



# Islamic Organisations in Western Switzerland

Actors, Networks, and Socio-Cultural Activities

Elisa Banfi and Matteo Gianni (eds.)

Cohésion sociale et pluralisme culturel  
Sozialer Zusammenhalt und kultureller Pluralismus  
Social Cohesion and Cultural Pluralism

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## Collection “Social Cohesion and Cultural Pluralism”

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# List of Acronyms of Islamic Associations

ACFMS	Cultural Association of Muslim Women of Switzerland / Association Culturelle des Femmes Musulmanes de Suisse
ACIAF	Albanian Islamic Cultural Association of Fribourg / Association culturelle islamique albanaise de Fribourg
ACMM	Meyrin Muslim Cultural Association / Association Culturelle Musulmane Meyrinoise
AMAG	Association for the Arab World in Geneva / Association pour le Monde Arabe de Genève
AMEUG	Muslim Association of University Students of Geneva / Association Musulmane des Étudiants Universitaires de Genève
AMF	Association of the Muslims of Fribourg / Association des musulmans de Fribourg
ASCMC	Aigle's Muslim Association / Association Musulmane d'Aigle
BMK	Basler Muslim Commission / Basler Muslim Kommission
CCIAG	Albanian Cultural Centre of Gruyere / Centre culturel islamique albanais de la Guyère
CCML	Muslim Cultural Complex of Lausanne / Complexe Culturel Musulman de Lausanne CICRA: Integration Cultural and Religious Albanian Centre / Centre d'Intégration Culturel et Religieux Albanais
CIGE	Islamic Centre of Geneva / Centre Islamique de Genève
DIAC	From Individual to Collective / De l'Individuel Au Collectif
DIGO	Organisation of Islamic Communities in Eastern Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein / Dachverband Islamischer Gemeinden der Ostschweiz und des Fürstentums Liechtenstein
Diyanet	Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs / İsviçre Türk Diyanet Vakfı, Islamic Türkisch Stiftung für die Schweiz
DLAE	From Light to Excellence / De la Lumière à l'Excellence
FAGS	Federation of the Alevis organisations in Switzerland / Föderation der alevitischen Gemeinden in der Schweiz
FCI	Islamic Cultural Foundation / Fondation Culturelle Islamique (FCI)
FIDS	Federation of Islamic Umbrella Organisations / Föderation Islamischer Dachorganisationen Schweiz (FIDS) / Fédération d'Organisations Islamiques de Suisse (FOIS)

FIOE	Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe
GMI	Youth Muslims of Italy / Giovani Musulmani d'Italia
GMU	University Muslim Group / Groupe Musulman Universitaire
IGMG	Islamic Community of Millî Görüş / Islamische Gemeinschaft Millî Görüş
IZRS	Islamic Central Council of Switzerland / Islamische Zentralrat Schweiz
JIL	Islamic Youth of Lausanne / Jeunesse Islamique de Lausanne
KIOS	Coordination of Islamic Organisations in Switzerland / Koordination Islamischer Organisationen Schweiz
LMS	Swiss Muslim League / Ligue Musulmane de Suisse
MCDA	Musulmans-Chrétiens pour le Dialogue et l'Amitié
MGB	Muslim community Basel
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi
MUCIVI	Museum of Civilizations of Islam in Switzerland
RAJR	Annual Meeting of the Romande Youth / Rencontre Annuelle de la Jeunesse Romande.
SASI	The Islamic Social Welfare Service / Service d'Aide Sociale Islamique
UAMF	Union of the Associations of Muslims of Freiburg / Union des Associations Musulmanes de Fribourg
UMMA	Islamischer Kantonalverband Bern
UNOM	Neuchâtel's Union of Muslim Organisations / Union Neuchâteloise des Organisations Musulmanes
UOMG	Union of Muslim Organisations in Geneva / Union des Organisations Musulmanes de Genève
UVAM	Vaud Union of Muslim Associations / Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes
VAM	Association of Aargau's Muslims / Verband Aargauer Muslime
VIOZ	Islamic organisations in Zurich / Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen in Zurich
YSMN	Young Swiss Muslim Network
UCOII	Islamic Communities and Organizations of Italy / Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia

# 1 Writing and Investigating about Islamic Organisations in Switzerland

*Elisa Banfi*

This chapter outlines the book's core arguments by introducing the academic debate on Muslims and Islamic organisations in Switzerland. It first contextualises a set of intertwined questions, for example: how can Islamic organisations shape themselves to ensure representation and recognition at the local and national levels of a federal state; and can these Islamic organisations' social and cultural activities increase their political inclusion? Second, the chapter summarises the scientific literature that describes the influence of institutional migratory regulations, welfare policies, and the state-church relationship on Islamic organisations, including their networks and activities.

## 1.1 Introduction

Islamic organisations in Switzerland stand at a crossroads: as never before, today their leaders and members experience pressures from both transnational and local dynamics. Geopolitical tensions connected to wars in the Middle East and North Africa, the Arab Spring revolution, the rise and fall of the Islamic State and other terrorist groups, alongside the failed coup in Turkey, have all influenced the structure and self-representation of Islamic organisations in Europe as a whole and Switzerland in particular. At the same time, converts and second-generation Swiss Muslims – especially women and young people – have increasingly claimed their place in structured activities outside of traditional Islamic networks. Islamic organisations themselves have successfully transformed the broader perceptions of Islam in public space through innovative actions and repertoires of mobilisation. Overall, exogenous and endogenous dynamics are changing the panorama of Islamic organisations in Europe by rearranging their alliances and hostilities.

What divergent and/or convergent forces shape the structures of Muslim organisations, in Europe and Switzerland specifically? States from which Muslim immigrants emigrate aggressively and progressively reassessing their ambition to control their diaspora. This is observed, for instance,

in Turkey via Diyanet, or in Morocco regarding radicalised immigrants (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018; Bruce 2019). However, the diaspora has also strengthened its desire to avoid the control of its various origin states, while second-generation Muslims lead the way to a practice of Islam conforming to new environmental conditions. Second-generation Muslims and converts are – both empirically and theoretically – considering the possibility of practising Islam as a religious minority in a democratic and laic state (Schmid and al. 2022). And across European states, public authorities, and citizens debate the training of imams and Islamic religious teachers (Ben Achour and Dermange 2017; Schmid and Trucco 2019)

So, today it is more important than ever to understand the activities of Islamic associations, which requires interdisciplinary competency and mixed methods of inquiry (Kortmann and Rosenow-Williams 2013). Proficiency in international relations and gender studies is needed to evaluate how transnational factors, such as the failed military coup in Turkey, or political initiatives like bans on minarets and burqas, influence Islamic organisational networks. Theological aptitude is required to assess the variety of branches of Islam that have established centres or associations in western countries in recent decades. In addition, sociological and political sciences expertise is vital to understand how Islamic organisations can use specific organisational structures to ensure representation, especially in a federal state such as Switzerland. Experience in psychology and media communications is also crucial in analyses of the institutional racialisation of Muslim believers and its interconnection with Islamic organisations.

The book intends to address these challenges through data analysis conducted by researchers from various areas of study, including anthropology, gender studies, political science, sociology, information sciences, and Islamic studies. It focuses on Islamic organisations and their evolution in western Switzerland. The book's contributors examine how democracy, representation, and recognition can influence the development of Islamic networks, their organisation, and political inclusion in the Swiss context. The contributors use analyses of current data to show how regulating migratory policies and the state-church relationship have influenced the historical emergence of Islamic organisations, second-generation Muslims' organisational activities, Muslims' sociocultural agency at the cantonal and municipal levels, and Muslims' claim-making activities concerning representation.

Almost all the data in the following chapters derive from large-scale projects or doctoral studies financed by the European Union (EU) or the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). The bulk of the data come from two projects:

(i) *Finding a Place for Islam in Europe*, an EU-funded project that investigates cultural patterns involving Muslim immigrants and their relationships with six European host countries; semi-structured questionnaires provide in-depth quantitative data on how the representatives of Turkish, Moroccan, Pakistani, and ex-Yugoslavian Muslim organisations think and operate.

(ii) *Public Deliberation, Network Analysis and the Political Inclusion of Muslims Living in Switzerland, France and United Kingdom*, an SNSF project that generates quantitative and qualitative data on the deliberations that Muslim actors engage in when intervening in the public sphere, particularly with respect to issues of social and political concern to Muslims in Switzerland, France, and Great Britain. This project's data are also controlled to account for local variations within Switzerland. The research evaluates the network ties these actors have developed through deliberative interventions; the data are taken from an organisational survey of key national and local Muslim organisations.

The following chapters display recent data on the activities of Islamic organisations. The authors investigate – theoretically and empirically – how these activities affect the public recognition of Islamic organisations and, in turn, how that public recognition influences the Islamic organisations. All authors focus on new data that shows the interaction between Swiss institutions and Islamic organisations, especially in providing services to different groups within the Swiss population.

## 1.2 Social Movement Findings and Islamic Organisational Studies

Over the last two decades, scholars have reshaped their theories concerning Islamic organisations in Europe; many researchers have begun to focus on the relationship between organisational structures and their recognition by public institutions to better understand the public accommodation of Muslims who reside in Europe (for more bibliographic details, see: Laurence 2012; Abbas 2017). This theoretical evolution was particularly influenced, explicitly or implicitly, by recent findings in the research field of social movements and immigrant organisations. In particular, the Swiss scholar Nina Eggert offers a pivotal contribution to understand how membership in voluntary associations and religious affiliation favours the political integration of migrants. Already in 2007, Eggert and Pilati (2007) showed that religious cleavages recognised

at the institutional level play a relevant role in political participation and the mobilisation of migrants. Eggert and Giugni (2011) fruitfully combined institutional structure theories with social network analysis with respect to immigrant political participation and inclusion. They showed that the local institutional context shapes the impact of religious belonging on both political participation and protest activities among immigrants. Their study established that, in pluralist cities such as London and Barcelona, membership of religious associations significantly affected both Muslims' political participation and their protest activities. These authors have empirically proved that a sense of religious belonging (acquired via associations) is a relevant indicator for political participation and inclusion. Eggert's findings (2011) in particular provide accurate identification of the effects of various institutional contexts on network structures of migrant organisations and confirm their influence on collective forms of mobilisation and political participation. Building on these findings, Banfi (2018) investigates networks of Islamic organisations in different local and national contexts in Switzerland, and she drafts an essential Islamic organisational cartography in *Chapter 2 The Development of the Islamic Organising Process in Switzerland* of this book.

### 1.3 The Social and Cultural Engagement of Islamic Organisations and the Inclusion of Muslims

The theoretical and empirical framework of this book is also grounded in recent studies that reconsider the public and collective identity of Muslims in Europe by analysing their organisational reality (Yukleyen and Yurdakul 2011; Peucker and Ceylan 2017). Some scholars analyse Islamic identity and its evolution in European countries by considering resource mobilisation, political-opportunity structure, and ideology (Fetzer and Soper 2005). Others have begun to focus on organisational structures and their activities to better understand Muslims' civic and political participation (Peucker and Akbarzadeh 2014; Peucker 2016; Peucker and Ceylan 2017). These studies have reinstated a more heterogeneous picture of European Islam. At the same time, they show how institutions coping with a variety of Islamic realities have sometimes neglected the impact of such diversity on integration policies and their outcomes (Banfi 2015; 2018). This book, especially *Chapter 5 Islamic Social Services in Switzerland: Crossing Religious Boundaries to Benefit Society as a Whole* (Baptiste Brodard), *Chapter 6 Swiss Welfare Politics and Local Islamic Organisations: A Case Study of the Islamic Social Service of Geneva* (Jérôme Grand), and *Chapter 7 Navigating between Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion: The Making of a Swiss Muslim Community in the Canton of Vaud* (Akbar

Nour), theoretically and empirically explores how Islamic organisations set up and manage their integration in a local Swiss institutional context by developing social activities.

In these chapters, the authors have developed – explicitly or implicitly – findings of two groundbreaking studies differing in their substantive focus, data, and methodological approach. The first, *Faith-based Organisations and Exclusion in European Cities* (Beaumont and Cloke 2012), examines the role of faith-based organisations in social exclusion in Europe. The book focuses on the findings of a European project, Faith-Based Organisations and Exclusion in European Cities (FACIT), an EU Seventh Framework Program. This project explores religious organisations and their social engagement in six states: the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK, Germany, Spain, and Sweden. The second study, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Davis and Robinson 2012), focuses on religious movements that provide social services in the United States, Egypt, Italy, and Israel. In both books, the authors stress the crucial role of welfare activities produced by Islamic organisations in structuring their public presence and recognition. In fact, the welfare activities provided by Islamic associations become a magnifying glass through which we can better explain the process of integration and/or accommodation of the Muslim population via their organisational networks (for an extensive literature review on this topic, see: Kortmann 2018; Banfi 2018). On one side, Kortmann (2018) has shown, for instance, that the political inclusion of Muslim organisations in Germany and Netherlands is strictly related to lack of equal treatment in relation to other religious organisations in providing welfare services. According to the author, Islamic organisational structures can be impacted by the institutional non-recognition of the relevance of welfare Islamic activities.

In any case, the political ramifications of sceptic views on Islam in Western democracies become visible when looking at the minor role the religion is being granted in the public spheres. Not only with regard to opportunities of Islamic welfare, European discourses imply difficult conditions as long as the fear of Islamic organizations being organizationally deficient, exclusive, disintegrating or even extremist prevails. Moreover, the fact that Islamic organizations themselves feel that they are confronted with general suspicion and treated unequally makes it rather unlikely that they are motivated to meet the requirements for being included as equal players in welfare delivery or other realms of public policy. Particularly in Germany, these requirements which include professional organizational structures. (Kortmann 2018, 453)

On the other side, Banfi and Bridji (2016) have shown that local and national welfare systems modify their impact on religious social services according to their degree of privatisation and decentralisation. In fact, forms of privatisation and decentralisation of social services have increased the diversity of social interactions between public authorities and religious associations. Since the 1980s, new forms of local cooperation between religion and public institutions have been created and developed in all countries affected by the economic crisis and/or by dismantling public centralised social services. At different levels (national or local), religious associations, both more traditional or less so, thus find spaces to develop social activities that either complement or add to those that already exist. In their analysis, Banfi and Bridji (2016) outlined the ambiguous role of Islamic social services. In fact, on one hand, Muslim organisations can fight social exclusion by providing social services to the beneficiaries (often immigrants) excluded from public services, but on the other hand, they can foster communitarianism within most disadvantaged and isolated popular strata.

In this regard, Peucker (2020) recently demonstrated in the Australian context how the role of the “Muslim intra-community volunteering strengthens both their religious and their civic identity, and helps them become more engaged, politically interested and critical citizens, with extended social networks within and, to a slightly lesser extent, beyond the Muslim community” (Peucker 2020, 2367). Peucker’s outcomes have paved the way for studies such as that in *Chapter 3 Youth Islamic Associations in Romandie* by Elisa Banfi and Victor Sanchez-Mazas. These authors investigate how youth Islamic organisations promote different forms of Muslim volunteering according to their organisational identity and how these volunteering activities can also impact their structure. However, scholars (Kuppinger 2014; Rey 2019) have recently analysed not only the welfare activities of Islamic organisations but also their cultural activities to better understand the patterns governing the inclusion and exclusion of Muslims. On one side, Virginie Rey (2019) recently investigated the creation of museums by Muslim communities in diasporic contexts and their effect on inclusion/exclusion and public visibility of Islamic organisations themselves: “One of the most important yet most invisible aspects of this museographic revival for the representation of Islam is the creation of museums led by local Muslim communities themselves. Increasingly, these communities are using museums as a medium to develop new ways of thinking about their identity in the West” (Rey 2019, 250). On the other side, Petra Kuppinger (2014) has focused on the everyday cultural work of ordinary people who for decades have negotiated compromises in multicultural and multireligious urban neighbourhoods. She has shown a great divergence between abstract public debates in media and parliament

concerning “Islamic” scandals and everyday cultural interaction of ordinary people creating new common identities by negotiating lifestyles in urban neighbourhoods. *Chapter 4 Muslim Organisations and the Laïcité Challenge in the Canton of Geneva* by Victor Sanchez-Mazas unveils, through accurate analysis, the role played in everyday life by negotiations and deliberative exchanges among Islamic and non-Islamic actors on a hot topic such the *laïcité* in the canton of Genève.

