

ANNALI DI SCIENZE RELIGIOSE

nuova serie

La rivista *Annali di Scienze Religiose* nasce dalle attività di ricerca del Dipartimento di Scienze Religiose dell'*Università Cattolica di Milano*, secondo un approccio multidisciplinare al fenomeno religioso, con particolare attenzione ai tre monoteismi e alle religioni del mondo mediterraneo antico. Ospita contributi di studiosi italiani e stranieri nelle principali lingue europee ed in arabo, suddivisi in una *sezione monografica* che determina il sottotitolo del fascicolo, una sezione di *lectures*, con testi che affrontano con taglio scientifico temi di ampio respiro storico o comparativo, una *sezione miscellanea* che presenta contributi puntuali su temi specifici, e infine una sezione di *note critiche* che contiene riflessioni proposte da membri del Dipartimento di Scienze Religiose o relative a loro pubblicazioni. Concludono ogni fascicolo la *Bibliografia ambrosiana* e la *Bibliografia gioachimita*, rassegne annuali delle pubblicazioni relative alla figura e alle opere di Ambrogio di Milano e di Gioacchino da Fiore.

*Annali di Scienze Religiose* is a periodical issuing from the research activities of the Department of Religious Studies at the *Università Cattolica di Milano* (Catholic University of Sacred Heart in Milan) which apply a multidisciplinary approach to religious phenomena and focus in particular on the three monotheistic religions and on religions of the ancient Mediterranean world. It features contributions from Italian and foreign scholars writing in the main European languages and Arabic. Each issue consists of a *monographic section* which determines the subtitle of the issue, a section of *lectures* with texts employing a scientific approach to a wide range of historical and comparative topics, a *miscellaneous section* presenting timely contributions on specific themes, and lastly a section of *critical notes* which contains reflections proposed by members of the Department of Religious Studies or relating to their publications. Every issue ends with the *Ambrosian Bibliography* and the *Joachimite Bibliography*, annual surveys of publications regarding the figures and works of Ambrose of Milan and of Joachim of Fiore.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

# Annali di scienze religiose

Religious Traditions in the Face of the Crisis  
of the Liberal System. The Case of Islam

Special Issue for the 50th Anniversary of the Department  
of Religious Studies at the Catholic University of Milan

“Theology and Religious Studies in the Euro-Mediterranean Context”

13  
2020  
nuova serie

*Direttore*  
Marco RIZZI

BREPOLS

# Annali di scienze religiose

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D/2020/0095/270  
ISBN 978-2-503-58718-9  
ISSN 2031-5929  
DOI 10.1484/J.ASR.5.121546  
Printed in the EU  
on acid-free paper.

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La stesura delle *Bibliografie* inserite alle pp. 459-  
529 del presente volume è stata finanziata dal-  
l'Università Cattolica nell'ambito dei suoi pro-  
grammi di promozione e diffusione della ricerca  
scientifica per l'anno 2020.

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MOHAMED ALI MOSTFA

# THE CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS VISIBILITY IN THE LIBERAL PUBLIC SPACE

## *Introduction*

Western modernity has engaged the religious question over the last thirty years in processes that show an increased interaction between religiosity, visibility, and public space. Religious visibility in secular societies raises the question of its relationship to the public space. At a time when expressions, behaviours, and forms of religiosity are sources of concern for politicians, jurists, or security experts, the question of the visibility of Islām deserves to be addressed.

This article focuses on the description and analysis of the visibility of Islām in France over the last few decades, as well as the reactions inevitably triggered by the affirmation of Islām in the public space. The notion of public space will be the guiding thread of the analyses that follow. It is the place where links and ties are shaped, where community affiliations are made visible, and the diverse Islamic customs are expressed. The issue of space leads to a discussion of the way it is appropriated and how this appropriation is perceived.

For the last four decades, French Muslim citizens have transformed the behaviour of the first generation of North Africans, characterized by invisibility and withdrawal from French public space. Today's French Muslim citizens have made themselves visible by forging new relationships with their environment. Their visibility is evident through the ways in which they express their cultural and religious belonging. Examples include the celebration of some religious ceremonies, such as *Ramadan* or



the *Eid al-Adha*, the language that young people use in their daily lives, based on a mixture of the French language and a few words of the Arabic language, a dress code, even though Islām has not defined a precise kind of clothing, and so on. It is at this level that the issues of visibility, public space, and community are intertwined. In the context of secular societies, religious visibility could be an indication of an expanding religious community, or simply a sign of deeper dynamics due to the pluralization of our societies and a kind of religious hybridization.

