

Valérie Amiraux & Gerdien Jonker

INTRODUCTION: TALKING ABOUT VISIBILITY – ACTORS, POLITICS, FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT

This volume started as several scholarly enterprises on the periphery of an international conference. Perhaps dissatisfaction with the meeting in question was at the root of its initiation, but more decisive, certainly, was that the right people happened to meet at the right time. The group that gathered together had not met before in this particular configuration. There were established academics and junior academics from different disciplines and with different scholarly backgrounds. Some had published extensively, whereas others were still working on their dissertation. What they shared was an awareness of a quickly growing gap in the field of Muslim visibility in Europe through the emergence of a heterogeneous and—to all appearances—very resourceful group of newcomers in the public arena. And a wish to make these voices available to a larger audience.

Mapping the Field of Muslim Visibility in Europe

In 2003, when we began the data collection that builds the basis of this book, policymakers and important segments of the media in many parts of Europe had been putting pressure on local Islamic organizations, accusing them of covering up fundamentalist sympathies and networks and of siding with terrorists. Translated into different discourses and practices, this trend spread throughout Europe. As a side effect of 9/11 and the Madrid bombings, the Islamic tradition was once again publicly charged of not being compatible with Western values such as democracy and human rights. Suspicion had taken root that, when all was said and done, Islam fostered principles that justified terrorism. Allegations of the incompatibility of Islamic and European values became stronger and more frequent, re-inviting public discussion about the loyalties of Muslim European citizens to democratic values. Almost everywhere in Europe, the public sought information about the scriptural basis of this religion, and sales of the Quran and related exegesis increased accordingly, sometimes creating the conditions for “public moral panics” that fed the general perception of Islam as an internal threat, in particular in countries where liberal multiculturalism had been the policy of choice (Werbner 2004, 452). A situation arose in which migrants from Muslim countries and their offspring were stigmatized as Muslims—regardless of

their degree of religious involvement or Muslim identification—and treated as a potential danger.

Coinciding with this development was the emergence of a very heterogeneous group of young people which was publicly redefining what it meant to be a Muslim in Europe, as individuals or as members of a collective. Young people not only were taking the place of the older generation in almost all of the “old” Muslim associations across Europe—reflecting a generational shift in leadership in most of the European host countries. In addition, we noted that new youth groups were forming and organizing across the boundaries of nationality. Moreover, many actors made their entry on local and national stages who were not part of an organization and did not stress their religious belonging, but who nevertheless insisted on acting and speaking as a Muslim. What seemed to connect all these actors was their search for public recognition of a distinct identity that they themselves labeled “Muslim.” They also shared a desire to be treated not as second-class citizens but as full citizens. In other words, a group of young people had made its entry on the European public stage, and it had laid claim to its own definitions over and against the political labels with which it saw itself confronted.

The countries in which we traced this group of people were Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy; the urban settings included Berlin, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Bradford, Paris and its suburbs, and Carrara and Macerata in Italy. The scale of the initiatives we examined included the cleaning of a neighborhood park (Berlin), the repainting of a local train station (Macerata), the defense of Islam on talk shows (France, the Netherlands, Great Britain), the organization of exhibitions on Islamic history and Muslims (Antwerp, Paris), and interfaith encounters (Italy, Great Britain). Political careers and activism popped up just about everywhere. In addition to these actors, we also searched for radicals, from hard-to-reach youth to the jihadis who were so persistently evoked in the media. From our collective findings it appeared that, within the Muslim populations of Europe, the latter represented an obscure domain, one that was avoided in public and very rarely commented upon to outsiders. Terrorists, or so it appeared to us, are the eternal absentees. Whenever possible, we have tried to locate their relationship within the larger context in order to convey the voice of these marginal actors.

Our common research question, however, aimed at encompassing a far larger group. Without excluding the phenomenon of terrorists, it intended to map the whole field of Muslim visibility. Over the last two years we explored the available space for action that is open to self-described Muslims in European Union (EU) member states. When a minority group hitherto hidden from view suddenly becomes public, and migrant communities turn into public actors that are labeled Muslim from the outside, what is the sanctioned space in which they may act? How, in which specific arenas, and with what intensity are they allowed to act in terms of their own definitions in the European public sphere? Where are the limits and who defines these limits?