Also inspired by Kuppinger’s findings, Çağla Aykaç and Elisa Banfi, in *Chapter 9 Women, Islamic Associations, and Public Debates in Switzerland from a Gender Perspective*, consider the role of different female leaders of associations speaking about Islamic issues who have increased their public visibility by developing cultural activities, such as writing books, organising conferences, or founding museums.

Finally, over the last two decades, studies on radicalisation have greatly innovated in the field of Islamic organisation studies. They have shown how local Islamic organisations that have developed counterterrorism activities have drastically transformed the organisational identity of Islamic actors and their insertion into local and national civic networks (Awan 2012; Shanaah and Lindekilde 2019). In this regard, in *Chapter 8 Swiss Islamic Organisations and the Challenge of Radicalisation*, authors Miryam Eser Davolio and Elisa Banfi investigate how Islamic associations in west Switzerland have been transformed by their counterterrorist policies.

Overall – and in a polymorphous way – each chapter innovates in how Islamic organisations have been studied in Switzerland. By displaying new data, authors aim to stimulate new research, especially on the empirical interactions between public authorities and Islamic actors.

## 1.4 Scientific Data on Islamic Organisations in Switzerland

Concerning existing scientific data on Islamic organisations in Switzerland, the SNSF has afforded great relevance to studies on Swiss Islam in recent years by financing large federal projects. However, the rapid transformation of Islamic organisational networks has created the need to constantly update scientific information on them.

The first research program that produced knowledge on Islamic organisations in Switzerland was the National Research Programme (NRP) 58, Religions, the State and Society. The NRP 58 sub-project, *The Emergence of Associative Muslim Actors in the Public Sphere in Switzerland*, was coordinated by Prof Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi of the University of Lausanne and

realised with the help of the senior researcher Sophie Nedjar and the research assistant Samina Mesgarzadeh (Bennani-Chraïbi et al. 2011). This study was based on eighty-two qualitative interviews (80–240 minutes each) with local, national, and cantonal Islamic actors. Through this project, representatives from fifty-four Muslim associations were interviewed between 2008 and 2010.

The basis of the knowledge of the organisational structure of Islamic associations at the federal and cantonal level was established in this study. A relevant update of this data has come with three publications: *Muslime in der Schweiz* (Allenbach and Sökefeld 2010), *La Suisse des mosquées: derrière le voile de l'unité musulmane* (Monnot 2013) and *The Diversity of Religious Diversity. Using Census and NCS Methodology in Order to Map and Assess the Religious Diversity of a Whole Country* (Monnot and Stolz 2014). Many other studies have contributed to this field (for instance: Schneuwly Purdie and Lathion 2003; Schneuwly Purdie et al. 2009; Tunger-Zanetti and Lathion 2012, 2013; Schneuwly Purdie 2013; Tunger-Zanetti and Schneuwly Purdie 2014, 2015, 2019; Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti 2016, 2017, 2020, 2021, 2022; Tunger-Zanetti 2018; Tunger-Zanetti and Endres 2019), as well as other local general mapping studies.<sup>1</sup>

Turning to consider the beginning of the Islamic organising process in the country, the majority of scholars outline the crucial role of the Islamic Muslim League in sponsoring the creation of the Islamic Centre of Geneva / Centre Islamique de Genève in 1961, and the Islamic Cultural Foundation / Fondation Culturelle Islamique in 1975, also in Geneva. Monnot (2013) observed that the network of Islamic organisations was diversified through the emergence of national Islamic associations, such as Albanian and Bosnian organisations. Meanwhile, Bennani and her colleagues (Bennani-Chraïbi et al. 2011) described how the birth of Turkish Islamic associations in the canton of Basel between 1972 and 2004 was related to political and religious conflicts in Turkey. In this period, some Islamic associations decided to affiliate themselves with the Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs / İsviçre Türk Diyanet Vakfı, Islamic Türkisch Stiftung für die Schweiz (Diyanet), whereas others affiliated themselves with the Islamic Community of Millî Görüs; still others decided to maintain their independence to prevent external influence. Kurdish second-generation migrants played a role in structuring these alliances and divisions (Bennani-Chraïbi et al. 2011).

In a seminal chapter, 'The Organisation of Muslims of Switzerland', Mesgarzadeh and her colleagues (Mesgarzadeh et al. 2013) describe the embry-

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1 In the city of Zurich (Humbert 2004; Banfi 2013; Baumann et al. 2022), the two half-cantons of Basel-City and Basel-Country (Baumann and Hess-Hurt 2014), in the canton of Ticino (Trisconi De Bernardi 2007), in the canton of Lucerne ([www.unilu.ch/rel-LU](http://www.unilu.ch/rel-LU)) and in the canton of Geneva (Banfi 2013; Gonzales et al. 2014).

onic presence of Muslim women's associations and youth associations at the national and cantonal level. They also outline the emergence of several Islamic cantonal associations at the end of 1990 as a reaction to the provocations of external actors. Three cantonal organisations are listed in this example: the Basler Muslim Commission / Basler Muslim Kommission (BMK), the Union of Muslim Organisations in Geneva / Union des Organisations Musulmanes de Genève (UOMG) and the Islamic community of the canton of Ticino / Comunità Islamica del Canton Ticino. Another relevant scholar, Behloul (2013) analysed the birth of federal organisational structures such as the Coordination of Islamic Organisations Switzerland / Koordination Islamischer Organisationen Schweiz (KIOS) and the Federation of Islamic Umbrella Organisations / Föderation Islamischer Dachorganisationen Schweiz (FIDS). He outlined two mechanisms that led to the emergence of the cantonal associations: institutional influences and the agency of charismatic leaders. Other quantitative data are displayed by Monnot (2013), based on the National Congregations Study, which is a cumulative data set (1998, 2006, and 2008) on religious organisations in Switzerland produced by the University of Lausanne's Observatory of Religions in Switzerland (Monnot and Stolz 2014). Islamic associations concentrate more on urban sites than rural regions; their average budget (CHF 60,000) is smaller than that of other religious associations (CHF 180,000) (Monnot 2013). Behloul (2013) analysed also the emergence of the first religious and cultural association for Swiss Bosniak residents: an organisation based in Teufenthal in 1988. The war of 1992 transformed this association into a centre for the coordination of humanitarian aid and the identification of refugees.<sup>2</sup> These scholars established a foundation for mapping the organisational structure of Swiss Islam, as well as independent website projects such as INFOREL (2022) in Basel or CIC (2022) in the canton of Geneva, Vaud and Ticino.

## 1.5 Describing and Studying the Islamic Organisational Process in Switzerland

Over the last two decades, many actors who produced information on Islamic organisations have been trapped in the media's "quoting game", aiming to influence public debates. Journalists, academic scholars, freelance experts, and spokespersons for these Islamic organisations have interacted (and even fought) to orient the conversation towards their specific interpretations of

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2 According to Behloul (2013), the Federation of the Islamic Bosniak Community of Switzerland / Islamska Zajednica Bošnjaka u Švicarskoj gathered nineteen mosques in 2013; these mosques were dependent on the Rijaset – the Bosnian religious authority based in Sarajevo – which is responsible for the training of imams.

Islamic organisations' presence in the country. Each actor has repeatedly quoted opinions of other actors, and, throughout these quotations, judgments and appreciations, facts have evaporated – and the circle of emotional cross-references has disoriented the audience. Even scholars are typically asked to provide not their analyses and data, but rather their judgments of other actors.<sup>3</sup> This trend exposes citizens to fragmented information about a complex phenomenon; they are often not equipped to decode the specific interests and strategies of each actor in the quoting game.

Problems in the production of high-quality data on Islamic organisations are manifold. For instance, a long period of direct observation is needed to obtain these data. Researchers must plan for many months of on-the-ground experience, which is expensive and time-consuming. The need to publish books and articles to develop their academic careers discourages scholars from investing the necessary five or six years in such research. Hence, scholars' weak engagement in gathering such precious data has paved the way for bloggers and journalists – who are not often subjected to ethical, methodological, or institutional controls – to present their investigative results.<sup>4</sup>

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3 A good example is the following anecdote. On 30 July 2018, a major Swiss Islamic organisation, the Federation of Islamic Umbrella Organisations / Föderation Islamischer Dachorganisationen Schweiz (FIDS), sent a letter to Mme Patricia Brambilla, a journalist for the customer-centric magazine of the Migros retail company. The letter asked for a correction based on Brambilla's interview with Mme Saïda Keller-Messahli. In this letter, the association expressed astonishment regarding the fact that the journalist had presented Keller-Messahli's recent book on Islamic organisations in Switzerland in a favourable manner, without criticism. To support this position, the FIDS spokesman quoted Prof Dr Hansjörg Schmid, Director of the Swiss Centre of Islam and Society at the University of Fribourg, and Prof Dr Reinhard Schulze of the University of Bern; both of these experts asserted that Mme Keller-Messahli "uses the populist techniques", "half-truths" and "conspiracy theory" by founding her assertions on stereotypes that are impossible to verify. The association also quoted Austrian experts, quoted in one of the most important German-language newspapers (the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*), as asserting that Mme Keller-Messahli is not competent to speak on Islamic issues. Finally, the associations also cited Swiss authorities that decided to not cooperate with Mme Keller-Messahli because they believe that she has been radicalised (FIDS 2018).

4 At the same time, high-quality data on Islamic organisations often requires an insider's point of view. Such internal observation is best made by scholars (using ethical and scientific methodologies); in addition, freelance columnists, bloggers, and journalists are often in contact with internal sources who must be protected by anonymity. In both cases, internal observations can be biased. The difference between scholars and columnists or bloggers is that the former must adopt a methodology that involves declaring their studies' biases and the critical aspects of their data. Public institutions force journalists, freelance columnists and bloggers do so only in the case of accusations of defamation by forcing them to reveal their sources. In both cases, transparency is problematic in the validation process for this kind of data.

The “quoting game” played by academics, freelance bloggers, Islamic organisations, and journalists is strictly correlated with digitalisation, which has irreversibly transformed the landscape of communicative tools, frameworks, and styles. As recently as thirty years ago, cultural elites had a monopoly on the production of information on crucial societal issues. Today, sources of information have multiplied, new forms of communication have democratised the creation of information for all citizens. At the same time, the need to analyse the nature and sources of information has become less pressing due to exigencies such as the need to quickly and regularly obtain new information. As criteria and standards for the production and consumption of information on Islam deteriorate, many citizens are increasingly interested in Islamic issues because of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent wave of global terrorist violence. Consequently, scholars, journalists, citizens, and freelance self-proclaimed experts must cope with the theoretical, epistemological, and empirical complexity of Islamic studies. Even though the production of scientific articles on Islam is steadily increasing, scientific cartographies of the organisational Islamic presence in Europe are still rare. The purpose of this book is to give readers a global picture of Islamic organisations’ presence in Switzerland and to present unedited data on Islamic organisations in western Switzerland from academic studies on this issue. It thus aims to pave the way for more accurate and better-documented discussions about this complex and sensitive subject.

## 1.6 Plan of this Book

One purpose of this book is to respond to the increasingly political interest in Islamic organisations in Switzerland by expanding beyond common knowledge. Even though between 2010 and 2021 the Muslim population in the country increased by only about 1 percent, political concerns about the organisational life of this part of the population have exploded in the last decade.

For instance, at the federal legislative level, the National Council as well as State Council have increasingly coped with parliamentary objects concerning Islamic organisations over the last twenty years (from 2001 to 2016; see Banfi 2021). In both federal political arenas, Islamic organisations are most always depicted as a problem and associated with different kinds of danger.

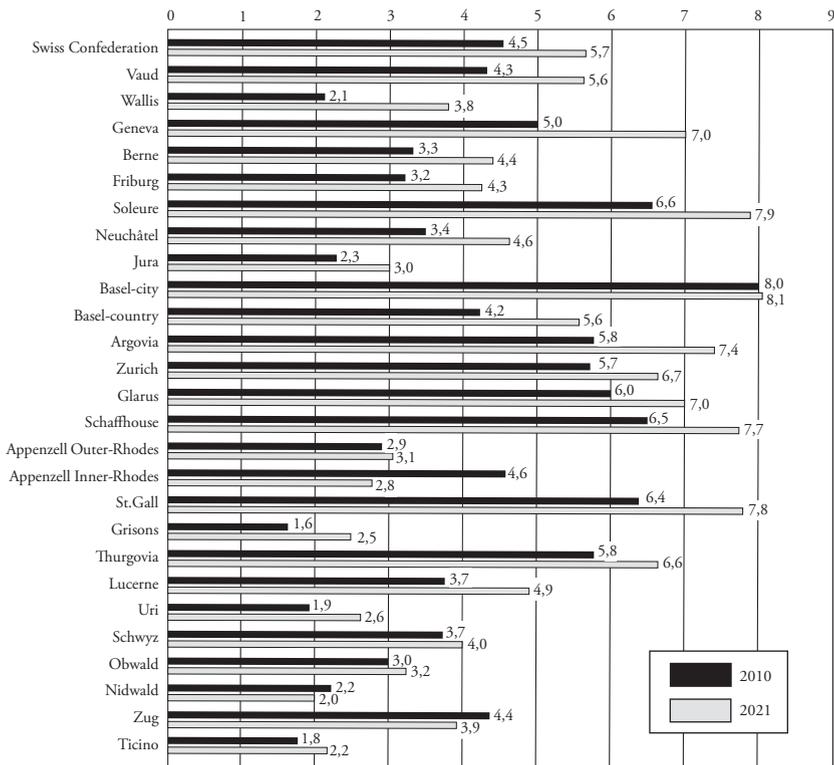
Even analysing more recent parliamentary objects from 2016 through 2018<sup>5</sup>, three main and strictly correlated concerns arise: the financing of Islamic

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5 Concerning the methodology, we built the data set through an exhaustive collection of parliamentary objects (and the respective Federal Council responses), as retrieved from the official Curia Vista website (French version). We analysed the parliamentary

centres by foreign states or actors; terrorist activities developed inside or from the Islamic organisations; and anti-democratic behaviours spread through Muslim associations. The financing of Islamic centres is seen as problematic, whether money comes from foreign countries or Swiss public authorities. In many parliamentary objects, the issue of financing from foreign states or actors is often associated with the possibility for the state authorities to modify the Swiss network of Islamic associations by banning some Islamic associations and promoting others.

*Figure 1: Permanent resident Muslim population aged 15 or over by canton, in 2010 and in 2021, in percent*



Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office – FSO, Structural Survey 2010–2021.

objects from 1 January 2016 to 1 September 2018. We searched all parliamentary objects for the following keyword equation: (Islam\* OR Musulman\*) AND (association\* OR centre\* OR organisation\*), resulting in a sample of sixty objects: seven from 2018, twenty-one from 2017 and thirty-three from 2016.

However, political parties at the federal level address questions and propose legislative actions by underrating the varieties of cantonal Islamic presence and their organisational structures. How do the cantonal and federal Islamic organisational structures vary in the country today? How can institutional policies of recognition influence the organisational network of Islamic organisations? How does the sociodemographic evolution of Muslim believers in the country influence the activities, purposes, and structures of their organisations? Do the cultural and social activities of Muslim organisations have an impact on social cohesion? The three main sections of this book provide manifold answers to these questions.

In the first section (Chapters 2, 3, and 4), the authors demonstrate the historical development of the Islamic organisational structure in Switzerland by stressing institutional, sociodemographic, and theological factors.