In the context of France, where secularism has emerged as part of the political debate, and where the secular consensus has emerged ‘as a result of an engagement with a transformation of religious ideas towards politics’,<sup>1</sup> the secular consensus leads to transformations in religious behaviour. New religiosities appear and spread through mechanisms that provide individuals with the possibility ‘to perform, alone or with the help of others, a number of operations on their body and soul, their thoughts, their behaviour, their way of being; to transform themselves in order to reach a particular state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immorality’.<sup>2</sup> Islām in the secular context involves forms of religious recomposition based on the search for meaning and spirituality. The question arises whether these forms of religiosity are not symbolically some of the main components of a political identity developed by minorities facing the threat of structural isolation imposed by the majority society.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. *Public Space and Religious Visibility*

The notion of the public space was elaborated by Habermas in 1962. Based on the consensus on the common good, the public sphere was defined ‘as a realm of our social life in which

<sup>1</sup> HASHEMI 2009, 2.

<sup>2</sup> FOUCAULT 2001, 1604: ‘d’effectuer, seuls ou avec l’aide d’autres, un certain nombre d’opérations sur leur corps et leur âme, leurs pensées, leurs conduites, leur mode d’être; de se transformer afin d’atteindre un certain état de bonheur, de pureté, de sagesse, de perfection ou d’immoralité’.

<sup>3</sup> KAYA 2006, 135–153.

something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens'.<sup>4</sup> This definition has since then been extensively amended by scholars<sup>5</sup> who have considered conflict as an inherent feature of the public space. Based on the work of Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, and Richard Sennett, Etienne Tassin develops a theory of public space that is not reduced to its institutional dimension alone, but a potential space open to all actors holding different visions and cultural expressions. It is a place where issues related to the public are dealt with, where antagonistic visions of general interest are expressed, which is therefore not the exclusive prerogative of the State. It is a space that is meant to be universal but which is inequalitarian since not everyone has access to it.<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, the public space is not a place open to everyone; on the contrary, it is reserved for some and forbidden to others. And the entry of pious Muslim actors into the public space violates these unacknowledged rules and weakens consensual norms.<sup>7</sup>

Tassin and Göle's definitions of the public space imply the cultural fragmentation of modern societies, which is characterized by the return of traditions, minority beliefs, and particular identities. Although these perspectives end up confusing the private and public spheres, they highlight the conflictual fact that, being an historical and political construct, the public space is not a universal concept because it cannot be applied to all countries, and even less to Arab-Muslims. Furthermore, Göle's definition on which this study is based is appropriate for the issue of Islām and its visibility in modern societies: 'a space becomes a "public" space when different social groups challenge it, and its control becomes a matter of contention between conflicting perspectives and imaginaries, especially between secular and religious'.<sup>8</sup> This definition reintroduces into the notion of public space what Habermas had discarded



<sup>4</sup> HABERMAS 1989, 136.

<sup>5</sup> SALVATORE – EICKELMAN 2004. GÖLE 2015. TASSIN 2003.

<sup>6</sup> TASSIN 2008, 40–46.

<sup>7</sup> GÖLE 2013<sub>a</sub>, 6.

<sup>8</sup> GÖLE – AMMANN 2006, 37.

and that postmodernity has brought back: cultural difference and conflict.

Religious visibility in France has been linked for several decades to the question of the growing visibility of Islām in the French public space. This question has been raised with reference to scenes<sup>9</sup> that have been perceived as threatening to *laïcité*,<sup>10</sup> a kind of cultural programme, a *manhaj* – programme – that has no relevance in Western societies.<sup>11</sup>

The reasons for the increased perception of the religious visibility of Muslims may be: firstly, an even stronger Muslim presence in urban areas together with increased immigration; secondly, problematic media coverage of international events that lead to bad publicity; and thirdly, a demand for legal and cultural recognition resulting in the appropriation of public space.<sup>12</sup>

Religious visibility very often yields to a socio-political reading orientation. In short, what does it mean to unveil one's convictions and to what end? In this context, three types of arguments are generally made against religious visibility in the public space. The oldest is the liberal argument, according to which true religion is interior and does not need public manifestation. The second and most widespread argument starts from the postulate that invisibility is the test of social integration. The third is the fear of proselytism in the broadest sense

<sup>9</sup> The IFOP survey (French International Market Research Group) on 28 October 2019 showed that there is a growing tension over Islām. There is an increase in the number of French people in favour of prohibiting street prayers (82 per cent vs. 62 per cent in 2011). Nearly three out of four French people are in favour of forbidding the wearing of religious symbols that are conspicuous by public service users (75 per cent), parents accompanying a school outing (73 per cent), and employees of private sector companies (72 per cent).

<sup>10</sup> According to the IFOP survey on 28 October 2019, 78 per cent of the French perceive *laïcité* as being threatened, which is fourpercentage points more than six months before. This perception of the threat linked to the visibility of religion in the public space leads to a change in the definition given by public opinion to *laïcité* (compared to the 2005 IFOP survey): it is now less and less about 'putting all religions on an equal footing' (19 per cent vs. 32 per cent in 2005) or 'ensuring freedom of conscience' (22 per cent), but above all about 'separating religions and politics' (27 per cent) and 'reducing their influence' (26 per cent vs. 9 per cent in 2005).