The answers we have come up with are not a recital of *halal* and *haram*, of the religiously allowed and the forbidden, although these may exert their influence in some cases. Rather, through the different chapters of this volume the reader will get to know the grey zones of interaction between groups, communities, and individuals on the one hand, and self-described Muslims and majority society on the other. All kinds of (in-)visibilities take shape in these grey areas. The contributions in this volume examine, from different perspectives and on various scales, the processes that transform these grey zones into accepted spaces for discourse, dialogue, and actions.

Forms of Differentiation

In the articulation of Muslim visibilities, two opposite forces seem to be at work: pressure from without and pressure from within. We consider their existence side by side without overemphasizing the impact of terrorism and the ensuing security measures on Muslim populations. If they had an impact at all, it may well be that violent action in the name of Islam urged other Muslims to create counterimages and to come to the rescue—if not the recreation—of the Islamic tradition. We instead focus our attention on a cluster of developments that occurred more or less in the same time span in the seven countries presented in this volume but that seem to have very different roots.

On closer inspection, three developments especially turned out to be reactions to the stigma of “Muslim” imputed from outside the Muslim community. First, over the last few years many local religious communities have withdrawn from whatever exchange they had been entertaining with majority society. Once pressed into the defensive, they ceased to participate in public events that addressed Islam or the Muslim minorities in Europe. Thus, numerous intermediaries, study circles, roundtables, boards, advisory committees, and hearings lost their Muslim participants. The first differentiation thus entails a distancing from non-Muslim society (Jonker, Fadil, Amiraux, Abdel-Samad).

Not necessarily connected to this development was the exit of the old generation of mosque founders and the entry of a new generation that was born or socialized in Europe. The newcomers set about the task of formulating an Islam of their own, which sometimes differed radically from the traditional and defensive ideas of their parents. Most of these reformulations are now oriented towards Europe; nonetheless, they do differ very much from one other. What they share is a notable distance from the parent generation. The second differentiation, therefore, is that between the generations (Frisina, Jonker, Fadil).

The security-related pressures set into motion a process of internal differentiation aimed at distancing oneself from external stigmatization. This process involved distinguishing oneself, with all available means, as the more

cultured, the more religious, and the most secular, as better educated and less primitive than one's neighbors. All over Europe, Iranians and Turks distanced themselves from "Arabs," as did Bosnians from Turks, Lebanese from Palestinians, Sufi-oriented groups from Islamist ones, and secular Palestinians from their religious compatriots. In some contexts, the distinction between secular groups and religious groups led to a clear articulation of one's political values within the context of settlement. In other contexts, it led to redefinitions of what Islam in Europe is about. It urged definitions of a "real Islam" as well as attempts to identify who "belongs" and who does not (Fadil, Boender, Amiraux, Frisina, Yurdakul). The third differentiation therefore gravitates towards claims of representation and power.

In the emerging display of Muslim visibility in Europe captured in this volume, Muslim democrats face Muslims who question democratic structures, and zealots and missionaries challenge believers who insist on private, intimate religiousness. There are radical activists who join with intermediaries looking for compromises, and secular liberals who keep their distance from the rule-abiding orthodox. The reader will encounter hate preachers as well as imams who manage to network in civil society, hard-to-reach youths, and partners in interfaith discussion groups. Angry young students have been given a voice, as have content believers with a high spiritual mission in secular society. All of these groups and individuals compete with each other in the articulation of what it means to be a Muslim in Europe. The competition is not always conscious and in some cases may also be the result of public policies. Hidden from view are the faceless young men who contemplate, prepare, and/or execute mass murder. Over recent years their actions have managed to attract the bulk of media attention and throw a shadow on all other forms of Muslim claims-making. One aim of this volume is to clearly show that the articulation of Muslim difference in Europe takes on many other forms.

Performances on Public Stages

Once these coexisting and extremely diverse modalities of being a Muslim had been observed and documented, the question of their interpretation and the choice of the relevant framework for analysis came to the fore. The central difficulty that we faced when collectively preparing this volume was the identification of both a common conceptual "language" and a common analytical approach to apply to our respective work. In purely descriptive terms, what we were facing in our various research contexts were combinations of strategies to go public that were presented in roughly the same period (2003–2005), both on national and on local stages. The ultimate decision to bring our work together under an analytical "public" umbrella came naturally after the first discussions, when we sat down together and started describing aspects of the ethnographic observations that we had made.