Chapter 2 offers an historical description of the federal and cantonal origins of Islamic umbrella organisations. In fact, in Switzerland, the federal Islamic organisations stem from two other forms of federation of Islamic organisations: (i) cantonal Islamic organisations, and (ii) mono-national federations, such as the Bosnian and Albanian federations. From the late 1970s, various cantons witnessed the emergence of several Islamic associations, and more recently cantonal umbrella organisations. At the theoretical level, Chapter 2 provides a comparative panorama of the Islamic cantonal structures.

Chapter 3 analyses new developments in second-generation Muslims' agency in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Using qualitative and quantitative data, the authors Elisa Banfi and Victor Sanchez-Mazas explore different second-generation Muslim organisations by investigating their relationships with national, cantonal, and local identities. Furthermore, their organisational and relational ties with other older Islamic associations are discussed, as well as their effort to structure regular intra-cantonal common public events.

In Chapter 4, shifting from social to political activities, Victor Sanchez-Mazas approaches the complex interaction between the Geneva *laïcité* and the Islamic organisational presence in the canton. In April 2018, the canton of Geneva became the first state to endow itself with a specific law on *laïcité*. Sanchez-Mazas describes the political process of leading several groups, notably Muslim organisations, to launch a facultative referendum against the law on *laïcité*. The chapter also investigates political inclusion and religious regulation within the legislative processes that led to the law on *laïcité*; it interrogates the work of the constituent assembly in 2009 to the parliamentary acceptance of a law on *laïcité* in 2018.

The three chapters in the second section provide empirical details on the social engagements of Muslim residents in Geneva, Vaud, and Bern cantons. Chapter 5 sheds new light on Islamic social engagement in Switzerland by describing new forms of social Islamic agency via quantitative data. Baptiste Brodard displays how Swiss Islamic organisations structure new social activities outside of the traditional framework of community empowerment. The author uses a comparative methodology to critically demonstrate how theological affiliations, nationalist belongings, and sociodemographic characteristics can influence the need for Islamic organisations that provide social services to be supported by institutions and other non-Muslim actors. In Chapter 6, Jérôme Grand moves to evaluate the theoretical and empirical interactions between Swiss welfare politics and local Islamic organisations through a case study of the Islamic Social Service of Geneva. The author explains the historical growth of that organisation and its recent “secularisation” by focusing on how institutional policies and public funding have contributed to influencing its network and activities. This chapter also introduces readers to recent scientific literature on social Islamic engagements, especially in western countries.

In Chapter 7, Akbar Nour focuses on the cantonal Islamic organisational umbrella in the canton of Vaud. Muslims’ relationships with Vaud civil society and local authorities tend towards social inclusion. The author adopts a dialectical approach of the exclusion/inclusion dyad to handle the complex relationship between Swiss Muslim communities and their regional and cantonal context. He explains the role played by sociocultural activities and the process leading up to recognition by public cantonal authorities. The third section focuses on two main issues the media have recently attributed to Islamic organisations: radicalisation and the abuse of women’s rights. Since the rise of the Daesh terrorist attacks and the Caliphate, the media have increasingly focused on the problematic aspects of Islamic organisational presence in Europe. The alleged lack of gender equality inside Islamic organisations and their assumed role in facilitating radicalisation are largely debated in mainstream newspapers, radio, and TV programmes.

In Chapter 8, Miryam Eser Davolio and Elisa Banfi present data on how Islamic organisations have recently often been solicited by their own members to discuss and confront radical ideas and influences transmitted from the outside (i.e. the internet, radical preachers, etc.). The authors discuss how Islamic organisations have tried to fight against jihadist radicalisation, especially to protect second-generation and converted Muslims.

In Chapter 9, Çağla Aykaç and Elisa Banfi analyse four female figures who participate in the public debate on Islamic organisations across the country. The authors compare the speakers’ public positioning about Islamic

organisations and women's rights by contextualising them in larger European debates about gender equality and Islam. The chapter interrogates the relationship between the speakers' identities and attributes (converts, women, Swiss citizens, people of migrant origin) and their positioning by outlining theoretical and analytical articulations between meaning and speakers.

In Chapter 10, Matteo Gianni summarises the findings and results of previous contributions by highlighting their theoretical and methodological limitations. Based on the recent academic results of Swiss researchers, the chapter paves the way for a contextualisation of the structure of Swiss Islamic organisations.

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**Discussing  
the Historical  
Development  
of the Islamic  
Organisational  
Structure in  
Switzerland**



## 2 The Islamic Organisations in Switzerland: An Historical Overview

*Elisa Banfi*

### 2.1 Introduction

Since its inception, the Islamic organisational process in Switzerland has been compelled to deal with a federal structure. A majority of the members of the first Islamic centres were immigrants, who needed to familiarise themselves with municipal and cantonal powers – and, in a few cases, federal powers – in order to build their associative structures. Swiss cantons feature twenty-six legal systems that manage immigrant and religious rights; consequently, Islamic organisations structured their activity at the local level before the cantonal and federal levels (Cattacin et al. 2003; Marti et al. 2010).

Intra-cantonal difference influences the Islamic organisational process in many ways. To those new residents willing to engage in the specific structures of associative activities, each canton offers different access to social, economic, and political opportunities. The linguistic variety from canton to canton may facilitate the settlement of some Muslim groups to the detriment of others, for instance, Maghrebian immigrants in a Francophone area or Turkish immigrants in the German-speaking cantons. However, federalism also impacts the Islamic organisational process by other and more relevant means than linguistic variety. The Swiss federal system structures an asymmetric condition between the German and French cantons in terms of the naturalisation procedure and the cultural requirement for acquiring a long-term permit (Helbling 2008; Manatschal 2011; Manatschal 2012). Consequently, the process of settling and naturalising Muslim immigrants varies from canton to canton and may influence the social capital of Muslims.

## 2.2 Islamic Organisations at the Federal Level<sup>6</sup>

In Fribourg, in April 1981, different members of Islamic prayer rooms and associations initially proposed a federal structure for coordinating the activities of Muslims in the country.<sup>7</sup> Some of them and others have tried to concretize this idea during the eighties by having only partial results. For instance, between 1978 et 1989, Muhammad Tufail created in Eggerkingen an association named the Society of Islamic Organisations for coordinating especially Muslims in the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

However, only in 1992 did the arrival of Bosnian refugees in Switzerland pave the way for the country's first federal platform of Islamic associations. In fact, as a consequence of the Bosnian War, in August of 1992, leaders of Islamic associations created the platform "Hilfsorganisation für bosnische Flüchtlinge" to help Bosnian refugees mainly in Switzerland and beyond. About 45 associations from Switzerland coordinated their efforts to achieve a common goal. This platform, with its executive committee, secretary and presidency, lasted until 1996.<sup>8</sup>

After 2000, the attempts to consolidate a federal representative organization for Muslims in Switzerland have multiplied.

In 2000, Farhad Afshar became the president of the Society of Islamic Organisations, and the association was renamed the Coordination of Islamic Organizations Switzerland / Koordination Islamischer Organisationen Schweiz (KIOS). He tried to coordinate twenty-five associations at the local level by promoting Islamic education for the second and third generations of Muslims. It also wanted to coordinate some Islamic cantonal umbrella organizations and some intra-cantonal umbrella associations based on the nationality of origin to better interact with the authorities.<sup>9</sup> In 2005, he organized a meeting in Zürich by inviting different associations to become members of KIOS. However, many associations disagreed on the statute and the modality by which the membership was proposed. Due to these disagreements, in 2006,

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6 Scholars that have recently tried to keep trace of the evolution of federal Islamic structures in Switzerland are mainly Tunger-Zanetti and Schneuwly Purdie (Tunger-Zanetti 2018; Tunger-Zanetti and Lathion 2012, 2013; Tunger-Zanetti and Schneuwly Purdie 2014, 2015, 2019; Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti 2016, 2017, 2020, 2021, 2022). Journalists sources and individual interviews are still mandatory to keep up to the date the history of Islamic associations by taking in account different narratives.

7 Dia Eddine, Khaldoun. Founding member of the Hilfsorganisation für bosnische Flüchtlinge, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 17 May 2023.

8 Dia Eddine, Khaldoun. Founding member of the Hilfsorganisation für bosnische Flüchtlinge, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 17 May 2023.

9 Farhad, Afshar. KIOS President, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 24 March 2017.

some Muslim leaders created a new association: The Federation of Islamic Umbrella Organizations / Föderation Islamischer Dachorganisationen Schweiz (FIDS).<sup>10</sup> Unsuccessfully, the two organizations tried to merge again in 2010, while the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland / Islamische Zentralrat Schweiz (IZRS), another association founded in 2009, claimed to represent Swiss Muslims at the federal level (Euro-islam.info 2010; Stauffer 2010; Sommer and Marti 2015).

Until now, the Coordination of Islamic Organisations in Switzerland / Koordination Islamischer Organisationen Schweiz (KIOS) and the Federation of Islamic Umbrella Organisations / Föderation Islamischer Dachorganisationen Schweiz (FIDS) represent the two most relevant attempts to create a federal umbrella gathering some Islamic associations in the country. However, if KIOS has often aspired to maintain more of a coordinative role of these partners, FIDS has started to become “a supra-organization of organizations”<sup>11</sup> representing the interests of its members at the federal level.

The partners of KIOS<sup>12</sup> were mainly two cantonal umbrella associations<sup>13</sup>: die Basler Muslimkommission and der Islamische Kantonalverband Bern – Umma. However, between 2021 and 2023, the Islamische Kantonalverband Bern – Umma lost its relevance with the birth of a new umbrella in the Canton of Bern, the Islamic Cantonal Association of Bern / der Islamische Kantonalverband Bern (IKB).<sup>14</sup> Between 2021-2022, the IKB joined the FIDS, which accompanied its founding phase. Die Basler Muslimkommission also joined the FIDS during the same period.

In the last five years, KIOS has attempted, without relevant results, to develop a working group whose members and partners debate how to elect a common Islamic leadership in Basel to represent every Muslim residing in

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10 Dia Eddine, Khaldoun. Founding member of the Hilfsorganisation für bosnische Flüchtlinge, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 17 May 2023.

11 Farhad, Afshar. KIOS President, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 24 March 2017.

12 KIOS is also a founding member of the following interreligious organisations: the Swiss Council of Religions / Schweizerischer Rat der Religionen (SCR); the working group “Islam” of the Swiss Bishops’ Conference, Arbeitsgruppe “Islam” der Schweizer (AGI), Bischofskonferenz; the House of Religions, the Community of Christians and Muslims in Switzerland / Haus der Religionen, Gemeinschaft von Christen und Muslimen in der Schweiz; and the Round Table of the Religions / Runder Tisch der Religionen in Bern.

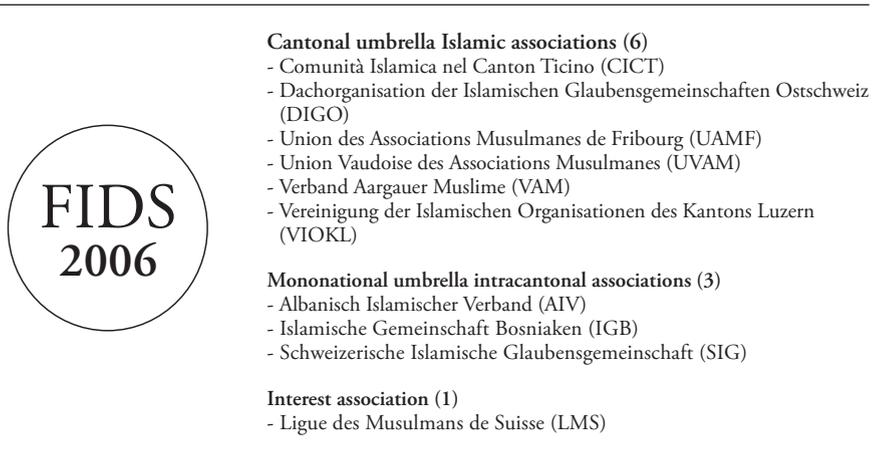
13 Furthermore, three other important associations are members: the Inter-knowing Foundation Genève / Fondation de l’Entre-Connaissance Genève, the Islamic Center Emam Ali / Centro Islamico Emam Ali, and the Ahle Beyt Lugano.

14 Redaktion «pfarrblatt», 11 November 2020, “Islamischer Kantonalverband im Kanton Bern gegründet”, <https://www.kathbern.ch/pfarrblatt/news-artikel/islamischer-kantonalverband-im-kanton-bern-gegruendet> (accessed June 09, 2023).

the canton (Stauffer 2010; Herzig 2012).<sup>15</sup> Its last activities were developed in the digital sphere by organizing many conferences and maintaining to be a member of the Swiss Council of Religions (Schweizerischer Rat der Religionen [SCR], www.ratderreligionen.ch) as well as the FIDS (Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti 2021).

By focusing on FIDS, it was founded on April 2006 by gathering, at that time, ten umbrella organizations (three intra-cantonal federations, six cantonal umbrella organizations, and two interest associations) federating 130 Islamic municipal associations (Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti 2021). FIDS modified its statute in 2010. Its members were almost stable during this period.

*Figure 1: FIDS Structure in 2006*



Source: FIDS (2006).

Already in 2015, FIDS federated twelve umbrella organizations by integrating those of Neuchâtel and Geneva and 170 members. In 2018, FIDS gathered twelve associations federating 170 Islamic centers. At this period, the cantonal umbrella association of Ticino left the FIDS, and a Diyanet intra-cantonal association joined the Federation.

<sup>15</sup> The working group considers how each Muslim can vote by owing passive and active rights, as well as how Muslims who do not belong to associations can be represented outside of the authorities Farhad, Afshar. KIOS President, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 24 March 2017.

Figure 2: FIDS Structure 2022/2023



Source: FIDS (2018).

FIDS aims to improve interreligious dialogue, reinforce religious peace, and represent its members. However, FIDS can also intervene at the cantonal level when individual members cannot solve problems with the public authorities. Recently, it has focused on improving member coordination by adopting digital devices to increase exchanges between affiliated associations. FIDS is not defined as a religious association but as a socio-cultural one. In the bodies of FIDS if a consensus is not reached through discussions, the decision are taken based on a majority vote.<sup>16</sup> FIDS rarely promotes local activities, which affiliated associations usually develop. FIDS is in constant dialogue and work with Swiss public authorities, municipal and cantonal – where needed – as well as with other authorities linked to part of the Muslim diaspora in Switzerland.<sup>17</sup>

Between 2018 and 2023, FIDS increased its representativeness in Switzerland's German-speaking part. BMK and the Islamischer Kantonalverband Bern IKB, the new federation of associations in Bern that was born from the cinder of UMMA joined FIDS.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, FIDS has recently accepted a second-generation umbrella organization YSMI as member-only

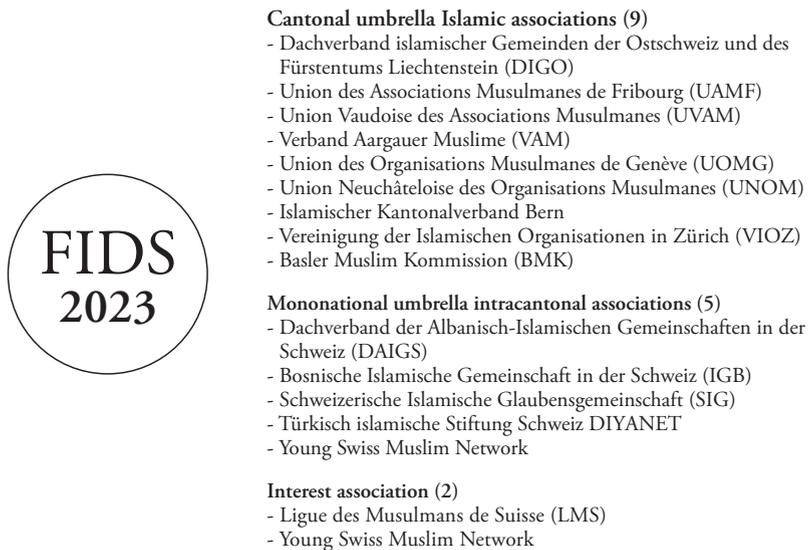
16 BenMrad, Montassar. FIDS President, interviewed by Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 31 October 2016.