<sup>11</sup> MASSAD 2015, 4.

<sup>12</sup> GONZALEZ 2015, 253.

of the term since, legally, wearing a religious sign, for example, is not proselytizing.<sup>13</sup> With respect to these three arguments, public space appears to be paradoxically a normative space, structured by dominant behaviours which give to the space inclusive and exclusive characteristics.<sup>14</sup>

In some respects, over the past three decades, as the signs of secularization have intensified in the public space, individual religious practices have also intensified and are being strongly reflected in the public space. The liberal context in which we precisely try to analyse the effects of the visibility of Islām seemingly no longer raise the question of Islām in terms of its integration or non-integration. It seems to me that it is more relevant to articulate visibility with the question of the cultural dimension and citizenship. The issue of integration now seems to be irrelevant, since the minorities we are talking about today share many of the same rights as the so-called ethnic citizens. However, it is also a question of determining what exactly we are talking about, whether it is the visibility of a religion or the manifestation of a cultural expression that until a few years ago was contained in peripheral spaces, before its expression became exposed to Western eyes.

The French context in which these analyses are carried out is shaped by the norms of secularism that stand as an argument against communitarian temptations. It is in this spirit that the very French concept of '*laïcité*'<sup>15</sup> was developed in France. It should be stressed, however, that the principles of French secularism are not developed against any religion, and

<sup>13</sup> See ROLLAND 2019, 5.

<sup>14</sup> See LOFLAND 1998.

<sup>15</sup> The 1905 French law separating the Church and the State is now over a hundred years old. The Act of 9 December 1905 of Separation of Church and State outlines in effect clear principles that have constitutional value, since the 1st Article of the Constitution of 4 October 1958 states that: 'France is an indivisible Republic, *laïque* (secular), democratic and social'. 'The *laïcité* (or secularism) principle it defines, despite the term not being mentioned in the text, is unique in the world and is an integral part of France's contemporary political DNA. However, this principle is protected neither by the fact that it is legal nor by its relatively old age. Indeed, it is controversial both at the national level, where it is subject to contradictory debates, and at the international level, where France is often accused of having an intolerant and discriminatory system'; cf. COLOSIMO 2017.

even less against Islām. What should be pointed out is that since the 1990s, the French State has been an important actor in the regulation and organization of the Islamic field in France. This involvement led, on the one hand, to the establishment of the French Council of the Muslim Faith in 2003 and, on the other hand, to the enactment of laws seeking to curb the expression of the Muslim faith in the public space. For example, the Act of 15 March 2004 introduced a regulation on 'the wearing of signs or clothing showing religious affiliation' for pupils in public schools, while the law of 11 October 2010 forebode the dissimulation of the face by means of a full veil, helmet or balaclava. Paradoxically, if liberalism in the field of politics underscores, as Rawls (1997) puts it, the idea of plurality and the irreducible diversity of religious doctrines, diversity in liberal contexts 'is made possible only by presupposing that the differences are within a certain range or shared family resemblances, and thus are not ultimately incommensurable'.<sup>16</sup>

Religious expression is not disconnected from the appropriation of space. The assimilation of public space by Muslim communities in France illustrates the steadfast degree of their integration and permanent settlement in the country. Henceforth, in the opinions of many specialists, Muslim communities are part of the national landscape. And away from any communitarianism, these communities engage in common actions and are now visible in places where they were once absent. More than a place of alienation or disengagement, the transformation of public spaces into places of visibility and action is therefore linked to the sociological evolution of these Muslims who now establish their religion, tradition, morals and way of life in the public sphere.

In the liberal<sup>17</sup> context, which is often intertwined with the secular environment, this form of community expression

<sup>16</sup> SETH 2001, 329.

<sup>17</sup> In this work, we take the classical definition of liberalism, based on the idea of equality, individual autonomy and responsibility. The normative public space to which Fatiha Ajbli refers above brings us closer to a critical definition of classical liberalism, as was elaborated by M. Foucault in a number of his publications. His idea of liberalism can be summed up in this sentence: 'La fin de la raison d'Etat, c'est l'Etat lui-même, et s'il y a quelque chose comme une perfection, comme un bonheur, comme une félicité, ce ne sera jamais que

is perceived as leading ‘to a form of society that establishes the social body as an organic whole bringing with it the destruction of all public space’.<sup>18</sup> The public space under consideration in this work would be the place where fundamentally cultural or conviction-based expressions are to be foreclosed. According to Tassin, the public space is thought of in relation to the common space as the two spaces are based on principles that separate and articulate them. The public space is conceived of as a space of distantiation and separation, while the common space is presented as a space of communion and close relationship. These principles of opposition and complementarity lead to the establishment of a political power in the public space that tends to circumscribe the principles of communion that characterize the common space. In Tassin’s theory, the challenges of the public and common spaces are closer to those of society and community developed by Ferdinand Tönnies.<sup>19</sup>