The strength of this volume lies precisely in the different types of qualitative data that were accumulated through fieldwork by its contributors. An emphasis on this qualitative dimension is central to the study of Muslims in Europe. It illustrates that it is possible to write a theoretically informed piece that is empirically grounded but nonetheless relevant to a broader context of political sociology and the sociology of religion (Madsen et al. 2002; Modood 2005). Ethnographic descriptions are present in all of the chapters of this volume, though they do not address similar samples. This method allowed the authors to illustrate in a concrete manner the multiple and complex modalities through which Muslims are engaged as Muslims in their various contexts. Nadia Fadil, in her analysis of the Union of Mosque and Islamic Organisations of Antwerp, concentrates on how individual members of this group relate their personal conception of being a Muslim to practices of citizenship. Valérie Amiraux addresses similar questions while giving the floor to Muslims who do not belong to associations. Philip Lewis provides snapshots based on conversations with imams whom he characterizes as educated, and also describes these individuals in their routine activities. Welmoet Boender focuses on the incorporation of Dutch imams through the institutionalization of Rotterdam-based religious training. In these contributions, the authors needed to master both the semantics of their discussion partners and their location in a network of meanings that is produced by others (e.g., the state, other Muslims). Gerdien Jonker's contribution specifically focuses on the elaboration of distinct discourses by competing Muslim associations which see themselves as confronted with the same security-inspired stigmata.

The use of ethnographic data enabled the authors to underline both the subjective dimension of the formation of public engagement and the coexistence of competing narratives in a public sphere. It also helped them to do justice to a nonutilitarian reading of the way in which Muslims—with different skills and different objectives—make their way to participative citizenship. From this qualitative field approach emerged a study of normal “in-the-making” experiences of Muslims in Europe. Our approach illustrates the gap that exists between the ideological bias with which policymakers and large segments of the media observe Muslims in Europe, and the pragmatic analysis of individuals’ practices and actions that is prevalent in the social sciences. Unlike the former, our data also encompass subjective experiences of justice and injustice, trust and mistrust.

The notion of public space helped us to select our different fields while heeding at least two dimensions: Public space was, first of all, the space in which social actors played a public role and presented themselves to others. In a way, this is the sensorial, perceptive dimension of public space, the one that gives all participants the opportunity to consider otherness and to confront it in physical space (on bodily practices, see Göle 1997; Arthur 1999). This concept of public space also applies to Muslims who discover their internal plurality through the options they have within their respective European contexts. Public space also appeared to be the site for elaborating

on common values and projects; in this sense, it was a nonmaterial space utilized to define the conditions of living together. Some would say that public space has a visible and an invisible side. What are Muslims entitled to do? And what is explicitly prohibited in non-Muslim European societies? It is clear that going public is unavoidably linked—both for collectives and for individuals—to the opportunities offered by the specific context and the institutional landscape.

While analyzing our findings, another aspect of public space became important for our work. This was the theatrical dimension, in which public space becomes a “stage” on which people play “roles” (Goffman 1971, 1980). As shown throughout this volume, individuals and groups compete on this stage for the ownership of definitions concerning the nature of being Muslim and the meaning of Islam. The discussions of good versus bad Muslims, of pure and impure, can be related to this notion of an image that should be presented to various types of audiences. Pnina Werbner, who in her most recent work elaborated on the impact of 9/11 on performative ability, described the pre-9/11 Pakistani community thus:

“In the past, British Pakistani Muslims had always been a vocal minority, demanding equal citizenship rights and never being afraid to speak their minds even if their opinions—support for the Iranian fatwa against Rushdie [...]—were out of line with British popular sentiments. They felt sufficiently secure in the UK to express their political opinions, however contentious, without fear. Indeed, in their own public arenas, in the diasporic public sphere they had created for themselves [...], Manchester Muslims articulated familiar visions of apocalyptic battles between Islam and the West, especially the USA, source of all evil.” (Werbner 2004, 463)

Local public arenas offered them the opportunity to perform, as theater actors would do, in front of audiences that did not systematically share the same views. In return, the audience discussed and made comments, criticized and supported, denounced or identified with the actors on stage (on the use of Goffman’s backstage and front stage in ethnographic work, see Eliasoph 1998). The same dynamics occur in European contexts when certain normative issues are discussed (e.g., wearing the veil).