17 BenMrad, Montassar. FIDS President, interviewed by Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 5 September 2016.

18 However, IGL, the cantonal umbrella of Luzern, decided to leave FIDS between 2018 and 2019.

on condition that it increases the number of its members.<sup>19</sup> In 2023, FIDS brings together twelve cantonal or intra-cantonal umbrella organizations, by federating almost 235 Islamic centers.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 3: FIDS Structure 2022/2023



Source: FIDS (2023).

The canton of Solothurn recently consulted the FIDS after the Islamic associations of the canton and politicians recently analyzed the possibility of an eventual foundation of an Islamic cantonal umbrella in the canton of Solothurn. FIDS is now one major discussion partner with different authorities to help in resolving many issues like the Islamic chaplainship in prisons or in the army or regarding discrimination.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, KIOS and FIDS represent only a part of the Islamic groups residing in Switzerland. For that reason, at the federal level, many other Islamic associations are structured to represent the Islamic diversity in the country. The Sufis,<sup>22</sup> the Murids (Maggi et al. 2013), the Alevis with the Federation of the Alevis organisations in Switzerland / Föderation der

19 BenMrad, Montassar. Former FIDS President, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, May 2023.  
 20 BenMrad, Montassar. Former FIDS President, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, May 2023.  
 21 BenMrad, Montassar. Former FIDS President, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, May 2023.  
 22 Association Internationale Soufie Alawiyya. 2019. <https://www.aisa-suisse.ch/accueil.html> (accessed March 18, 2019).

alevitischen Gemeinden in der Schweiz (FAGS),<sup>23</sup> and the Ahmadi in the Ahmadiyya Islamic organisation in Switzerland / Ahmadiyya Muslim Gemeinde Schweiz<sup>24</sup> self-organise their communities at the federal, cantonal, and municipal levels. For instance, the Ahmadi's association has an extremely sophisticated organisational structure.<sup>25</sup>

The International Majlis is composed of each elected national president (*amir*) and one additional member for every hundred members of each national community. The national president can be elected for two terms (each term is three years); after that, if somebody is elected for one term, the former president can be elected again after that term. The democratic rules are rooted in the history of the Ahmadiyya developed before the diaspora period. Members called *murabbis* are responsible for members' education and cultural contact with the non-Muslim population. In Switzerland, the Ahmadi's have one *murabbi* at the federal level and three at the subnational level. Concerning financing, the Ahmadiyya association in Switzerland supports the idea that Islamic associations must provide services to public institutions and civil society actors, rather than asking for state financing. Federal Islamic minority associations are more homogeneous, they focus on improving the sociocultural insertion of their members.

At the federal level, another kind of association has existed since 2009. The Islamic Central Council of Switzerland – Islamische Zentralrat Schweiz (IZRS) – was founded in 2009 to defend the interests and rights of Muslims residing in the country. This association differs from both FIDS, KIOS and Islamic minorities' federal associations. In fact, IZRS does not develop activities to help public institutions, to better accommodate Muslims residing in the country or to improve the dialogue with institutions or civil society to obtain public recognition. Instead, the association emerged during a political campaign concerning the minaret initiative to organise the “defence” of the Muslim population in the country. The IZRS rooted its claims-making

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23 Föderation der Alevitischen Gemeinden in der Schweiz (FAGS). 2019. <http://www.iabf.ch> (accessed March 18, 2019).

24 Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Schweiz. 2019. <http://www.ahmadiyya.ch/home/index.php/de> (accessed March 18, 2019).

25 At the federal level, the Lajna Ima'illah has gathered female members above the age of 15- and 16-years-old; the Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya has gathered male members between the ages of 15- and 16-years-old and 40; the Majlis Ansarullah has gathered male members above the age of 40; the Nasiratul Ahmadiyya has gathered girls between the ages of 7-years-old and 15- and 16-years-old; and the Atfalul Ahmadiyya has gathered boys between the ages of 7-years-old and 15- and 16-years-old. The committee members of each sub-association must be elected every two years, and they cannot serve for more than six years. Informations gathered during the 35<sup>th</sup> Jalsa Salana Schweiz 2017 by Elisa Banfi.

activities in the framework of the Muslim population's victimisation. The associations developed an aggressive action against state institutions and civil society by strengthening the idea of incompatibility between Islamic and Swiss values. At the same time, the association denounced the lack of institutional fairness around Muslims and developed attitudes and values across their members that opposed Swiss identity as compared to Islamic identity. The IZRS differs from other umbrella associations because it aims to directly represent individual Muslims in the Switzerland as a whole.

However, the IZRS association does not develop relevant activities at the local and cantonal levels; it focuses more on digital and media activism compared to other traditional Islamic associations in the country. Furthermore, its positioning as a federal actor allows IZRS to structure a relevant media-centric presence in different linguistic areas and different cantons. Indeed, the IZRS' major relevant activity is the promotion of its religious fundamentalist position through the media, social media, and digital campaigns. Through this activity, the IZRS projects the image of being an active and representative Islamic association by being, on the contrary, quite an isolated and non-representative association, as the data reveal. For instance, IZRS has attempted to form structural links with other inter-cantonal associations such as the Swiss Muslim League / Ligue Musulmane de Suisse (LMS)<sup>26</sup> without success. The LMS<sup>27</sup> disagrees with the values and methods of the IZRS and has already refused to cooperate on the minaret initiative.

The effort to create an organisational structure representing a majority of Muslims living in the country at the federal level reveals two obstacles: the variety of the Islamic presence in the country and the influence of cantonal

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26 Ben Yahya, Mansour, LMS President, interviewed by Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 26 January 2016.

27 Mejri, Adel, LMS former President, interviewed by Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 16 November 2015. The LMS is registered on the commerce register of the canton of Vaud and was founded between 1994 and 1995 to improve the socioeconomic insertion of Muslim immigrants into Swiss society. Nowadays, it defends the interests of Muslim citizens and promotes Islam, especially at the national level but it has different sections at the cantonal level (e.g. in Neuchâtel, in Vaud, in Fribourg, in Genève, in Bienne, in Basel and in Zurich). It also has individual members in Bern, Ticino, and Luzern. In the committee, there are members responsible for women and family issues as well as for the youth. The president and the administrative committee are elected every four years, and there are two kinds of general assemblies: one for administrative decisions and another for orienting the development of activities. The simple majority and the search of consensus have regulated the decisional processes. LMS organises a three-day meeting each year (one day for Muslims and non-Muslims and two days for Muslim members and sympathisers). It includes members of the Federation des Organisations Islamiques en Europe, and some of their members are active leaders in this organisation.

sociodemographic realities on organisational structures. The older umbrella Islamic association emerged at the cantonal level, federating different kinds of Islamic organisations from each canton. In some cantons, but not in others, the cantonal umbrella has federated Shiite and Sunni currents; in some cantons, but not in others, youth associations are integrated into the umbrella; in some cantons, the majority of association members of the umbrella already belong to a well-structured international umbrella such as Diyanet; in some cantons, historical actors such as the Saudi Arabia Foundation or the presence of Muslim Brotherhood leaders influence the organisational process; and, in some cantons, but not in others, women associations or/and converts have had an important influence on the organisational process.

Supra-organisations such as FIDS attempts to better coordinate the already-existing cantonal and intra-cantonal umbrella. These kinds of association must struggle with the variety of their members and create a form of coordination that respects the individual agency and nature of each affiliated association.

For instance, in 2014, KIOS and FIDS signed a joint declaration with the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities and the Swiss Jewish Liberal Platform to avoid the conflictual impact of external factors on the coexistence of Jews and Muslims in Switzerland (FIDS 2014).<sup>28</sup> However, in several cantonal umbrellas (e.g. Zurich and Geneva), the tensions in the country of origin affected the structural ties between Islamic associations in

28 “...The Jewish and Muslim federations in Switzerland have decided to issue a joint call against violence and peace. Without doubt, Muslims and Jews have differing views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We Jews and Muslims in Switzerland, recognise that our communities do not share the same opinion about the cause’s current and possible solutions. Yet, we find that there are many things we agree on: the deaths of civilians we are saddened. Together, we consider it unacceptable and contrary to our religious beliefs to abuse people and civilian institutions. In addition, we all aspire to a swift end to the war and to a lasting peace for all. Despite the difficult situation in the Middle East, we want to continue to foster good relations between our religious communities in Switzerland. We must not bring home conflicts elsewhere; we instead, we want to send messages of peace to the world. If everyone has the right to express their political opinion, whether at an event or in social media, we must remain vigilant about how we formulate our protests. When we express our opinions in the media, on the streets or on the Internet, nothing can excuse acts of racism, anti-Semitism, violence or other forms of intimidation. We strongly condemn any expression of hostility towards Jews and Muslims, as well as any form of racism. We are appealing to the Jewish and Muslim communities in Switzerland to commit themselves to cooperation and mutual understanding. We need to engage in constructive dialogue in order to stem our differences of opinion and expand as much as possible ... There are more themes that unite us than differences that separate us. In this sense, we are sending a message of hope and peace to the world.” (FIDS 2014)

Switzerland. For instance, many Fetullah members of some Islamic associations disappeared from any associational activities after the 2016 the Turkish failed military coup d'état (see the paragraph on the VIOZ case).

It is important to stress that KIOS and FIDS only represent Muslim members already belonging to already-existing associations and not those individual Muslims who practise their faith without adhering to any association. On the contrary, federal associations such as the IZRS or religious minority associations have a direct relationship with their individual members and are also better placed to control their behaviours or values precisely because their members are individuals.

## 2.3 Islamic Organisations at the Cantonal Level

As shown above, the composition and history of each cantonal umbrella organisation differs drastically. Except for the cantonal umbrella of the canton of Zurich (VIOZ), founded in 1998, the majority of the rest were founded between 2003 and 2006; they federated an unequal number of associations that are also representative of different sociodemographic groups of Muslims. Their relations with public authorities are difficult to compare because each canton develops contact with them according to different cantonal regulations. This section briefly describes the existent umbrella cantonal associations by paving the way for more specific analyses in subsequent chapters.

### 2.3.1 VAM: Verband Aargauer Muslime

The Association of Aargau's Muslims / Verband Aargauer Muslime (VAM)<sup>29</sup> was founded in 2004 in the canton of Aargau by federating eight associations<sup>30</sup> based on national identities, especially Albanian, Bosnian, and Turkish identities, as well as gender-based associations. The VAM aims to represent

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29 Aargauer Muslime (VAM). 2019. <https://aargauermuslime.ch/de> (accessed March 18, 2019).

30 Swiss Islamic Religious Community / Schweizerische Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft (SIG) [Aarau, Wohlen]; Association of Islamic Cultural Centres / Verband islamischer Kulturzentren (VIKZ) [Neuenhof, Staufen]; Islamic Albanian communities / Islamisch-albanische Gemeinschaften [Brugg, Bözen, Reinach, Kirchdorf, Aargurg]; Dzemmat of the Bosnian Communities / Dzemmat der bosnischen Gemeinschaften [Oberentfelden, Koblenz]; Turkish-Islamic Foundation for Switzerland / Türkisch-Islamische Stiftung für die Schweiz (ITDV) [Aargurg, Buchs, Reinach, Döttingen]; Bab-i Reyhan [Rheinfelden]; Association of the magazine 'Mercy' – Trägerverein der Zeitschrift 'Die Barmherzigkeit' [Turgi]; Women's Club Nuur / Frauenverein Nuur [Aarau]. See Aargauer Muslime (VAM). 2019. <https://aargauermuslime.ch/de> (accessed March 18, 2019).

Muslim concerns to local and cantonal authorities: the association promotes contact between Muslims and non-Muslims living in the canton, supports the education and integration of the second generation and promotes social services for Muslims and public recognition for Islam in the canton of Aargau.

### **2.3.2 DIGO: Dachverband Islamischer Gemeinden der Ostschweiz und des Fürstentums Liechtenstein**

The Umbrella Organisation of Islamic Communities in Eastern Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein / Dachverband Islamischer Gemeinden der Ostschweiz und des Fürstentums Liechtenstein (DIGO)<sup>31</sup> was founded in 2003, in St. Gallen. The founding members of the umbrella organisation include seventeen Islamic associations based on nationalities (Albanian, Arab, Bosnian, Turkish); the association federated intra-cantonal associations based in six cantons (SG, TG, AI, AR, GR, SH) and in the Principality of Liechtenstein. DIGO aims to represent Muslims to the media, political authorities, and religious institutions. It aims to promote integration and social inclusion. It promotes Islamic values by supporting the introduction of Islamic education in public schools and by organising social and medical services in hospitals, prisons, children's homes, orphanages, and retirement homes. The executive committee is elected every two years and includes two imams.

### **2.3.3 UAMF: Union des Associations Musulmanes de Fribourg**

The Union of the Associations of Muslims of Freiburg / Union des Associations Musulmanes de Fribourg (UAMF)<sup>32</sup> was founded in 2000 by three organisations: the Albanian Islamic Cultural Association of Fribourg / Association culturelle islamique albanaise de Fribourg (ACIAF), the Association of the Muslims of Fribourg / Association des musulmans de Fribourg (AMF) and the Association of Swiss Muslim women of Fribourg (today named Espace Mouslima). Since 2005, along with the Catholic and Protestant churches, the UAMF has organised different events with support from the cantonal Directorate of Public Education. These activities were integrated into public educational programmes to improve the knowledge of Islam and Muslims in the canton. In 2006, the Albanian Cultural Centre of Gruyère / Centre culturel islamique albanais de la Guyère (CCIAG) became a member, and the UAMF joined the FIDS. In 2016, Frislam and the Islamic Cultural Centre of

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31 Dachverband Islamischer Gemeinden der Ostschweiz und des Fürstentums Liechtenstein (DIGO). 2019. <https://digo.ch> (accessed March 18, 2019).

32 Union des Associations Musulmanes de Fribourg (UAMF). 2019. <http://www.uamf.ch> (accessed March 18, 2019).

Murten / Islamisches Kulturzentrum Murten became members of the cantonal association. In 2017, the UAMF cooperated with the Catholic and Reformed Churches during the Fribourg festival “Recrotzon” by developing common activities and improving mutual knowledge between different religions.

### 2.3.4 UVAM: Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes

The Vaud Union of Muslim Associations / Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes (UVAM)<sup>33</sup> was founded in 2004 by federating nine associations of Lausanne, Vevey, and Yverdon-les-Bains (Monnot 2013). Members have considerably increased and between 2018 and 2023 were between thirteen and eighteen associations.<sup>34</sup> The UVAM is a relevant member of the FIDS. The UVAM stems from the wishes of several associations to have a valuable and coherent leadership behind the non-Muslim population, civil society actors, and public authorities. Furthermore, the UVAM promotes the integration of Muslims and interreligious dialogue and answers the needs of the Muslims in the canton by coordinating member associations (see for details Chapter 7).

### 2.3.5 UOMG: Union des Organisation Musulmanes de Genève

The Union of Muslim Organisations in Geneva / Union des Organisation Musulmanes de Genève (UOMG) federated ten of the main Islamic associations<sup>35</sup> in the canton (for details, see: Banfi 2018). This cantonal umbrella has played a relevant role in gathering a heterogeneous group of associations to organise public events in the city. However, not included are other associations active in the territory, such as the association From Individual to Collective / De l’Individuel Au Collectif (DIAC), the Murid community and its association, the Dahira Touba (1992); the two Al-ahbasha associations, the Sunni Cultural Centre (Centre Culturel Sunnite 1991) and the Associa-

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33 Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes. 2019. <https://uvam.ch> (accessed March 18, 2019).

34 Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes. 2019. <https://uvam.ch> (accessed March 18, 2019).