The notions of private and public are two sociological categories that belong to the field of Western social sciences. Therefore, their use in the field of Islamic thought may prove ineffective. In most Arab-Muslim countries, the distinction between these spheres is built on principles of continuity from one space to the other. This continuum forms the basis of a complete religious conception of life that extends to all realms of life. From this conception, the private space then becomes the place by definition of concern for the whole community as an extended family, the place of interpersonal relations and exchanges. Hannah Arendt had in a way stirred up the academic world when she introduced in *The Human Condition* her own reconstruction of the distinctive facts of the two spheres. ‘Since our feeling for reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm (...), even

celle (ou celui) de l’Etat lui-même. Il n’y a pas de dernier jour... mais quelque chose comme une organisation temporelle unie et finale’ (The end of raison d’Etat is the State itself, and if there is anything like perfection, like happiness, like felicity, it will never be anything other than that [or that] of the State itself. There is no last day ... but something like a final and united temporal organization’). FOUCAULT 2004, 264. In this paper, the notion of liberalism crystallises precisely the tension between individual autonomy and State omnipotence.

<sup>18</sup> TASSIN 1992, 24.

<sup>19</sup> GEMEINSCHAFT – GESELLSCHAFT 1887.

the twilight which illuminates our private and intimate lives is ultimately derived from the much harsher light of the public realm'.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the overlapping of the spaces cancels out their division. The vision of private space undermines the distinction that the liberal world draws between the public and the private because it leads to the decline of the public as a function or subcategory of the private. The latter now appears as the one and only concern of the believers 'to strive for the fullness, (...) to allow the Word of God, the teachings of the Torah, the commandment and example of Jesus, (...) to shape their existence as a whole, including, therefore, their social and political existence'.<sup>21</sup>

Following Wolterstorff, the division between public and private is brought into question when individuals' actions are shaped by their religious beliefs. This unavoidably raises the question of the border that delineates the constituent elements of the public and private spheres. Being fluctuating, 'the distinction between (both spaces) has always been, simultaneously, very porous, dynamic and ideological, and strongly influenced by political contingencies'.<sup>22</sup>

While the community is characterized by the affective and spatial proximity of individuals and is therefore defined as a community of blood, place and spirit – where the whole takes precedence over the individual – society, on the other hand, is the scene of forced individualism and of large-scale competition between individuals who are now separated. The power of the community is the source of political power. French public space, through all its identity components, crystallizes logics of social life that seem dissimilar. On the one hand, there are Muslim communities that are recreating and consolidating their ties by gradually assimilating the public space in all its dimensions, and on the other hand, there is a society 'in which all forms of the common are exposed to ruthless criticism of individual rights that has become the exclusive source of all legitimacy'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> ARENDT 1958, 51.

<sup>21</sup> WOLTERSTORFF 1997, 105.

<sup>22</sup> FERRARI 2012, 72.

<sup>23</sup> MANENT 2015, 124.

However, beyond a behavioural differentiation, it is more precisely an opposition between two types of spaces that put in perspective two forms of ties: the one that results from a union and a transformation that tends towards ‘communion’ and the one that results from the fragmentation of interests, unties the ties and invents the symbolic forms of the social bond.<sup>24</sup> For the Muslim communities, the new Western public space is a chance and a possibility to widen their ethical imagination and to transcend their past invisible existence among other French and European citizens. Participation in the public space has become an essential instrument of integration, since it entails the development of mechanisms and forms of effective communication capable of persuading the public, whether they are local, central, or other civil society institutions. Beyond visibility, the public space from this point of view emerges as the means to influence political, economic, and social life. Nielsen<sup>25</sup> analyses the challenge of the current public space as it concerns Muslim communities in terms of influence on policies on all levels and the development of required communication mechanisms:

Participation in the public space has become an essential instrument of integration, as it requires the development of mechanisms and forms of communication capable of persuading the public, whether it be local or central government, or other civil society institutions.<sup>26</sup>

Not all liberal contexts have the same interactions with religious expression and its symbols in the public space. In the American context, for example, religion is not viewed through the perspective of modernity and secularization. The discourse on religion is ‘more related to the concept of ‘an open religious market’ and religious diversity kept in order with the help of judicial jurisprudence of the US Supreme Court and its relationship to the First Amendment clauses in the American Constitution’.<sup>27</sup>



<sup>24</sup> Cf. MANENT 2015.

<sup>25</sup> NIELSEN 2018.

<sup>26</sup> OASIS 2018, 18–35.

<sup>27</sup> MODÉER 2012, 25.



Paradoxically, in Europe, the Islām that is very often debated in academic circles is the one with Western roots. It is not an external component of liberalism. Islām ‘resides within liberalism, defining its identity and its very claims to difference. It is an internal component of liberalism, not just an external one, although liberalism often projects it as the latter’.<sup>28</sup> As Massad argues, the processes of externalisation representing Islām as another highlight the idea of inadequacy between Islām and the liberal context. This approach, on the one hand, ignores the plurality and complexity of Islām and, on the other hand, puts forward the idea of a one-sided liberalism with which Muslims would not identify.

