghan police officer and the Fort Hood killing in the United States were reported in the press as events bolstering "a perception that loyalty to Islam will often outweigh loyalty to comrades, uniform, or country".[67] The article noted as well that "of the 2.4 million British Muslims, only 350 serve in the Armed Forces" and that "The military authorities have made repeated efforts to recruit more Muslims. But potential recruits continue to be put off by fear of racial or religious discrimination, a reluctance compounded by opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan".[68]

In France

Muslim federations unanimously condemned the September 11 attacks in the United States.[69] However, an IFOP poll for *Le Monde*; *Le Point* and *Europe 1* revealed that though 90% of French Muslims said terrorism was contrary to their religion, 68% said they could understand that American policy in the Middle East may have angered "Islamic extremists".[70] Almost 70% supported the idea that France should help the United States in fighting terrorist networks but only 23% would support a war against states helping or harbouring terrorists. 49% of the French general population would support a French participation to a war while 49% would oppose it. 83% of Muslims and 88% of the French general population thought a French military action against an Islamic state could increase risks of attacks on French soil and 78% of Muslims and 84% of the French general population thought it could lead to disturbances between the different communities. Having said that majority of Muslims (two out of three) did not notice a change of behaviour towards them after the September 11 attacks.[71] Therefore, it seems the effect of the 9/11 attacks was less pronounced, in terms of divided loyalties debate, in France than in Great-Britain. Later on, it was also due to the French stance regarding the War in Iraq. This also may be due to the fact that the issue of loyalty was salient in France even before the 9/11 attacks: it first emerged with the Gulf War and the Algerian Civil war.[72] The gap between French Muslims and the French population positions concerning the Gulf War had several consequences; it created a rupture with the general population, it brought suspicion on their mobilisation and claims-making, a distance had for the first time been created with the Socialist Party and finally, it revealed an "Arab sensitivity".[73]

Another type of events crystallizing questions about loyalty is the hostage crises. When British Muslims called for the release of Kevin Bigley who was taken hostage in Iraq, this was taken as a proof of loyalty and as an additional sign dissipating what had been interpreted as an ambiguous stance:

> Until now, moderate Muslims have done far too little to distance themselves
> from the religious extremism that is an insult to Islam. What is important

about the present initiative is the emphasis laid on the appeal for the life of Mr Bigley as a fellow Briton. British Muslims reject terrorism, but have often appeared ambiguous in their loyalties to, and identification with, the state in which they live. Their opposition to the Iraq war and their support for radical causes overseas, either in Kashmir or Palestine, was combined with a willingness of a minority in the community to resort to nihilistic violence. In these circumstances the moderates must take a clear stand.[74]

The condemnation by Muslim leaders' of this kidnapping was favourably perceived publicly given the wide opposition of the war in Iraq that could have brought about a different reaction to that hostage crisis.[75] In their unambiguous call for the release of Kevin Bigley, on the grounds of him being a 'fellow Briton', British Muslims were then reintegrating the imaginary community of Britons which justifies the title of the article 'Fellow Britons'.[76]

The same process took place in the French context when the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) was involved in the liberation of two French journalists, Georges Malbrunot and Christian Chesnot, kidnapped in Iraq by the Islamist Army, a group who was asking for the abolition of the 2004 law banning religious signs at school. The final text of the bill banning the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols, significantly backed up by public opinion, was adopted on March 15th in 2004. Laurence and Vaïsse argue that the ban could be seen as:

> … part of a larger effort to reduce the further development of certain religious inclinations and to prevent the potential development of dual loyalties among France's Muslim population - a development that the government fear is being stocked by international pressures (…). The headscarf ban served as a useful symbol of a robust state response, aimed to relieve the transnational pressures exerted on France's youngest, female citizens.[77]

It is interesting to note how the hostage crisis led to the absence of any disturbances in the application of the law. In fact, as the kidnappers were demanding the cancellation of the law, this lead to a common voice among Muslim leaders calling for the respect of the law and denouncing the kidnapping. A diplomatic mission was even sent to Baghdad by the CFCM which could be interpreted as a strong and unambiguous sign of support from Muslim leaders, against the vision of a global *ummah*. Laurence and Vaïsse go so far as to suggest that "what had threatened to lead to a grave confrontation between Muslim leaders and French government officials had led instead to a major rapprochement."[78]

Conclusion

The 9/11 attacks in the United States have had several consequences on Muslims in Europe in terms of securitization. This paper focused more particularly on British and French perceptions of Muslims' divided loyalties. These perceptions are rooted in an essentialist reading of Muslims in Europe as it treats European Muslims as a single block and

homogenous entity. The 9/11 attacks have liberated an encompassing rhetoric which designates all that is 'Muslim', or perceived to be such, as a threat. The securitizing perspective, intertwined with debates over Muslims' integration and increasingly visible religiosity has led to increasing suspicions regarding Muslims' loyalties. This paper has provided a brief overview of the occasions giving rise to these debates in France and Great-Britain, an enterprise which shows the necessity of re-contextualizing Muslim communities in their respective national framework for a better understanding of a complex and multidimensional issue.

NOTES

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