35 Among them, the list includes the following: the Islamic Centre of Geneva / Centre Islamique de Genève (CIGE) founded in 1961 by Said Ramadan, the spiritual heir of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood; the Islamic Cultural Foundation / Fondation Culturelle Islamique (FCI) founded in 1975 by Saudi Arabia members; the Shiite association; the Islamic Association of Ahl al-Bayt Switzerland Geneva (Association Islamique d’Ahl al-Bayt de Suisse Genève, founded in 1992); the sports club Salsabil (1993); the Islamic Chaplaincy (approximately 2000); Bosnian Cultural Centre (1997); the Geneva Turkish Foundation Muslim community (1999); the Albanian Cultural Centre Dituria; and the Meyrin Muslim Cultural Association / Association Culturelle Musulmane Meyrinoise (ACMM).

tion of Muslim Women in Geneva (2002); the Ahmadi association; and the Foundation of Between-Knowledge (1999). The figure of Hani Ramadan and the presence of the Saudi Arabian association among UOMG's founding members have sometimes made it difficult for this umbrella to receive public recognition from cantonal authorities and citizens (see following chapters).

### 2.3.6 VIOZ: Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen in Zurich

The Federation of the Islamic organisations in Zurich / Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen in Zurich (VIOZ)<sup>36</sup> was founded in 1995 to represent a part of Islamic centers and associations in the canton (Mahing 2002; Baumann et al. 2019; Banfi 2018).<sup>37</sup> In the beginning,<sup>38</sup> VIOZ was active in claiming religious rights, especially burial spaces for Muslims in Zurich cemeteries (Mahing 2002). In 2012, twenty-two Muslim organisations were already members of VIOZ. Nowadays, VIOZ is one of the largest cantonal federations of Islamic organisations in Switzerland and it is engaged in trying to build a federal structure of Islamic organisations. As well as UOMG and other cantonal umbrella organisations, it has mainly federated Sunni associations. In 2023, VIOZ gathered 37 members organisations.<sup>39</sup>

Members include multinational mosques; Bosnian, Turkish, Somali, Pakistan, Albanian, and Kossovar associations; a Shiite association; and a youth association. Alevi and Ahmadi<sup>40</sup> are not members, on the contrary the al-Ahbash association the Islamische Zentrum Zürich is member. In 2010, network's data gathered by scholars have displayed a cooperation between the Diyanet and Fetullah organisations inside VIOZ (Banfi 2018). At that time, both groups have worked together to structure sociocultural activities that would improve the cultural integration of Muslims in the canton. In fact, in the decade between 1996 and 2006, the Turkish Islamic community established a network of NGOs that have specially organised activities to

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36 Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen in Zurich. 2019. <https://vioz.ch> (accessed March 18, 2019).

37 The report of Baumann et al. described in detail all Islamic associations and mosques active in the canton of Zürich in 2019.

38 In 2005, 15 associations were members of VIOZ.

39 However, the affiliated associations are running almost forty mosques (see Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen in Zurich. 2023. <https://vioz.ch> (accessed June 18, 2023)).

40 "... The Mahmūd Mosque, the first mosque of Switzerland that was inaugurated in June 1963 in Zurich, was intended to provide a place of prayer for an Islamic group, the Ahmādis, persecuted by the Sunnī Islamic majority. They found a refuge in Switzerland to practise their beliefs" (Banfi 2018, 75).

promote the cultural and professional empowerment of women and second-generation Muslims (Banfi 2018).

However, recent data from the DELMUSNET project show that, after the failed military coup d'état in Turkey, the Fetullah leadership has been less active inside VIOZ.<sup>41</sup>

Many Turkish associations in the canton of Zurich are directly related to TISS, the Swiss section of Diyanet: the Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs. The Swiss section was founded in 1987 (İsviçre Türk Diyanet Vakfı, Islamic Türkisch Stiftung für die Schweiz) and it federated almost fifty associations and mosques (Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti 2022). It is direct member of VIOZ because its managerial and administrative centre is located in the canton of VIOZ and it is also member of FIDS. Some of its associated mosques and Islamic centres can be members of cantonal umbrella associations. The relevance of its role has increased during the last ten years, in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, as well as in the French-speaking part of the country. Islamic Türkisch Stiftung für die Schweiz became a pivotal player in the Islamic life of Switzerland by acting through its affiliated centres. As scholars have shown (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018), the Turkish government's agenda can have a relevant impact on European Islamic organisational networks.

However, in Switzerland, in the last five years, different factors have transformed the relation between associations with an imam partly financed by Diyanet and the influence of the Turkish politics. Many associations having an imam supported by Diyanet are reshaping their decisional boards and committees to avoid to import Turkish politics into the organisation structures. At the same time, the second generation is more and more involved in the Swiss associational life. Last but not least, the Turkish foundation at a federal level is removing most of its members living abroad focusing on members that are Swiss residents or citizens by becoming an example for their affiliated associations.

In general, these events confirm the fact that the Swiss system of Islamic umbrella organisations are acting by self-regulating their relations<sup>42</sup> and by trying to reduce specific foreign influences.

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41 Even in the canton of Geneva, the former strong relations between Fetullah members and Turkish Islamic associations were dissolved.

42 Data gathered in the French-speaking part of Switzerland by Elisa Banfi between 2022 and 2023.

### 2.3.7 Islamische Gemeinde Luzern (IGL), the ancient Verband Islamischer Organisationen des Kantons Luzern (VIOKL)

In 2002, the Association of Islamic Organisations of the Canton of Lucerne / Verband Islamischer Organisationen des Kantons Luzern (VIOKL) was founded to coordinate the activities of the Islamic centres existing in the canton.<sup>43</sup> A multinational mosque, the Eyüb Mosque was first founded in 1976. Later, in the early 1990s, different mono-national associations were founded: in 1991, the Dzemat of the Islamic Community of Lucerne for the Bosnian-speaking Muslims; in 1993, the Dar as-Salam Mosque for the Arabic-speaking Muslims; and, in 1994, the Islamic-Albanian Mosque. VIOKL also federated at that time the Islamischer Frauenverein Luzern (2002) and the Türkische Luzern Camii ve Lokali. VIOKL was replaced by the Islamic Community of Lucerne / Islamische Gemeinde Luzern in 2005. The new umbrella association aims to obtain state recognition,<sup>44</sup> improve the coordination of Islamic association in Luzern, promote integration, and develop interfaith dialogue.

### 2.3.8 UNOM: Union Neuchâteloise des Organisations Musulmanes

The Neuchâtel's Union of Muslim Organisations / Union Neuchâteloise des Organisations Musulmanes (UNOM) is an umbrella organisation of eleven active Muslim associations<sup>45</sup> in Neuchâtel (eight founding members and three supporting associations). The UNOM was officially created in 2007 but only started playing a relevant role in the canton in 2015. The UNOM is a member of FIDS and other Muslim umbrella associations in Switzerland. Its

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43 Islamische Gemeinde Luzern. 2019. <https://www.igl-luzern.ch> (accessed March 18, 2019).

44 New members include the Islamic cultural association Uniteti and Islamic Cultural Association Mercy. The others are the same after changing some parts of their name.

45 Islamic Cultural Centre of La Chaux-de-Fonds / Centre Culturel Islamique de La Chaux-de-Fonds (CCICDF), Bosnian Cultural Centre of the Canton of Neuchâtel / Centre Culturel Bosniaque du Canton de Neuchâtel (CCBCN), Cultural Association of Muslim Women of Switzerland / Association Culturelle des Femmes Musulmanes de Suisse (ACFMS), Islamic Centre Association Le Locle / Association Centre Islamique le Locle (ACIL), Assalam Association of Val-de-Travers / Association Assalam du Val-de-Travers (AAVT), Cultural Association of Muslims of Neuchâtel / Association Culturelle des Musulmans de Neuchâtel (ACMNE), Swiss Muslims League/Neuchâtel / Ligue des Musulmans de Suisse/Neuchâtel (LMS/NE), Turkish Cultural Association / Association Culturelle Turque (MENHEC), Anatolia Cultural Foundation of Neuchâtel / Fondation Culturelle Anatolia de Neuchâtel (FCANE), Somali Diaspora Association / Association Diaspora Somaliens (ADS).

main function is to represent Muslim associations in the canton of Neuchâtel and to increase Muslim integration by participating in the group of Muslim contacts organised by public institutions. The UNOM participates in the interreligious dialogue platform of the canton of Neuchâtel; it refers to the European Council of Fatwa and Research, whose goal is to provide religious recommendations to its individual members.

### 2.3.9 BMK: Basler Muslim Kommission Dachverband der islamischen Organisationen in den Kantonen Basel-Stadt und Basellandschaft

The organisational process of the Basel Muslim Commission / *Basler Muslim Kommission* (BMK)<sup>46</sup> was begun in 1987 by a reformed pastor who wished to improve interreligious dialogue in the canton (Baumann and Hess-Hurt 2014). However, the association was officially founded between 1992 and 1997. The association intended to federate twenty associations (especially mono-national associations, e.g., Turkish, Albanian, Bosnian, and Maghrebian associations) but a lack of solide structure obstructed the function of democratic and representative rules. The qualitative interviews of the project DELMUSNET<sup>47</sup> revealed in 2016 a gap in the organisations' relations within the umbrella, as declared on their website, as well as the real nature of these relations. At that moment, the organisational network of the BMK appeared to be highly fragmented, it engendering a lack of coordination between public authorities and Islamic centres. This fragmentation was largely due to the political situation in Turkey, as the interviews show. Inside the BMK, associations with a completely different approach to integration and the relation between religion and politics critically coexisted. For instance, one of the first members of the BMK, the Basel Türk Kültür Verein, founded in 1997, declared in 2016 its goal to strengthen its relationship with the Turkish government. Furthermore, its defence of Islamic practices was prominently tied to the defence and promotion of Turkish nationalistic ideals. The association's headquarters was decorated with Turkish flags, especially from the nationalist extreme-right organisation, the "Gray Wolves", and the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP) (the official extreme-right party in Turkey). Behind one Swiss flag, the portraits of Atatürk and Mehmet Bahçeli, president of the

46 Basler Muslim Kommission. 2019. <https://www.bmk-online.ch/wp> (accessed March 18, 2019).

47 Member of the Merkez Gebetsraum Mescid, interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 29 January 2016. Responsable of the Muslimische Gemeinde Basel Muslim community Basel (MGB), interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 28 January 2016. Members of the administrative board of the Basel Türk Kültür Verein, interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 29 January 2016.

MHP, stood out. At the same time, the association was a place to pray and a social place to meet. Many Islamic centres in Basel preferred not to engage with the BMK, as the presence of associations such as the Basel Türk Kùltur Verein among its founding members, politicises the nature of the umbrella association.<sup>48</sup>

For instance, one of the oldest associations in Basel, the Merkez Gebetsraum Mescid, founded in 1999, was not a member of the BMK. Its president, a former Swiss boxing champion, left the BMK to avoid the overlap between religion and politics. The unique vocation of the Merkez was to be a place of prayer by allowing individuals to practise their faith without political complications. The association did not organise any activities, provide any social benefit, or have contact with public authorities.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, association members of the BMK, such as the Muslimische Gemeinde Basel Muslim community Basel (MGB), did not seem, in 2016, to benefit from their membership of the BMK for managing their relations with public institutions. For instance, the MGB, founded in 2007, organised inclusive social services based on the values of Islam for all of Basel's population without coordinating with public authorities, other Islamic associations, or the BMK. The services offered include sports activities (swimming, archery, ski trips, etc.), childcare, crèches, and advice and support for the integration of newcomers (especially refugees excluded from state welfare services). The president trained for seven years in a Koranic school in Turkey to distance himself from the Islamic network, since it is too politicised and highly fragmented. The association provided Islamic funeral services and other services for municipalities in the canton.

As a consequence of these internal critics and criticisms, the BMK has recently triggered a democratic transformation of its organisational structures by including the second generation.<sup>50</sup>

48 Member of the Merkez Gebetsraum Mescid, interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 29 January 2016. Responsible of the Muslimische Gemeinde Basel Muslim community Basel (MGB), interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 28 January 2016. Members of the administrative board of the Basel Türk Kùltur Verein, interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 29 January 2016.

49 Member of the Merkez Gebetsraum Mescid interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 29 January 2016. Responsible of the Muslimische Gemeinde Basel / Muslim community Basel (MGB), interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 28 January 2016. Members of the administrative board of the Basel Türk Kùltur Verein, interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 29 January 2016.

50 Member of the Merkez Gebetsraum Mescid interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 29 January 2016. Responsible of the Muslimische Gemeinde Basel / Muslim community Basel (MGB), interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 28 January 2016. Members of the administrative board of the Basel Türk Kùltur Verein, interviewed by the DELMUSNET team, 29 January 2016.

### 2.3.10 UMMA: Islamischer Kantonalverband Bern

In the canton of Bern, the federal umbrella, the Islamischer Kantonalverband Bern (UMMA), was founded in December 2004 by federating eleven Islamic centres and mosques.<sup>51</sup> It aimed to create an opportunity in the canton of Bern to realise a common interlocutor for all interested authorities, as well as providing representation for all Muslims. At the beginning of 2005, UMMA introduced itself to the Basel population through a public event. The association also aimed to obtain public recognition of Islam; to represent the common concerns and interests of the Islamic organisations behind public authorities and coordinate their efforts; to improve the integration and education of Muslims and promote interfaith cooperation. According to its first website, the KIOS, as a federal association, was counted as a member of the UMMA. In reality, UMMA and KIOS shared part of the leadership of the umbrella for a while. In 2008, UMMA withdrew from the public project of the local *House of Religions*. The association disagreed on the location given for the Islamic centre inside the new structure and on the democratic rules structuring the relationship across different religious members of the House of Religions (RJ 2008). After that, the Muslimischen Verein Bern took UMMA's place as representing Islam in the public project of the House of Religions<sup>52</sup> by managing the Islamic space there since 2015. Recently, the UMMA umbrella association has lost visibility and relevance at the cantonal and municipal level (Stauffer 2010). In 2020 a new reformed cantonal umbrella, the Islamischer Kantonalverband Bern (IKB) was founded and joined FIDS.<sup>53</sup>

## 2.4 Cantons without Umbrella Islamic Organisations

In the canton of Valais, Islamic associations have still not constituted a cantonal umbrella. However, a mono-national association, the Islamic Cultural Centre of the Balkans, founded in 2003, usually gathers Albanian, Bosnian,

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51 Umma. 2010. *Vorstand Mitglieder* <http://www.umma.ch/navigation/Vorstand-Mitglieder.html>. Retrieved in <https://web.archive.org/web/20100409082215/http://www.umma.ch/navigation/Vorstand-Mitglieder.html> (accessed March 18, 2019) Partage, Islamic Centre Bern Foundation / Islamic Center Bern Förderverein, Dar an Nur, Sunni Muslim Association Bern, IGGL Xhamija e Langenthalit, Sabur, Islamic Cultural Centre Steffisburg, Turkish Islamic Association, Sri Lankan Muslims Association, Somali Women's Club, Somalian Muslims Association Bern, KIOS.

52 Haus der Religionen. 2019. <https://www.haus-der-religionen.ch/muslime> (accessed March 18, 2019).

53 Redaktion «pfarrblatt», 11 November 2020, «Islamischer Kantonalverband im Kanton Bern gegründet», <https://www.kathbern.ch/pfarrblatt/news-artikel/islamischer-kantonalverband-im-kanton-bern-gegruendet> (accessed June 18, 2023).

and Turkish Muslims living in Central Valais and Lower Valais. Older Islamic centres, such as the Islamic centre of El-Falah, founded in 1993, and the more recent centres, such as the Espace Culturel des Musulman-e-s de Martigny, founded in 2018, or the Islamic centre of the Association Socio-Culturelle des Musulmans du Chablais, founded in 2014 in Aigle, are developing activities for members of various origins by promoting a “Swiss Muslim identity”.