## *2. Public Liberal Space and the New Structures of Belonging*

The question of plurality and its acceptance in the liberal context is not a long-standing, established principle. Being supposedly intrinsically democratic, the liberal world embraces the principle of plurality in a tension-free way, which generally leads to its transformation and evolution. However, anything that is not assimilated becomes an antithesis to liberalism and its principles. In cases where the beliefs and practices of individuals and religious communities conflict with general laws or compromise equality, which is another central liberal value, balancing religious freedom with other fundamental liberal rights poses a challenge. According to Sikka, ‘sometimes social and political judgments on some cases appear to apply double standards to the religious visibility of certain minorities and reflect an element of cultural racism’.<sup>29</sup> Sikka highlights cases with attitudes and decisions in Western countries regarding the hijab and other types of veils worn by Muslim women. For her, applying liberal principles to regulate religion in a truly neutral and impartial manner remains a challenge.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> MASSAD 2015, 1.

<sup>29</sup> SIKKA 2019, 1.

<sup>30</sup> SIKKA 2019.

Today's Western discourse about Islām is shaped through the issue of liberalism as the antithesis of Islām. Muslims living in the West therefore feel caught up in this perspective that although it does not stigmatize all Muslims, it pushes some of them to adopt reflexes and defence mechanisms imbued with an identity-based religiosity. By situating Islām in a logic of counter-history, the liberal discourse triggers among Muslims reflexes whose ultimate purpose is to claim firm membership in a religious tradition. Arguments such as incompatibility, threat, or the unsuitability of Islām in the West are very frequently raised in public debate to shape Islām from the Western perspective. 'The anxieties about what this Europe constituted and constitutes – despotism, intolerance, misogyny, homophobia – were projected onto Islām and that only through this projection could Europe emerge as democratic, tolerant, philogynist, and homophilic, in short Islām-free'.<sup>31</sup>

The principle of a liberal state is to guarantee freedom of belief to its citizens while remaining neutral and avoiding any involvement in this area. Neutrality certainly does not mean indifference; it means above all the willingness to accept the conditions that make social plurality a principle. Whereas religions or beliefs are most often considered incompatible with liberalism because they no longer share with it a common cultural heritage that is easy to identify as such, hence there are lexical slippages that dangerously construct a universe of meanings and referents in which the question of incompatibility is widely highlighted.

The liberal context defines modernity as a significant turning point in the history of the West. The elements underlying this modernity are based on the ideas of freedom, universalism, and individualism. The notion of freedom is essential since it refers to the liberation of whatever could maintain humanity in a state of heteronomy. Among those guardianship that the concept of modernity challenges is that of spiritual tutelage. The question of spiritual autonomy stands as a dividing line between modernity, with its logic of independence and autonomy, and a no or extra-modernity represented by Islām and

<sup>31</sup> MASSAD 2015, 12.

its ancestral rules. If Western modernity is based on a spirit of emancipation, liberation, and empowerment, it is important to ask whether French Muslim citizens are necessarily outside Western history.

Today, the debate on the question of Islām and its visibility in the French and European public space must be addressed from an angle that raises the question of the bond that unites the members who claim to belong to the Muslim community and the relationship they have with the values of French society. The reaffirmation of the Islamic tie is the result of the rewriting of a new narrative in a new territory. This approach is thought out in a horizontal perspective whose advantage is in highlighting the spatial dimension. The latter presents itself as a dynamic place of confrontation between citizens who hold narratives that sustain different cultural identities. As a result, the public space is the medium of visibility shaped by three main concerns: the desire to receive recognition, the desire to repair a situation of injustice, and the desire to participate in the production of collective identity.

The three concerns are an attempt to reconstruct problematic identities as a result of a modern liberal narrative that does not admit the religious or spiritual heritage of others. These identity reconstructions are processes that are largely a matter of the relationship to religion. Consequently, it is in the religious field that a major part of this work of identity is carried out. In the same way, these processes bring about the modification of the believer's relationship to his religion by transforming the latter into a social vector, or social religion. The spiritual quest of the modern believer articulates other social, cultural, and civic needs. In short, religion is not necessarily the link to the other world; it is a bond to the other, rooted in the here and now. Willaime adopts this approach when he states that what has changed since the end of the twentieth century is what is happening inside the religious field and not only outside: there is an individualized relationship to belief, 'a subjectivization of belief, even a mundanization of belief'.<sup>32</sup> The belief that attracts the adherence of today's believers is a less metaphysical but more

<sup>32</sup> OBSERVATOIRE DE LA LAÏCITÉ 2009, 19.

materialistic belief. The relationship to belief is all the more differently shaped in the case of individuals whose experience, even indirectly, is that of exile, immigration, or resettlement.