Competition of necessity engenders a public setting, a space for representation or a front stage, in which actors appear, leaving a public impression or confronting policymakers. Public space offers them an open space, but one with certain constraints within which the players must respect the rules of the game. Unlike individuals, Muslim organizations in Europe no longer can ignore these rules. After forty years of sometimes invisible, sometimes distinct cohabitation, all now respond to post-9/11 policy-making, both on a national and on a European level.

Policymakers who define the “Muslim problem” in public space also draw profiles of possible discussion partners and try to exclude those who do not fit their rules (Amirault 2004; Jonker 2005). Sometimes actors perform before an audience in accordance with rules that have been laid down by others. The

question thus presents itself: How is the performed message perceived and received by the public that observes the scene? What is its reaction to the performances on the public stage? Both supporters and dissenters may distrust the players. They may keep silent or express their support in public. They may continue to gossip in private or confront the speaker during pauses. In some of the contributions to this volume, the generation gap is expressed only through the comments of the older generation on the efforts of their successors. In other cases peers formulate criticisms, boards appoint and dismiss representatives, and religious communities grope for a consensus that brings together opposing views.

Of course, to work with the notion of public space is to tackle a complex and well-studied field (Gaonkar and Lee 2002; Cefai and Pasquier 2003; Göle and Amman 2004). Its multiple significations mean that it cannot be applied as a universal tool to any and every situation. Our larger framework can be compared to the “deprivatization” process described in the comparative work of Jose Casanova (1994). However, our purpose was not restricted to the idea of an eruption of religious issues in the public sphere.¹ Some contributions address the formulation of grievances, the way in which self-described Muslims protest against the redefinition of their belief system as a public problem, and their endeavors to shape and undermine that process (Abdel-Samad, Frisina, Jonker). Others cover the constitution of the public arena itself and analyze the modes with which Islam and Muslims have been turned into a public problem (Amiraux, Fadil; cf. Gusfield 1981). Other authors address the genesis of whole new grammars resulting from the political stigmatization of Muslims as a potential threat for non-Muslim societies (Jonker; cf. Gusfield 1996). Some contributions also address the commitment of non-Muslims in supporting the cause of Muslims and the response of public authorities to this support (Lewis).

The relevance of the concept of public space for mapping our work can be summed up in a number of points. First, it helped us to pin down the local and national specificity of which all contributions give evidence on different levels. Though we were collectively aware of a dynamic of “Muslim coming out” in European public settings, we were also perfectly conscious of its path-dependency on context-specific opportunities. We are referring here to political and legal opportunities as well as cultural types of opportunities, all of which continue to differentiate in each context and delimit the way in which religion finds its public place. The case studies, even when they sometimes appear to be similar, thus were firmly anchored in national and/or urban trajectories, and historical national variables could be kept in focus. Moreover, specific tensions and opportunities that are rooted in national trajectories could be taken into consideration. The same goes for the

1 The process of making religious issues key public issues can be driven by state policy, a political party, or the establishment of institutions representing one religion, or it can occur through the circulation of opinions, ideas, and shared knowledge.

specific conditions that Muslims deal with in order to raise their voices in public. The contributors shared the view that individual contexts and history play a role in explaining the specific articulation to the political domain of one's commitment as a Muslim in public. The public sphere is not neutral, and, as the product of a specific history, it is embedded in a complex of influences that reflect the national political culture. Muslims have not always been actors in that historical process, but they are now demanding participation and equal treatment as citizens of these countries. Likewise, national and European religious histories have an impact on how this minority religion acquires public presence. As the contributions illustrate, the private/public relationship should therefore be understood as an interdependency rather than as a strict separation. In that context, the quest for equality and recognition is also the demand for a civil society that is open to religious pluralism, both for individuals and for groups (Modood 2005). European states no longer can consider Muslims to be citizens without opening public space to the recognition of others' ways of doing things according to religious belief.