The canton of Ticino saw an attempt to transform the association of the *Comunità Islamica del Canton Ticino*, founded in 1992, into a cantonal umbrella association; however, the diverse origins and nature of canton’s associations (e.g. the Turkish-Islamic association, the Kosovars, the Bosnians, Muslims form the place of worship in Giubiasco, the Islamic library in Chiasso, the Imam Ali Cultural Centre of the Shiites) led to the project’s failure. Moreover, in 2005, a part of the *Comunità Islamica del Canton Ticino* left the association to form the *Lega dei Musulmani in Ticino* after disagreeing on organisational structures and democratic rules.

The canton of Glarus does not have a cantonal Islamic umbrella, the major centre is a *Glarus Islamisch Albanische Gemeinschaft*. In 2016, the centre founded a mosque in Netstal that cost two million francs by triggering critics of financial transparency through civil society actors, especially the reformed church (Meier 2016).

There is no cantonal Islamic umbrella in the canton of Solothurn, Islamic associations are based on nationality, such as the *Albanisch Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft Solothurn-Zuchwil* the *Moschee Ebu Hanife Grenchen / Albanische Islamische Gemeinschaft Grenchen*, the *Moschee as-Salam Oensingen*, the *Albanischer Kulturverein Oensingen*, the *Fatih-Moschee Solothurn* and the *SIG Solothurn Islamische Gemeinschaft/ Beyazit-Moschee Bellach*, or they belong to religious minorities in the case of the *Alevitisches Kulturzentrum in Solothurn* and the *Ahmadiyyah Muslim Jamaat, Sektion Bern-Solothurn*. Moreover, the cantonal institutions have recently gathered a group of Islamic organisations of Solothurn for discussing different issues concerning Muslims in the canton.

The canton of Uri has no cantonal Islamic umbrella. In 1986, the brothers Mustafa and Sadullah Öztürk founded the Islamic Union of Uri in Bürglen. In 2008, the Muslims of Uri left the location and relocated to Flüelen. They moved to Flüelen and Schattdorf by establishing good relations with the neighbour association, the Mountain Spirit Line Dancers, in late August 2012.<sup>54</sup> Many Muslims from the canton prayed in the Islamic centres in Luzern.

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54 Föderation Islamischer Vereine der Schweiz / Federation of Islamic Societies in Switzerland. 2019. [https://islam-cf.ch/?page\\_id=116](https://islam-cf.ch/?page_id=116) (accessed March 18, 2019).

There is no cantonal Islamic umbrella in the canton of Zug. The Bosniac association Džemat Zug was founded in 1991; it was registered in 1992 after receiving a work permit for its imam. In 2005, the association purchased a building in 2005 for 2,5 million francs by transforming it into a polyvalent Islamic centre. Another mono-national Islamic association, the Turkish Islamic Association (TIV), founded the Fatih Cami mosque in Baar on the edge of an industrial site.<sup>55</sup> The president is an advisor on Muslim matters for the local police, priests and teachers, and it is a cofounder of the Forum of Religions in Zug. Visits to the mosque for school groups and other interested people are regularly organised (Wieser 2011).

In the canton of Schwyz, there are no umbrella organisations but many nation-based associations are very active. Bosniaks have settled in the Swiss canton of Schwyz since late 1991, founded a prayer room in Goldau and the Džemat Bosna-Sandžak Goldau association in 1992, and have organised religious, sports, cultural, and social activities. Members are from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, and Turkey. Also, the Türkisch-Islamische Verein Hazret founded a mosque in Wangen and two Albanian and Kosovar prayer rooms in Arltedorf (Xhamia Altendorf – Moschee Altendorf – AIG Altendorf)<sup>56</sup> and Goldau (Islamischer Kulturverein) (Brun 2018). Asylum seekers from Afghanistan are Shiite by majority and participate in Islamic prayers in Zurich.

In the canton of Nidwald and Obwald, there are no umbrella cantonal organisations, Muslims are few and pray in the nearest mosque of Emmenbrücke in the canton of Luzern. The mosque of Emmenbrücke was founded by the Bošnjacki Kulturni Centar/Džamija, and it is the second largest mosque in Switzerland (after that of Geneva). It became the meeting place for approximately 4,500 Muslims, mainly from Bosnia, in the regions Nidwalden, Obwalden, Uri, and Lucerne. The mosque was formerly a cinema (Honegger 2016) and the foundation stone for the mosque was laid in summer 2001. Three million francs are gathered via donations inside the community or via bank loans. The community includes 550 families of over 1,500 people (Bossart 2009).

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55 Bosnische Islamische Gemeinschaft in der Schweiz. 1991. <http://www.izbch.ch/dzemat-zug> (accessed March 18, 2019).

56 Xhamia Altendorf – Moschee Altendorf – AIG Altendorf. 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/XhamiaAltendorf> (accessed March 18, 2019).

## 2.5 Conclusion

The organisational process of Muslims residing in Switzerland is greatly influenced by federalism and the sociodemographic features of Muslim populations in each canton. Each canton deals with Muslims from a variety of national origins and displays a different Islamic equilibrium across various groups. For instance, in some cantons, minority Islamic groups such as Ahamdis or Alevis have developed strong relations with public authorities, while in others, Sunni and Shiite groups have built common organisational structures that are able to efficiently represent both groups. In some cantons, especially in Nidwald, Obwald, Schwyz, and Uri, the presence of Muslims is so limited that the organisational process remains in its early stages.

The impact of federalism on the organisational process is also evident when comparing the situations of cantons in Central Switzerland (Innerschweiz) and that of other cantons, such as Geneva, Basel, or Zurich. The size of the Muslim population is so different from canton to canton that it affects the quantity and identity of Islamic associations. In cantons such as Geneva, Basel, and Zurich, coexistence between actors from the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia, and/or Diyanet; associations of Muslims from Bosnia, Turkey, Maghreb, or Albania and youth and women's associations leads to different organisational outputs. In some cantons, umbrella associations represent all these components, whereas in others they represent only some. In cantons of Innerschweiz, Muslims are not still completely accepted as a component of the sociocultural landscape. For instance, in the canton of Schwyz, as recently as 21 September 2017 (Brun 2018), three cantonal councillors requested information to the cantonal government via an interpellation on Islamic organisations and Muslims residing in the canton. On the contrary, in Geneva and Zurich, the public authorities have a good knowledge of the transformation of cantonal umbrella associations in terms of their composition and representation, for instance the direct consequences of Turkish political tensions on Swiss Islamic umbrella organisations. The equilibrium within the cantonal umbrella associations can also indirectly affect the position of umbrella associations aiming to represent Muslims and/or Islamic associations at the federal level.

As the political and economic situation in many of the countries of origin of Muslims who currently reside in Switzerland has dramatically changed, it will be crucial over the next decade to observe the impact of this transformation in the internal equilibrium of all umbrella organisations at the cantonal and federal level. The major issue will be how second and third generation Muslims, Muslim women, Swiss-Muslim converts, and unaffili-

ated Muslims influence the positioning and structure of organisations that aim to represent Muslims in Switzerland.

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# 3 Youth Islamic Associations in Romandie

*Elisa Banfi and Victor Sanchez-Mazas*

## 3.1 Introduction

The landscape of Islamic organisations in Switzerland has changed dramatically over the last five years due to the emergence of new Islamic organisations founded and led by the second and third generations. This trend can be traced to two social processes. On the one hand, internal changes in the Muslim population's sociodemographic characteristics over time have modified its identities, social capital, and aspirations; on the other hand, external factors have influenced the public discourse on Islam in Switzerland, triggering an internal debate about Islamic self-representation. The Swiss Muslim population is thus currently in a transitional phase, which has two notable manifestations. First, a number of Muslims have begun to distance themselves from practices and representations that characterise countries of origin and are moving closer to *secular* attitudes (still compatible with the Islamic faith). Second, external factors such as the emergence of Daesh propaganda and the political focus on “radicalised Muslims” have led young Muslims to increasingly express themselves in the public sphere through collective associations.

As the analysis in this chapter shows, the current associational engagement of young Muslims in Switzerland is in line with the general development of youth organisational activities in contemporary democratic societies. As Roudet (2004) demonstrates, the forms of political involvement seen among the youth have completely changed over the last two decades. Engagement in associations that defend *collective* rights (such as trade unions) is shifting towards associations that organise sociocultural, sportive, or recreative activities to empower *individual* competences. Youth involvement in these types of association is motivated by a desire for sociability and the development of personal skills, rather than the aim of social or societal change as such. The individualism that characterises contemporary democratic societies is the structural origin of this transformation:

Concerned by the growing individualization of our societies, the current forms of associative participation inform us about the modalities and characteristics of this evolution. Four trends stand out: the predominance of associations linked to individual fulfilment, the development of forms of associative engagement, the decline of the traditional forms of activism, the strengthening of friendly sociability within the associative life. (Roudet 2004, 17–18)

Following this general evolution, the current forms of associational engagement of the Muslim youth stand at odds with traditional features of Islamic organisations. As this chapter shows, the Swiss Muslim organisational network is also experiencing a deep transformation. Through semi-structured interviews, we analyse how Muslim youth in Switzerland are building and leading either more or less structured groups that advance their own interests, through their own modalities of engagement and reflecting their own views of Islam. In conclusion, the chapter shows that current features of the associational activity of Swiss Muslim youth contribute both to developing the public representation of Islam across Swiss society and to improving dialogue among institutions, civil society actors, and Muslim citizens.

## 3.2 Literature Review

The characteristics of the organisational engagement of the Muslim youth are rooted in a larger global evolution of the modalities of youth political participation. Since the 1990s, participation in formal mainstream politics has declined, compensated for by new practices and alternative repertoires (Norris 2002; Zukin 2006; Manning 2017). As Bang (2004) outlines, new, more self-reflexive political forms and activities have emerged. In fact, across advanced democracies, the progressive disengagement of youth from formal voting and political party membership is compensated for by a new “figurative” politics. As Jaster (2018) describes, in these new forms of citizen political participation, individuals realise in their own daily lives the transformations they claim political authorities should enact. According to Häyhtiö and Rinne (2007), new forms of political actions are more in line with digital and virtual activities. According to Muxel (2016), young citizens adhere to less conventional forms of political participation, such as digital activism and figurative politics in general.

For Muxel (2016), the first characteristic of youth political engagement is the new articulation between the individual and the collective. Unlike in the past, the collective is not a system with a highly normative framework; rather, it has transformed into “small groups in which the young people

evolve via a contextualised and circumstantial engagement” (Muxel 2016).<sup>57</sup> The second characteristic is that young people deal with many influencing actors alongside shifting between virtual and real engagement. The third transformation concerns the “change of geographical and territorial scope which supposes globalisation, but also from a change of affective and emotional scale which brings the distant and closer together” (Muxel 2016).<sup>58</sup> The fourth transformation concerns a shorter temporality of social and political commitment, a change for instance from the long-term political engagement of the 1960s. Muxel (2016) outlines other characteristics of political youth activism that empirical data in this chapter will confirm: a refusal of legitimacy imposed by a hierarchy, a horizontal organisational model, the most immediate effectiveness possible, the pragmatism of commitment and the possibility of disengagement (Muxel 2016).

New forms of political action are common across Muslim youth associational activities in different European countries (Frisina 2004; Gaale and O’Toole 2009; Minganti 2011; Bendixsen 2013). According to Gaale and O’Toole (2009), the criticism of Muslim youth’s disengagement from citizen participation depends on the theoretical definition of *political participation*. In fact, scholars have often reduced political participation to conventional forms of political engagement. The political disenchantment affecting young people in general represents for some scholars (O’Toole 2003; Vromen and Collin 2010; Sloam 2012) an opportunity to bypass political participation as conceptually reduced to voting and membership of political parties. O’Toole and Gaale (2010) demonstrate an increase in creative political participation among young British Muslims by describing their horizontal forms of political actions and new repertoires of mobilisation in Birmingham and in Bradford. As Gaale and O’Toole (2009) assess, young British Muslims have often been accused of not being engaged in traditional forms of associational activism (Simpson 2004; Phillips 2006). For instance, in 2005 the Home Office proposed as an explanatory factor for their low engagement (less than the average among general youth in the United Kingdom) their low confidence in umbrella and existing Islamic organisations. Moreover, according to Birt (2005), in the United Kingdom young Muslims have developed a mistrust of political institutions because of the United Kingdom government’s positioning on Middle Eastern issues. However, Gaale and O’Toole (2009) also outline how Muslim youth have enacted new forms of political action by cooperating with non-Muslim actors and tackling non-Islamic issues.

In addition, Muslim youth increasingly participate in the redefinition of Islam itself (Gaale and O’Toole 2009). By investigating the agency of

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57 Translated by Elisa Banfi.

58 Translated by Elisa Banfi.

Muslim women working inside Islamic youth associations in Berlin, Bendixsen (2013) shows how Muslim youth associations have played a major role in negotiating the interpretations of religious sources, sometimes struggling against traditional religious authorities. Furthermore, the young Muslim women active in these associations have become a reference point for non-Muslim civil society actors in terms of local engagement. Especially, young Muslim women operate in *de-ethnicizing* Islam and situating Islamic beliefs and practices in a determinate space and time, “within a discursive Muslim tradition that is constantly subject to internal transformations” (Bendixsen 2013, 284; see also: Asad 1986; Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003). In the same vein, Minganti (2011) analyses the role of young female members of Sweden’s national Young Muslim Organization (*Sveriges Unga Muslimer*, SUM) and other Swedish Islamic youth organisations. For her, Muslim youth associations first “construct a common Islamic identity, which ideally surpasses any association with ‘race’/ethnicity” (Minganti 2011, 374), or class. Second, they claim this universal Islamic identification is compatible with being a Swedish citizen. Third, the youth often question and sidestep traditional authorities, such as parents and the *ulama*. Furthermore, these young Muslim women are favourable to state-funded programs training imams to replace “imported imams” (Minganti 2011, 374).

For these reasons, the independence of Islamic youth associations from older Islamic associations has never been simply granted but has often been obtained after hard negotiations. For instance, Frisina (2004) observes that in Italy, during the first three congresses of the Youth Muslims of Italy / *Giovani Musulmani d’Italia* (GMI), the traditional Islamic umbrella organisations’ leadership, such as the Islamic Communities and Organizations of Italy / *Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d’Italia* (UCOII) and the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), tried to manipulate the development of a “new” Italian Muslim identity. The GMI’s leadership has avoided the influence of the “elders” by distancing itself from their tutorship. In particular, the GMI was able to systematically introduce inter-gender cooperation and Muslim and non-Muslim partnerships into its organisational routine. The GMI’s actions were organised by involving local cooperation and partnerships, especially with Catholic actors (Frisina 2007).

As highlighted above, Muslim youth engagement corresponds to a large extent to the general features that characterise the evolution of youth political participation in contemporary democratic societies. In this chapter, we assess whether Swiss Muslim youth associations share these transformations, and, if so, to what extent. As such, we compare several Swiss Muslim youth associations along the main indicators of this general evolution: a refusal of hierarchy; a horizontal organisational model; a demand for immediate effi-

cacy; a pragmatic attitude; the importance of digital devices; the practice of figurative and reflexive actions. In addition to these general features, Muslim youth engagement has also experienced deeper mutations which are *specific* to Muslim youth. As such, we will also compare and discuss the Swiss Muslim youth associations along the following features: low confidence towards umbrellas; distance from traditional and older authority figures; the greater involvement of women; a positioning on non-Islamic issues, and an openness towards a contextual redefinition of Islam.

### 3.3 Methodology

The data were gathered by semi-structured questionnaires produced by the team working on the project “Public Deliberation, Network Analysis and the Political Inclusion of Muslims Living in Switzerland, France and Britain”, financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). The sampling was obtained through a double procedure: associations were selected by analysing Swiss daily newspaper articles from 2014 to 2015, and then they were individuated through snowballing selection and reputational criteria. A questionnaire was prepared between March 2015 and October 2015; it was tested in November 2015. Interviews were then conducted between November 2015 and September 2017. The questionnaire was composed of four parts: the first part concerned the type of organisation and the board’s composition; the second involved the internal rules for making decisions; the third was about the activities; while the fourth concerned relationships with external actors. The gathered data allowed us to investigate Swiss Muslim youth’s associational network and the modalities of their political engagement.