Dejean and Endelstein explain that ‘new religious territorial victories and hybridization phenomena have been associated with the recomposition of religion’,<sup>33</sup> a phenomenon that had already been pointed out by Roy as the phenomenon of religious deterritorialization.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, it is clear that nowadays, the secularized public space has aided the emergence of a militant relationship to religion. This relationship gives rise to a reformulation of belief and autonomy and thus to new conditions for its expansion. No religion seems to remain within the national, cultural, and ethnic territorial perimeters in which it was born, in which it is the dominant religion. The time has come for the rise of a resolutely nomadic religious people in societies that have become religiously plural. Just as the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted over the centuries from the heart of Europe to the American continent and then to Africa, the same thing is true for other religious traditions, such as Islām, which was born in the Arabian Peninsula but is now overwhelmingly Asian and also established in Europe.

This new transformation of the belief system may also be due to the collapse of the once very unifying ideologies in the Arab world in the 1960s, such as nationalism and Arabism, for example. Zwilling<sup>35</sup> points out that several authors<sup>36</sup> attribute a return of religious and political visibility ‘to the inability of secular

<sup>33</sup> DEJEAN – ENDELSTEIN 2013, 4.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Deux phénomènes jouent un rôle clé dans la mutation du religieux aujourd’hui: la déterritorialisation et la déculturation. La déterritorialisation n’est pas seulement liée à la circulation des personnes (qui ne concerne que quelques pour cent de la population mondiale), mais plutôt à la circulation des idées, des objets culturels, de l’information et des modes de consommation en général dans un espace non territorial’ (Two phenomena play a key role in the mutation of the religious today: deterritorialization and deculturation. Deterritorialization is not only linked to the circulation of people (which concerns only a small percentage of the world’s population, but also to the circulation of ideas, cultural objects, information and consumption models in general in a non-territorial space): ROY 2008, 12.

<sup>35</sup> ZWILLING 2019, 18.

<sup>36</sup> These authors include Bryan Turner, David Martin, Peter Berger, Judith Butler, and Craig Calhoun.

ideologies (nationalism, liberalism, socialism) to provide the normative and psychological foundations of identity and collective action' but also 'to the failure of scientific approaches to give meaning to reality'.<sup>37</sup> In other words, this religious reactivation could also be the product of concern about the secularization of society.

To grasp the subtle relationship to public space, Tassin raises the notion of the *Dasein*,<sup>38</sup> which reveals further relationships to the world and to our environment. I am not trying to compare the two notions of deterritorialization and that of the *Dasein*. But the latter offers another figure of the existence in connection to the world coordinated through the markers of the existential, those of the 'I', 'you', 'he/she' which merge with the markers of spatiality – here, there, and over there.<sup>39</sup> The public space at the end of the analysis is itself a common space and it cannot be otherwise. By following the Heideggerian demonstration of space, Tassin suggests an analysis of the existential spatiality of the *Dasein*, which designates being-in-the world. 'Because of this spatiality originating in the being-in-the-world, existential and not categorical spatiality, the being-in-the-world must be understood immediately as being-with (*Mitsein*) and coexistence (*Mitdasein*).'<sup>40</sup> Tassin's theory allows us to grasp the type of community that is being established out of this space.

The appropriation of space contributes to the foundation of the group's identity and reinforces its sense of belonging to a territory, both on a physical and symbolic level. This appropriation results in the building of places having religious and cultural identity dimensions. The transposition of these collective identities into the public sphere should not be seen as a mere display

<sup>37</sup> WILLAIME 2019, 18.

<sup>38</sup> German word that means, 'being there'. *Dasein* is a fundamental concept in the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, particularly in his book *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) published in 1927. *Dasein* is not to be understood as a human being or a person. *Dasein* is 'a way of life shared by the members of some community'; HAUGELAND 2005, 423.

<sup>39</sup> TASSIN 1992, 26.

<sup>40</sup> TASSIN 1992, 27: 'En raison de cette spatialité originaire de l'être-au-monde, spatialité existentielle et non catégoriale, l'être-au-monde doit se comprendre immédiatement comme être-avec (*Mitsein*) et coexistence (*Mitdasein*)'. For further analysis, see MOSTFA 2017.

of the traditional symbols of the Islamic religion, but rather as a far-reaching reconstruction of the religious component, its adaptation to the Western public space and its participation to the redefinition of citizenship. The 'aim is to be recognized in domestic public spheres and not to be confined only to the private sphere, as culturally distinct groups'.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, new themes emerge in relation to the risks of dissension and distance that could separate citizens, all legitimately claiming their full citizenship. These new identity places attract social and cultural behaviours which could be perceived as the manifestation of an antagonistic influence acting against the principles of Western modernity, those principles that delegitimize religious factors and cancel their inclusion in the public sphere.<sup>42</sup>