Second, all of us dealt with a new type of actor: people who interact with society as Muslims and who are determined to make their voices heard, regardless of the actual domain of their initiative. Their commitment surfaced in expected as well as unexpected spheres of activity, from religious teaching to political activism, from music and Sufi discussion groups to art. We quickly recognized that underlying all the case studies was a form of communication and relationship to society in which one's self-definition as a Muslim was never questioned but simply affirmed. The meanings of this identification, however, appeared to be very different from one situation to the next. Our choice to frame Muslim commitment as public commitment was influenced by the extreme diversity of the actors discussed in the various chapters. An analysis in terms of public space enables one to cover collective, organized activities as well as individual ones. It does not restrict the field to organized forms of engagement, but instead opens it up to relatively isolated and anonymous forms of being engaged as a Muslim.

The millions of Muslims living in the EU are indeed a complex and heterogeneous population that includes migrants, converts, European citizens, foreigners, men and women, old and young, believers and nonbelievers, secular Muslims, traditionalists, and radicals. The majority of them do not identify with the small minority of Muslim association members. The studies that compose this volume therefore include a broad spectrum of Muslim actors; sometimes their only commonality is the skills and resources needed to go public. We spoke with religious experts, imams, male and female teachers, social workers, political actors, charismatic leaders, anonymous believers, and political activists. The channels in which they operated, their level of experience, and their motivation to go public differed. But they all shared a self-definition as Muslim when confronted with public situations.

Third, as mentioned earlier, we selected our interview partners at the crossroads of the internal process of becoming visible (i.e., Muslims making

Muslims visible) and the push from outside to pinpoint Muslim presence in Europe (i.e., Muslims as a security problem). The chorus that can be heard today in European public spaces includes religious voices (e.g., when imams publicly assess the normative validity of homosexual behavior), political voices (e.g., when Milli Görüş leaders claim the right to become accepted as a partner of the state), and civic voices (e.g., when Muslim representatives denounce bombings or condemn the hijacking of journalists in Iraq). Consequently, the volume highlights the variety of potential attitudes towards society, including exit, silence, and loyalty (Hirschman 1978). The multiple meanings that are given to the word “Muslim” in the currently tense environment allow for defensive and inimical reactions but also involve positive communication about one’s position in society. Some contributions touch upon the innovative ways in which self-described Muslims react when confronted with situations that provoke the Islamic tradition—although their religious identification requires them to either justify their tradition or keep silent. In this respect, the shift from the older guardians of the Muslim faith to a younger generation has been essential and is common to all countries, regardless of their history of migration. It is above all younger Muslims who are creating distance from traditional institutions, elaborating new demands for recognition and for the representation of interests, and developing strategies to distinguish the Muslim community from the dominant representation of Muslims as enemies.

Fourth, the precise nature of belief and its limits were never at the center of our research. We even thought it abusive to suggest that fieldwork grounded on the observation of religious practice could facilitate our understanding of belief, which is, after all, anchored in individual experience. Moreover, such experience must first be voiced in order to exist as a social fact (Luhmann 2000). It is only when people declare their faith through language or bodily practices that one can start to assess the role that religion plays in their actions. Thus, the role of religious practice and values in the daily exercise of citizenship was taken into consideration only when our interview partners chose to negotiate “lifestyle choices among a diversity of options not necessarily congruent with collective religious sentiments” (Eickelman 2000, 120). When, however, the individual did not express religious sentiment, it was not for the observer to ascribe religion as a framework to explain what he or she saw.

Finally, we wanted to maintain a constant focus on the plurality of experiences that our fieldwork made visible. The performance and expression of difference are central to the constitution of a democratic dynamic public space that enables the meeting of different types of beliefs, belongings, identities, and representations of the world. “The public sphere is articulated as including people with different characteristics, and as requiring participants to be able to carry on conversations that are not strictly determined by private interests or identity” (Calhoun 2002, 165). Unlike policymakers, who barely discern between one Muslim and the next, the new Muslim actors discussed

in this volume themselves discern between those who “belong” and “others.” This differentiation resulted in the coexistence of clashing visibilities. The questions of what “real Islam” is and who the “real Muslims” are loomed large and continue to do so. This process inevitably leads to competition and the empowerment of the group that gains the most support.