### 3.4 Analysis

Between 2013 and 2016, diverse Muslim youth organisations were active in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. From associations aiming to represent Muslim youth at the cantonal level to one that only proposed activities at a local level, all share features that differentiate them from traditional Islamic associations. The sections below describe the internal functioning and the external network of six youth associations: Frislam, From Individual to Collective / De l’Individuel Au Collectif (DIAC); the Islamic Youth of Lausanne / Jeunesse Islamique de Lausanne (JIL); the Muslim Association of University Students of Geneva / Association Musulmane des Étudiants Universitaires de Genève (AMEUG); From Light to Excellence / De la Lumière à l’Excellence; and University Muslim Group / Groupe Musulman Universitaire (GMU).

The chapter also compares two embryonic umbrellas of them: the Annual Meeting of the Romande Youth / Rencontre Annuelle de la Jeunesse Romande, (RAJR) and the Young Swiss Muslim Network (YSMN).

### 3.4.1 Frislam: “a Structure a bit Deconstructed”<sup>59</sup>

The association Frislam was founded in 2015 and is registered as an association in the municipal register of Fribourg. The association’s mission is to reinforce the agency of its members as citizens and “to become a worth/value added to society”;<sup>60</sup> its main self-definition is “youth association”. The association aims to build bridges (*être jeteur des ponts*)<sup>61</sup> between Muslim believers and the rest of the population. The scope of its organisational activities is clearly defined as the Sarine District (Saanebezirk/District de la Sarine), one of the seven districts of Fribourg canton. The association’s articles are published on its website. The general assembly meets once a year and uses a show of hands as its voting method. The secretary proposes the agenda and the president manages the session’s timing, which must be strictly respected by the general assembly. The executive committee is composed of the president, the secretary, the treasurer secretary, and the chiefs of projects or commissions charged with specific executive tasks. Within the executive committee, the decisional process is based on consensus. The executive committee interacts through continuous streaming via a WhatsApp group. The adoption of this digital device for coordinating and facilitating the decision-making process has had a great influence on Frislam’s internal democratic practices. The time spent by the executive committee on decisional processes is unlimited, thanks to the dematerialisation of meetings through smartphone devices.

In 2015, Frislam developed particular social, charity, and religious activities. In 2016, it focused mainly on educational, religious, sportive, and recreational activities. Its promotional activities combine digital (Facebook) and traditional (media releases and flyers) communication media. The association is proactive in contacting public authorities (the cantonal council and police authorities). However, contacts are bidirectional, as authorities have sometimes invited the association to participate in different institutional activities. For example, the association’s president was included in training to become a “Fribourg sympa agent”.<sup>62</sup> The association is not an umbrella

59 The Frislam’s communication officer, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 19 April 2016.

60 Self-definition from the Frislam’s communication officer, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 19 April 2016.

61 Self-definition from the Frislam’s communication officer, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 19 April 2016.

62 “Fribourg sympa” is a participative project within the cantonal program “Communes sympas—Gemeinsam in der Gemeinde”. The city proposes that its inhabitants acquire

association and is affiliated only with Fribourg's cantonal umbrella, the Union of the Muslim Organisations of Fribourg / Union des Associations Musulmanes de Fribourg (UAMF), and indirectly with the Federation of Islamic Umbrella Organisations / Föderation Islamischer Dachorganisationen Schweiz (FIDS) / Fédération d'Organisations Islamiques de Suisse (FOIS). At the same time, Frislam is a member of the Young Swiss Muslim Network. Frislam has met state councillors several times to propose common projects and to discuss issues. For instance, Frislam has invited women members of the Christian Democratic Party (CVP) of Switzerland to discuss women's political engagement in Switzerland.

The association has developed a complex and diversified communication strategy. It manages mainstream and digital media with the same ability. For instance, it took part in the popular TV talk show *Infrarouge* on the Swiss Radio Television / Radio Télévision Suisse (RTS). In addition, the committee discusses and approves all answers to Facebook comments. Furthermore, the association has often organised alternative performances, such as the distribution of flowers on the street to citizens during the fasting days of Ramadan. Both the interactions on the internet and on the street with non-Muslims are relevant for the association. In fact, each discussion allows the association's members to address individuals with different opinions and questions and to have real discussions about the association's identity, activities, and about Islam. Concerning the individuals who do not share the same points of view as the association's members or who criticize Frislam's activities, the association adopts an inclusive and consensual approach:

If there is fear or incomprehension, we try to put ourselves in their shoes and think that we might have acted in the same way. This way, our approach to the other is based on comprehension, and we take the time to deconstruct fear and to explain our point of view through compassion. This approach allows for another kind of dialogue. It is not only argument against argument, but it is a pacified dialogue.<sup>63</sup>

Frislam's members think that consensus is the aim of each interaction with Muslim or non-Muslim actors; for that reason, time must be spent achieving a consensus through mutual dialogue. To realise common projects, the association is ready to adapt and reshape its vision and has sometimes made difficult concessions.

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new skills or deepen existing ones through training lasting thirty hours, organised by the training centre L'Étrier. The "Agents Sympas" have as their mission to improve the quality of social cohesion within the city through both their attitude and real projects.

63 Self-definition from the Frislam's communication officer, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 19 April 2016.

### 3.4.2 DIAC: From Individual to Collective

From Individual to Collective / De l'Individuel Au Collectif (DIAC) was founded in 2011 as an association but it had already been active as an informal group since 2008. At the end of 2015, it obtained recognition as an association of public utility from the cantonal tax authorities. Recently, its members have sought to transform the association into a foundation to increase and facilitate interactions with institutional actors. Its main mission is to gather people together in a platform that facilitates meetings and exchanges between Muslim (but not exclusively) youth. Gatherings are characterised by an informal and friendly atmosphere. The association's self-definition is a youth group of direct action. DIAC aims to encourage young people to participate in citizen action and humanitarian activities. The members' interactions within activities allows for the increase and deepening of interpersonal exchanges and mutual understanding. The association's scope is mostly in the canton of Geneva, even though it aims to develop inter-cantonal activities. The executive board is composed of five members, the general assembly is held once a year. DIAC's articles are published on its website. The executive board meets twice a month and the president proposes the agenda to be discussed. The decision-making process is based on a qualified majority rule. When planning big events, each member charged with a project can ask for additional meetings. Respectful language and respect for the agenda during discussions are the main rules of the sessions. The association is active in social, sporting, cultural, and humanitarian activities. Furthermore, it develops actions to improve community-building and political participation among the youth. It organises training courses for improving soft skills and personnel empowerment. Concerning political participation, it does not organise informative sessions about political parties' programmes but tries to improve alternative forms of political participation and political awareness such inclusive activities for refugees, empowerment training, and cultural performances.

The association is not an umbrella association and it has sporadic contacts with other traditional Islamic associations. Until 2016, state authorities had never consulted it. On the contrary, the association has lobbied Meyrin's municipal authorities to obtain spaces for developing activities, in cooperation with the Meyrin Muslim Cultural Association / Association Culturelle Musulmane Meyrinoise (ACMM). After the 2015 terrorist attack in France, the media became interested in contacting DIAC. The association cooperated with a journalist from RTS, the Swiss French-speaking public television station, to explain how members of the association experienced the tragic events of Charlie Hebdo. Initially, the interactions with journalists were relaxed and agreeable. The association's aim was to show how its members lived using

Islamic principles in Switzerland and how Muslims experienced the tragic events in France. However, the DIAC was disappointed by the final reporting. According to the DIAC, journalists preferred to give more visibility to other associations, such as the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland / Islamische Zentralrat Schweiz (IZRS), and utilised a short extract of their interview with DIAC in an incoherent way, cutting and modifying sentences. Moreover, the journalist in charge of the documentary interacted with the DIAC in an asymmetric manner, so the association's members felt manipulated. The place given in the documentary to other traditional associations was not really representative of the second generation of Muslims in Switzerland. Members of the association felt their images had been stolen and that they had been hustled. At the same time, the members had positive interactions with RTS Radio journalists. The interaction was developed in a consensual and respectful way and the discussion with radio journalists allowed a real exchange of different points of view. The dialogical process was inclusive, the association was perceived as a "normal" citizen actor. The DIAC's members felt that they had contributed positively to the realisation of the reporting. The theme of asymmetrical relationships is also relevant for the association, since it has had to cope with the intra-Islamic organisational universe. In fact, the association does not directly cooperate with the cantonal umbrella of Geneva, the Union of Muslim Organisations in Geneva / Union des Organisations Musulmanes de Genève (UOMG), when organising events and activities. They are afraid of being influenced by a traditional old umbrella organisation, representing a panoply of Islamic associations. On the contrary, they sporadically decide to cooperate with different single associations affiliated with the UOMG for specific events. In the case of cooperation with the ACMM to organise an Eid celebration, DIAC tried to maintain complete independence from the UOMG. In that case, the cooperation was more strategic, even though it was based on the same values and purposes. However, the interaction was closer to bargaining than consensual dialogue. The empirical analysis outlines that DIAC prefers interacting with Islamic associations led by women, such as the ACMM and Nadwah.<sup>64</sup> In the case of Nadwah, DIAC brings members to events organised by the Nadwah association. However, DIAC does not share the same action strategy or activities with the UOMG. The association is also worried about asymmetrical interac-

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64 Nadwah is an association founded in 2012 in Geneva whose main objectives are to accompany families and immigrants in their process of social and professional integration and support young immigrants from the first-and second generation towards a citizen and professional integration in the country (Khadam al-Jame, Dia, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 24 February 2016). See for additional information Sylvain Thévoz (2016).

tions in relation to other non-Muslim associations. However, the association never felt like it was treated asymmetrically by other associations. In the case of Geneva's interreligious platform, the interaction was more based on strategic aims than reaching consensus. In their first interaction, Geneva's interreligious platform wanted to involve the youth in their activities, while DIAC wished to increase its public visibility. During interactions with the platform, DIAC was more passive. In the second event co-organised with the platform, DIAC participated with the organisation in a more proactive way, and the relations were more symmetrical.

DIAC mainly aims to become an "organisational bridge" between Muslims in Geneva, especially the youth, and the state authorities. However, at the beginning of the DIAC's activities, institutions rarely replied to DIAC's questions or demands. The first institutional recognition of the association's social role was given by the fiscal cantonal administration, which recognised DIAC with the status of "public utility". After this recognition, the association developed more activities, such as public debates involving youth politicians and different religious communities. The association aims to publicly affirm the belonging of Muslim youth to the Swiss collective identity. In 2018, it developed a documentary project on Islamic headscarves and Islam in Switzerland, in cooperation with the Integration Office.

### **3.4.3 Jeunesse Islamique de Lausanne: Digital and Fluid Associational Engagement**

The informal group the Islamic Youth of Lausanne / Jeunesse Islamique de Lausanne (JIL) was founded in 2014 to gather together Muslim youth between 19- and 35-years-old in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. The group aims to become a formal association in the future. It defines itself as a sportive, religious youth association. It develops sports activities but also events in the fields of education, women's rights, and humanitarian aid. It is a "good-humoured"<sup>65</sup> group focusing on youth needs (but not activities against Islamophobia or discrimination). The sportive activities especially concern young people between 19- and 20-years-old, while its other activities also concern older youth. The organisational scope is municipal, even though the group has created ties with Muslim youth associations in Fribourg, Geneva and Valais. The executive board is charged with proposing activities to members via emails and WhatsApp. It gathers once a week at the Rolex Learning Centre or on Skype. The executive board decides on consensus, and a vote is rarely necessary. No contacts have ever been established with public institutions. However, the group cooperates with the cantonal Islamic Umbrella of Vaud

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65 The president of the association JIL, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 06 May 2016.

(UVAM) and with the Muslim Cultural Centre of Lausanne. Some group members volunteer for the activities of both associations on the basis of shared values. Decisions are taken consensually with both associations. The group has learnt from UVAM's leadership how to professionally organise volunteer engagement and how to plan and pilot important activities. The group also interacts with other Muslim youth associations (Frislam, GMU, DLAE, and AMEUG). In 2016, it organised the first gathering of Muslim youth associations in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Its members are very proactive in answering non-Muslim individuals who express fears regarding Muslims and Islam. They understand these fears as being the consequences of jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe; for that reason, the association aims to increase peaceful interactions between citizens at the individual level.<sup>66</sup>

#### 3.4.4 AMEUG: A Bridge Between Academic and Professional Involvement<sup>67</sup>

Founded in 2015, the Muslim Association of University Students of Geneva / Association Musulmane des Étudiants Universitaires de Genève (AMEUG) aims to activate the youth, stimulate the academic world, defend students and prepare them for the professional world. It defines itself as a student, charity, youth, and pacifist association. The organisational scope is cantonal but its activities are concentrated at the University of Geneva. The internal structure is composed of an executive board of seven members, a management board of four members, one secretary, one treasurer, and one president. The general assembly is held once a year, and the 130 members are all students of the University of Geneva and vote by a simple majority rule. The executive board meets once a week and makes decisions by consensus. Different advice has to be included in final decisions. The association outlines the relevance of listening to conflicting positions in order to integrate different arguments and change previous positions. The association is apolitical and organises activities concerning social inclusion, education, entertainment, research, humanitarian aid, human rights, women's rights, and soft skill training and professional development. To date, AMEUG has not had contact with political parties, trade unions, media, and institutions except for the university administration. However, the association interacts in particular with other student associations (FRISLAM, JIL, GMU, DLAE). AMEUG is also member of the University Conference of Student Associations of the University of Geneva (Conférence Universitaire des Associations d'ÉtudiantEs, CUAÉ).

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66 The president of the association JIL, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 06 May 2016.

67 The president of the association AMEUG, interviewed by Elisa Banfi and Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 04 May 2016.

AMEUG affirms that it shares the same values and objectives as the CUAE through a common aim to stimulate student life at the university. AMEUG also interacts sporadically, mainly at the individual level, with the university's Association of Students in Theology (AET) and students in Political Science and International Relations (AESPRI). On a more regular basis, it co-organises cultural activities with the Association for the Arab World in Geneva / Association pour le Monde Arabe de Genève (AMAG). It has some individual contacts with the association Coexistence for Dialogue between Religions. Individually, members participate in daily prayers at different Islamic centres throughout the canton without being active inside the centres specifically. However, AMEUG interacts with the youth components of the UOMG by co-organising public debates at the university. The association has organised many conferences to develop students' soft skills. The topics discussed concern the capacity for a minority to excel or to empower their own successful interpersonal abilities. The association chooses entrepreneurs to speak about how to become a "productive Muslim" or how to reconcile work and family needs. The association also tries to build bridges between students from different faculties and between Muslim and non-Muslim students.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.4.5 De la Lumière à l'Excellence: Against Disorganisation

The association From Light to Excellence / De la Lumière à l'Excellence (DLAE), founded in 2014, aims to respond to the disorganisation of Muslims in Switzerland, especially in the canton of Valais. Its scope is mainly cantonal but sometimes also inter-cantonal. The executive committee gathers twice a month and makes decisions "in an Islamic way"—that is, "by taking in account the minority advice".<sup>69</sup> They adopt a vote by a simple majority only if there is no consensus. The general assembly votes by simple majority. The association wants to distance itself from the older generation of organisations; at the same time, it maintains strong ties with the old leadership. Sometimes, the general assembly or executive committee asks for advice on specific subjects from the Council of Savants, composed of Hani Ramadan, Youssef Ibram, and Mustapha Brahim. DLAE embodies the transitional phase of the second-generation's organisational activism among Swiss Muslims. For instance, the first "imam" of the association was a local Muslim

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68 The president of the association AMEUG, interviewed by Elisa Banfi and Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 04 May 2016.