The notion of 'public' introduced by Meyer and Moors is meant to underline the change that modernity has brought about in public space. The latter is no longer the place for 'believers' as bounded entities, but rather for citizens or 'publics' involved in continuous process of construction and reconstruction, of negotiation and contestation.<sup>43</sup> Religious moral grounds are judged irrelevant and the issue of citizenship is primarily based on equal access to public space and to political life along with the guarantee of freedom of speech. Nevertheless, the process of secularization is not linear. The advent of religious intellectual positions, fostered by exogenous cultural references, show resistance to the idea of a single logic of Western modernity. By reversing the perspective, by shifting the approach towards non-Western modernity, we must then set ourselves the task of reconstituting the dialectical link between identity and otherness.<sup>44</sup> The presence of Islām in France generates in the minds of many French people the idea of a decisive gap between modernity and what is considered rather as no modernity. The debate on these questions, far from reducing dissonances, highlights its complexity regarding the semantics



<sup>41</sup> EISENSTADT 2004, 340.

<sup>42</sup> MOSTFA 2017.

<sup>43</sup> MEYER – MOORS 2006, 12.

<sup>44</sup> GÖLE 2005, 66.

attached to lexicographical chains intimately linked to distinct civilisational and cultural legacies.<sup>45</sup>

### 3. *Public Space and the Reinvention of a Topographical Identity*

The notions introduced above – those of deterritorialization, decentring, and *Dasein* – which displace the oppositional role from I/you to here and there seem to raise the issue of deracination and rootedness, which may or may not allow for community building.

The deterritorialization of Islām and the expansion of contemporary social and geographical spaces enlarge the horizon of belonging and displace the ancient patterns of connections to places and communities. The individual efforts of the vast majority of Muslim citizens to overcome their parents' social conditions give rise to new affiliations that shift the sense of belonging to a territorialized community. Islām remains a source of values, but the community space is disrupted and its foundations outdated. The massive 'We' of a belonging invariably attached to an imaginary *ummah* – community –, represented by the authority of a caliph or an imam disintegrates in an expanding horizon that dissolves the idea of the original community. While appropriating the forces of Western modernity, generations from Muslim traditions build their customs mainly on Islamic values. Thus, the standards linked, for example, to food prescriptions are at the top of the list of requirements that young French people declare they respect quite rigorously. At the same time, the factors reinforcing the idea of a generalized communitarianism seem to be evanescent. The term 'communitarianism', when used to express the way in which public space expands and is appropriated or transformed, is still subject to impressions and stimuli that are not very concrete. The over-qualification of certain Muslim values in the public sphere is an argumentative construction that focuses first on two processes, those of inter-recognition

<sup>45</sup> MOSTFA 2017.

and interaction with others. These two processes illustrate the model of a new reconstruction of the value of belonging and an understanding of the world based on agreements to communicate with other cultures, and through time.

Moreover, the Islām of the year 2000 in France was based on a new organization and a new structuring process characterized by the emergence of an intellectual, cultural, and political discourse on Muslim personalities of this new generation, particularly in the public space. The turning point of Islām in recent years is not just a question of the visibility of symbols, which for some is part of the Islamic cultural heritage. It is about the structured and structuring discourses that aspire to be part of a form of Islamic modernity that is different from and in contrast to Western modernity due to its historical background and trajectory. Even if today's French-speaking Muslim personalities represent leading figures of a committed Islām,<sup>46</sup> they are only a few examples of a generation of Muslims educated in France, conscious of their identity, convinced of their intellectual and cultural contributions to their birth or adopted country, and thus confirming their faith in their civic commitment. The effect of these discourses is to provide the Muslim citizen with meaningful resources to guide their actions and their life. These deep structures offer a visibility and a cartography of the public space where Islām definitely takes place. The new geography leads to a mode of circulation that allows the Muslim citizen to articulate and link the common space and the public space.

Göle analyses this ambiguity by articulating it with themes that have already attracted a lot of attention, namely the headscarf worn by young women who enjoy a double cultural capital both religious, but also secular.<sup>47</sup> They can circulate in several spaces, leave their community, and distance themselves from the traditional world of Islām while expressing their disagreement without going so far as to assimilate all the implicit conventions of modernity. At least that is how the veil works as an integral



<sup>46</sup> Tariq Ramadan, Hassan Iquioussen, Mohamed Bajrafil, Marwan Muhammad, Tarek Oubrou, etc.

<sup>47</sup> GÖLE 2005, 14.



part of the religious field. In an increasingly secular world, the veil functions, in Pierre Bourdieu's words, as an unthoughtful part of the heritage and not as a state of consciousness or a political position. The veil is subject to symbolic variations and trans-actions between groups that choose to wear it. Even if we move away from the archetype in favour of an almost individual do-it-yourself (DIY), the veil acquires a special status in the public space, that of a social code of conduct. This explains the com-ings and goings of some veils, depending on the circumstances – the spaces of circulation – between wearing and removing it. Instead of oscillating between displacement and transgression, it rather calls for the paradoxical process of displacement and conformism.