The attitudes and statements described in this volume mirror the emerging “work in progress” among Muslims in Europe. Their newness, however, does not preclude the researcher from taking into account the needs and sensibilities of the parent generation, which was grappling with opposing interests and defensiveness long before the recent political claims-making came into view. Policymakers may set the scene for their appearance while trying to define ways in which Muslims are allowed to differ, strictly discerning between “good” and “bad.” But caught in between hurt feelings and the political class’s power of definition, the new Muslim actors work with emancipation concepts of their own. Their business is the creation of new methods that further the peaceful establishment of Islam in EU member states and open up space for them to elaborate on the meanings of being a Muslim in EU societies.

The Structure of This Volume

Based on unpublished data that have been collected in seven Western European countries between August 2003 and July 2005, the contributions take into consideration Muslim actors who in recent years have entered the public sphere of their country of residence. Some contributions focus on individual actors, whereas others examine a whole professional stratum (imams and imam training), a “young” organization, or young people in “old” organizations. All contributions describe the specifics of national and urban frameworks, forms of differentiation, and the choice of public arena. They address the different forms of claims-making, which are anchored in the specificity of national and local contexts, and, whenever possible, relate these to parallel patterns of development among Muslims elsewhere.

Valérie Amiraux (France) follows five average French citizens who do not engage in any association but who nonetheless claim the right to a private religious identity. She analyzes the ways in which these people relate to their self-identification as a Muslim while confronted with the fact that its legitimacy is denied in a public space that respects *laïcité* only. How can they speak both as a believer and as a citizen? Supported with very rich field notes, this chapter portrays five individuals who are committed to making their voices heard on the subject of being a Muslim within a society that has institutionalized patterns of hostility towards religiosity.

Nadia Fadil (Belgium) pursues a somewhat similar direction, though she takes a different angle in her description of a form of claims-making that is widely considered to be specific to the Islamic religious tradition—namely,

how Muslims should behave as “good” Muslims. Having done extensive fieldwork in a local Antwerp association, she explores the link that young Muslim activists constantly describe in order to relate their religious identification to political action. According to Fadil, performance as an Islamic political subject is a constellation of attitudes, ranging from resistance to a quest for recognition, which provides us with alternative interpretations of the role of associations in the political socialization of Muslims in Europe.

Annalisa Frisina (Italy) opens up a window on the claims-making of a genuine (religious) Muslim citizenship and a likewise genuine (secular) European citizenship. Focusing on an association founded by the children of immigrants, Frisina observes the formation of an active and above all autonomous citizenship anchored in local and everyday policy initiatives, which aim at individual self-realization yet at the same time seek access to larger public debates on Italian politics.

Welmoet Boender (the Netherlands) studies how the emergence of a European Islamic authority could possibly become institutionalized. Her account brings to light the precarious claims of “import” and “homegrown” imams. She also describes the precarious situation of religious students in private Islamic vocational institutions who navigate their future role as mediators between religious communities and secular society—aptly summarized as “something of a minefield.”

Gerdien Jonker (Germany) opens another minefield as she discusses religious responses to political measures. In her analysis, the asymmetry between the partners becomes especially clear. Whereas policymakers want to control the “threat” that Muslims in Germany present, Muslim communities lay claim to the ability to cure the German “illness” resulting from the secularization of European societies.

Gökçe Yurdakul (Germany), through her analysis of the headscarf debate in Germany, uncovers the intensive claims-making among the children of Turkish migrants in Germany about the way a woman should appear in the public sphere. Her chapter demonstrates the centrality of the tense ties binding secular and Islamist groups to the representation they have of their coexistence in a pluralistic non-Muslim society.

Philip Lewis (Great Britain) brings us back to interfaith channels and to the many inroads to partnerships which imams in this country contribute to in order to stabilize the “one nation, many faiths” ideology of British politics. Preachers have to answer to the demands of at least two sides, however, a tension that sometimes bears very strange fruits.

Hamad Abdel-Samad (Germany) analyzes the specific framework in which young Muslims in Germany become isolated from society, radicalize, or even opt for violence. His contribution accurately reflects the voices that demand respect, the power of self-definition, and inclusion, as opposed to the marginalization and nonrecognition that these interviewees usually experience. Abdel-Samad’s account opens a window on choices: denouncement, resignation, anger, and outrage.

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