

Islam in Europe as a Social Movement: The Case of the Islamic Civil Society in France and Its Contribution in the Defense of Muslims' Cultural Rights

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Abstract : Since the 80ies, in specific situations, France's Muslims have enacted political actions to reply to attacks on their identity or assimilation attempts, using their religious affiliation as a resource for the organization and expression of collective claims. Indeed, despite Islam's internal sectarian and ethnic differences, religion may be politicized when minorities' social and cultural rights are under attack. French Civil Society organizations, in this specific case with an Islamic background (ICSO - Islamic Civil Society Organizations), play an essential role in defending Muslims' social and cultural rights. As a matter of fact, Civil Society organized on an ethnic or religious base is a way to strengthen minoritarian communities and their role as political actors, especially in multicultural contexts. Since the first 1983's "Marche des Beurs" (slang word referring to French citizens with foreign origins), which involved many Muslims, the development of ICSO contributed to the strengthening of Islam in France, here meant as a Social Movement aiming to constitute a French version of Islam, defending minorities' cultural and religious rights, and change the perception of Islam itself in national society. However, since a visible and stigmatized minority, ICSO do not relate only to protests as a strategy to achieve their goals: on several occasions, pressure on authorities through personal networks and connections, or the introduction into public debates of bargaining through the exploitation of national or international crisis, might appear as more successfully - public discourses on minorities and Islam are generally considered favorable conditions to advance requests for cultural legitimation. The proposed abstract, based on a literary review and theoretical/methodological reflection on the state of knowledge on the topic, aims to open a new branch of studies and analysis of Civil Society and Social Movements in Europe, focusing on the French Islamic community as a political actor relating on ICSO to pressure society, local, and national authorities to improve Muslims' rights. The opted methodology relies on a qualitative approach based on ethnography and face-to-face interviews addressing heads and middle-high level activists from ICSO, in an attempt to individuate the strategies enacted by ICSO for mobilizing Muslims and build relations with, on one hand, local and national authorities; into the other, with actors belonging to the Civil Society/political sphere. The theoretical framework, instead, relies on the main Social Movements Theories (resources mobilization, political opportunity structure, and contentious/non-contentious movements), aiming to individuate eventual gaps in the analysis of Islamic Social Movements and Civil Society in minoritarian contexts.

Keywords : Islam, islamophobia, civil society, social movements, sociology, qualitative methodology, Islamic activism in social movement theory, political change, Islam as social movement, religious movements, protest and politics, France, Islamic civil society

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