Autonomy as a characteristic of the liberal public space seems to be in the process of being acquired in spite of alarm-ist discourses that put forward counter-examples that can be found here and there. The Muslim woman, whether or not she wears the hijab, works, integrates harmoniously into the global society, favours affinity in marriage and a marital relationship based on the sharing of responsibilities and domestic tasks, and even re-appropriates her sexuality. These practices set her apart from her grandmothers but not much from her fellow citizens of the same age. This way of situating oneself in at a distance from one's country of origin and family while avoiding any total assimilation of Western modernity makes perceptions unclear and Muslim women belonging to French society equivocal.

Despite the criticism it has received, the notion of public space has proved to be one of the most successful concepts to describe a number of events that have taken place in con-temporary societies.<sup>48</sup> In this article, the public space is the place for a redeployment of a new form of citizenship which intends to contribute to the social sense, through its full integration and participation in the city.<sup>49</sup> This approach implies a change of perspective in the apprehension of religious visibility. The latter participates to the construction of the moral identity of the individual and the community and to unconditionally motivate

<sup>48</sup> SA MARINO 2013.

<sup>49</sup> LAROCHE 2006.

them to articulate a conception of the Good and of the good life which can serve as a principle of integration to groups.<sup>50</sup> Space in question is not only a container but a place of social experience, expressing the entire set of relationships of individuals and groups in terms of distance, placement, displacement, limitation (and) crossing.<sup>51</sup> It is the place where the Muslim citizen seeks recognition, stands up against a stigmatizing attitude, and claims economic and social repositioning. Through these actions, the space thus becomes a means of a proximity that reinforces resemblance, supports reference to the same God, structures a memory, reinforces a common language, a specific food code, etc. On the other hand, difference can be perceived as strange, even unknown, and therefore potentially threatening.

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<sup>50</sup> See TÉTAZ 2002, 61.

<sup>51</sup> LUSSAULT 2007, 27.

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### *Abstracts*

Western modernity has engaged the religious question, over the past thirty years in processes that show an increased interaction between religiosity, visibility and urban public space. At a time when expressions, behaviours and forms of religiosity are a source of concern for politicians, jurists or security experts, the question of the visibility of Islām deserves to be debated.

This research aims to articulate the community dimension and the urban public space in the context of liberal societies. Public space leads to the question of community and vice-versa, as both of them are intimately linked. This perspective provides the opportunity to analyse the nature of religious manifestations, their expressions and their reception as 'counter-discourses'. The liberal public space being the place of individualities, the community dimension, especially the religious one, therefore can be interpreted as a position, an action and a form of counter-power.

In connection with these questions, we will also be led to examine the issue of religiosity as being shaped by processes inherent to the constitution of public space in the liberal context. A space that enshrines the individual dimension of conformity while rejecting the communitarian reality.

Starting from this conceptual framework, how does the public space contribute to the emergence of forms of religiosity and “domestication of the sacred”? What does it mean to be visible today? Would visibility be a means of expressing a sense of belonging to a group or an instrument of self-construction, which could be exclusively personal?

*Keywords:* Islām, Public space, Visibility, Liberal context.

La modernità in Occidente ha impiegato la questione religiosa, negli ultimi trent’anni, in processi che mostrano una maggiore interazione tra religiosità, visibilità e spazio pubblico urbano. In un momento in cui espressioni, comportamenti e forme di religiosità sono fonte di preoccupazione per politici, giuristi o esperti di sicurezza, la questione della visibilità dell’Islām merita di essere discussa.

Questa ricerca mira ad articolare la dimensione comunitaria e lo spazio pubblico urbano nel contesto delle società liberali. Lo spazio pubblico porta alla questione della comunità e viceversa, poiché entrambi sono intimamente collegati. Questa prospettiva offre l’opportunità di analizzare la natura delle manifestazioni religiose, le loro espressioni e la loro ricezione come “contro-discorsi”. Lo spazio pubblico liberale è il luogo delle individualità, la dimensione comunitaria, specialmente quella religiosa, pertanto può essere interpretata come una posizione, un’azione e una forma di contro-potere.

In relazione a queste domande, saremo anche portati a esaminare la questione della religiosità come modellata da processi inerenti alla costituzione dello spazio pubblico nel contesto liberale. Uno spazio che sancisce la dimensione individuale della conformità mentre respinge la realtà comunitaria.

A partire da questo quadro concettuale, in che modo lo spazio pubblico contribuisce all’emergere di forme di religiosità e “addomesticamento del sacro”? Cosa significa essere visibili oggi? La visibilità sarebbe un mezzo per esprimere un senso di appartenenza a un gruppo o uno strumento di autocostruzione, che potrebbe essere esclusivamente personale?

*Parole chiave:* Islām, Spazio pubblico, Visibilità, Contesto liberale.