69 The president and two members of the association DLAE, interviewed by Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 20 May 2016.

trained at the *Institut Européen des Sciences de l'Islam* (IESH).<sup>70</sup> According to the interviewed members, Muslims, and especially the Muslim youth, are in general either too rigorous or too “relaxed”.<sup>71</sup> The association wants to gather members around a fair and balanced Islam. It aims to separate cultural from religious practices and to distance itself from the Islamic practices of origin countries. Its members would like to represent Swiss Muslims and explain that a “Swiss Islam” is possible by founding their approach on relevant academic theological essays. They distance themselves from Tariq Ramadan or Nicolas Blanchot as spokespeople of second-generation Swiss Muslims. The association’s mission is to push young Muslims in Switzerland to engage themselves outside of the mosque. The association self-defines as a youth and environmental group defending human and women’s rights, as pacifist and as being against Islamophobia, xenophobia, and homophobia. For the association’s members, Swiss law determines the limits of co-existence; Islam has to inspire an individual to be proactive in his or her engagement. They have interacted with the UVAM and the inter-convictional platform of Valais (Plateforme Interreligieuse Valaisanne, PIV) by organising activities mainly concerning education and youth.

The association is engaged in political campaigns to support candidates and activate the political role of young people. It organises public discussions on initiatives and referenda as well as on the functioning of the political system. The association made a juridical complaint against seventeen members of the Swiss People’s Party (SPP), who accused the people gathered in the association’s local prayer room of radicalisation.<sup>72</sup> The first prayer room in Martigny was closed after one year of activity. The SPP denounced the room’s illegal use for religious activities to municipal authorities. In August 2016, the association began gathering money for a new centre and received 250,000 CHF in 2017.<sup>73</sup> The new prayer room, Espace Culturel de Musulman-e-s de Martigny (ECMM), was inaugurated on 11 May 2018. The events related to the first prayer room’s closure have been perceived as a message of non-recognition from other citizens.

Furthermore, the association’s members feel rejected by both the Islamic umbrella associations and public institutions. On the other hand, the

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70 The president and two members of the association DLAE, interviewed by Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 20 May 2016.

71 The president and two members of the association DLAE, interviewed by Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 20 May 2016.

72 The president and two members of the association DLAE, interviewed by Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 20 May 2016.

73 The president and two members of the association DLAE, interviewed by Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 20 May 2016.

association has a strong network with new Muslim associations and interacts regularly with AMEUG, JIL, GMU and Frislam, with which it shares principles and strategic repertoires. It also interacts with other individual associations, such as the Mosque of Sion, Viège, Brig and the inter-convictional platform of Valais, with which the organisation has to negotiate about values, to find compromise about principles and share strategic repertoires. DLAE cooperates with other actors supporting the informal group Valaisan-ne-s contre l'Interdiction du port du Voile à l'École (Collectif VIVE). This informal group mobilised against the Initiative "For students bareheaded in Valais schools", especially in the framework of the campaign against the initiative (Grand Conseil et Commission de l'éducation, de la formation, de la culture et des sports 2017).

### 3.4.6 Groupe Musulman Universitaire: Glocal Muslim Students<sup>74</sup>

In 1996, the University Muslim Group (Groupe Musulman Universitaire, GMU) – which defines itself as a student association – already existed as an informal group of Muslim students. The group was founded on the model of the Biblical Group of the University of Lausanne thanks to the friendly relations with the university's chaplaincy, which allowed it to organise its weekly meeting in a room used by the chaplaincy. GMU was inactive for a while and only restarted its activities in the last decade. In 2012, the organisation was decentralised by abolishing the centralised structure based on an authoritarian role for the president and a traditional vote system. The new structure was based on the roles of a general coordinator and of different coordinators for each activity using a consensual decision-making system. However, in 2015, the university administration retracted the authorisation to use the chaplaincy room for GMU meetings. The GMU can still use a room for a prayer and an ecumenical room for meditation. For that reason, in 2016, the GMU's members re-organised the association's structure to be recognised by the university by establishing its executive board and a general assembly. Recently, the association had 300 members (students and alumni) on its mailing list. The association is active within the campus, but events outside campus have to be justified by cooperation with an external partner. Once a week, the association gathers to discuss topics, eat, and organise Friday prayers.

The association also organises coaching for students, activities for inter-religious dialogue, religious festivals and sporting activities. In particular, the GMU organises hikes through the woods and mountain trekking activities.

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74 The former president of the association GMU, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 09 October 2018.

Members can propose activities and the GMU's mission is to implement them. The main activity developed by GMU is the *iftar* during Ramadan, especially during exam periods. The GMU mobilised PhD candidates to prepare a dinner for hundred Muslim people at the university after the breaking of their fast. In this way, they facilitated the exams for Muslim students, respecting the fast's requirements. In 2017, the GMU cooperated with students from the Economics and Biology Departments and with the association Boycott for ethical education in consumerism for the project Ethic or Not.<sup>75</sup>

A majority of the committee is composed of women. Concerning its relations with other Islamic associations, GMU has sporadic contacts with the federal and cantonal umbrella associations (KIOS and UVAM) but no cooperation on specific projects. The umbrella organisations have asked for volunteers from among the GMU members for their activities. The relations were asymmetrical, so the GMU felt like it was being used as a pool of volunteers without being able to take part in the decision-making processes for these activities.<sup>76</sup> The GMU therefore prefers to distance itself from the umbrella associations by avoiding being used for external interests. The communication inside and outside the group is based on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, with the latter used especially for coordination activities. Standing out from other young Muslim associations, GMU was not founded and has not evolved in a local Swiss framework; rather, it has developed within an international university environment. A majority of the GMU's members are not Swiss and English is a vehicular language for the association.<sup>77</sup> As the GMU's activities have become increasingly successful, members have perceived an increasingly negative attitude from the university administration towards the association. In fact, in 2017, the administration refused to allow the association to have a stand for presenting its activities during the Welcome Journey, as it had done since 2012.

### 3.5 Discussion: Comparing Young Muslim Associations and their Networks

The emergence of Muslim youth associations over the last decade in the French-speaking part of Switzerland has depended on different factors. On

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75 I-Boycott. 2017. The project Ethic or Not. <https://www.zeste.coop/fr/ethic-or-not> (accessed December 18, 2017).

76 The former president of the association GMU, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 09 October 2018.

77 The former president of the association GMU, interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 09 October 2018.

one hand, young Swiss Muslims needed to find an alternative place to traditional prayer rooms and mosques in which to gather. On the other hand, they wanted to develop sociocultural activities inspired by values informed by their faith, without emphasising the religious framework. Each association has a special way of embodying the transitional phase of Swiss Islam. In fact, some of them (especially DLAE) are still greatly related to the older leadership, while others have tried to escape forms of influence or co-option. Certainly, all of the studied associations are aware of the trade-off between risks and opportunities that proximity to the cantonal and federal umbrellas involves in terms of independence.

By comparing new forms of engagements and repertoires (see Table 1 below), we observe that half of the associations have structured their organisational processes by refusing forms of hierarchical decision. The majority have adopted horizontal organisational patterns to avoid the problems observed in the power relationships of traditional Islamic associations. However, they can also function in a more flexible way because they do not federate with any other organisations or represent Muslims beyond the Swiss authorities. Concerning the self-evaluation of their associational life, half of the associations would like to improve the regularity of their activities and the extent of their impact on Swiss societies. The other half adapts the performance of their engagement and the associational objectives to the real resources available among members, without fearing external or internal judgement. All associations act by displaying a pragmatism towards network strategy and organisational structures. They all facilitate the coordination of activities and the decisional process by using digital devices. The digital devices are also used by all associations to implement new forms of actions through social media and by combining them with figurative and reflexive political actions.

*Table 1: Youth Muslim Associations, New Forms and New Engagements*

Name of association	Date of foundation	Refusal of hierarchy	Horizontal organisational model	Demand for efficacy	Pragmatism	Relevance of digital devices	Figurative and reflexive actions; political consumerism
Frislam	2015	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DIAC	2011 (2008)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
JIL	2014	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
AMEUG	2015	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
DLAE	2014	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
GMU	2012 (1996)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Interviews of organisations DELMUSNET project.

The major public event at which these new forms of political engagements has been visible is the Annual Meeting of the Romande Youth / Rencontre Annuelle de la Jeunesse Romande (RAJR), which was organised for the first time on 16 April 2016 and then again on 12 November 2017 by several Muslim youth associations. Its event summarised the tensions and opportunities of this transitional phase. Analysis of the modalities of how these meetings were conceived sheds light on the convergences and divergences among these new associations. During the organisation of both RAJR meetings, the decisions between the associations were taken by delegates of each association working in different project groups. Decisions were taken by consensus. The associations shared both basic values and strategies. When positions diverged, it was normal practice that representatives of each association changed their positions after listening to the other delegates' arguments.<sup>78</sup> AMEUG proposed that DIAC participate in the RAJR meeting, but DIAC refused without disagreeing about the project but due to a lack of organisational resources.<sup>79</sup>

The first RAJR meeting was organised by DLAE, Frislam, GMU, JIL, and AMEUG. The sponsors included the Museum of Civilizations of Islam in Switzerland (MUCIVI), Islamic Relief, Jinène, and Supreme Tacos. AMEUG affirmed that the youth associations accepted the sponsorship of Islamic Relief and the MUCIVI but did not consider these associations as partners in organising the event.<sup>80</sup> The second meeting was organised by DLAE, Frislam, JIL, AMEUG, and Niya, an association from the canton of Neuchatel that integrated the RAJR's organisation on November 2016. The sponsors were Islamic Relief and Jinène. The GMU left the organisation for the second meeting because its members had a different vision for the meeting's content. In the second meeting, the workshop topics were too local and cantonal oriented according to the members of GMU. Furthermore, for the second meeting, other associations created a programmatic chart, which was oriented towards topics related to "citizens". The members of the GMU, who are international students, felt excluded by this focus on citizenship and related rights. The association decided not to participate in organising the second meeting to avoid spending time on activities that were not relevant to the majority of their members.<sup>81</sup>

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78 The president of the association AMEUG, interviewed by Elisa Banfi and Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 04 May 2016.

79 The president of the association AMEUG, interviewed by Elisa Banfi and Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 04 May 2016

80 The president of the association AMEUG interviewed by Elisa Banfi and Victor Sanchez-Mazas, 04 May 2016.

81 The former president of the association GMU interviewed by Elisa Banfi, 09 October 2018.

The two meetings of the RAJR displayed both continuities and discontinuities. The first meeting, *Change the Speed!*, was held in Epalinges (VD), and the workshops were open to both Muslim and non-Muslim youth. The workshops concerned writing slams; learning to manage projects; sport/wellness and quality of life; the Swiss Army; the power of self-determination; defending an idea in five minutes; living a refugee life; first aid; reconciling private, religious, and working life; women's identity and their images in advertisements; entrepreneurial seduction; discovering one's personal profile in five minutes; and political and citizen engagement. Youssef Ibram, Sabine Tiguemounine, Taha Benmrاد, and Safia Zennou were invited to the final round table.

The second meeting, *Destination Excellence*, was held in Geneva. Three young women were selected as presenters: Nadia Hammoudi, a YouTuber expert on women leadership and wellness; Fatima Khemilat, PhD candidate in political science; and Maissa Leroy, consultant in personal development, trainer in communication, and behavioural analyst. The titles of the workshops were:

Think Outside the Box;  
Speed Reading;  
Launching an Online Start-Up without being Rich;  
The Private Sphere on the Net;  
Health Insurance: Attention!;  
Political and Associative Commitment;  
Take Action? A Necessity!;  
Video Games: How are they Useful?;  
Managing a Blog: Get Started!;  
Being Self-Confident;  
Excellence, Image and Consumption:  
How to Excel;  
Personal Coaching;  
The Ideation: a Beautiful Idea;  
Marriage: What a Story!;  
The Humanitarian: a Duty!;  
Pursuing one's Dreams and Managing one's Image on the Internet.

The workshops were led by Muslim youth, except for the workshop on marriage, which was organised by the association Trait d'Union and composed of older Muslim leaders (almost all women leaders from the ACMM and Nadwah). In the first meeting, the youth associations developed new forms and repertoires of political engagement by still inviting members of the traditional Islamic organisations to the final roundtable. In the second meeting, they

retained innovative activities and stressed citizenship and identity issues by inviting young professional women as conferenciers. Especially in the second meeting of the RAJR, the influence of French speakers was more relevant than previously. Summing up, both meetings displayed how youth associations adapt their networks and activities to their platform that changed every year, and to the contingent needs of each association.

The differences between the RAJR events and other Youth Muslim platforms such as YSMN are manifold. The YSMN is not an association or a foundation but a “platform”. Youth associations such as GMU, the Muslim Student Association of the University of Basel (MASAUB), DIAC, JIL, AMEUG, UMMAH<sup>82</sup>, Basel Muslim Kommission JUGEND Plattform<sup>83</sup>, Muslim Students Association Zurich (MSAZ)<sup>84</sup>, SIG Students<sup>85</sup>, and NIYA<sup>86</sup> only participate in networking events that are proposed unilaterally by YSMN. Despite YSMN’s hierarchical structure<sup>87</sup>, all of the youth associations in Romandie affirmed they had benefitted from YSMN’s workshops. They did not have to organise anything but still benefited from the useful content concerning experiences at an intra-cantonal level.

The RAJR structure was democratic, horizontal, and based on consensual decisions among all organisations participating in the event. For that reason, the RAJR meetings expressed the contextual situation of the involved actors. This structure allowed more independence from the first-generation leadership, which could be conveyed or not according to the contextual equi-

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82 Ummah. 2017. <http://www.ummah.ch/ueberuns/#intro> (accessed March 20, 2017).

83 Basel Muslim Kommission JUGEND Plattform. 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/baslermuslimkommisionjugendplattform> (accessed March 20, 2018).

84 Muslim Students Association Zurich (MSAZ). 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/MSAZurich> (accessed March 20, 2018).

85 SIG Students. 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/sigstudents> (accessed March 20, 2018).

86 Niya. 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/association.niya> (accessed March 20, 2018).

87 The YSMN was a top-down proposal aimed at strengthening the abilities of young Muslim leadership in Switzerland. The vertical organisation of the event allowed for workshops focusing on leadership skills and long-term organisational planification. However, the associations’ independence from umbrella and first-generation leadership was not avoided. In fact, the speakers were mainly older leaders of umbrella associations at the cantonal and federal levels that also sponsored the events. Another relevant difference from the RAJR associations was the presence of several youth associations, including Milli Gorus (SIG students), and the cantonal umbrella, with a strong presence of Diyanet leaders among the Basel associations (Muslim Kommission Jugend Plattform and UMMA) participating in the YSMN’s networking events. In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, Diyanet, and Milli Gorus are relevant elements of the Islamic organisational panorama, differently from in the French-speaking part.

librium and local dynamics. Young women's interventions in the workshop training were relevant. A bottom-up process of self-organisation was expressed, with limited resources and a strategic approach to sponsors and cooperation.

### 3.6 Conclusion

The sample of Islamic youth associations illustrates the transitional phase that they are living in Switzerland. Muslim youth are searching for public spaces in which to express a specific identity. Their activities have predominantly converged on new and alternative forms of political participation related to self-reflective action and self-empowerment. All associations have contributed to "de-ethnicising" the country's Islamic associational presence. In this regard, their relations with the older Islamic leadership are ambivalent: on one hand, these Muslim youth associations have tried, to different extents, to distance themselves and avoid being influenced. On the other hand and also to different extents, they maintain structural ties, such as by sponsoring or inviting imams or leaders belonging to umbrella or local first-generation Islamic associations. Even if some continuities with the old leadership were maintained, all young Islamic associations observed want to keep the possibilities of disengagement and withdrawal from any relationship of cooperation. The members are engaged in a more flexible and intermittent commitment. Over the last decade, many events have been organised but resources and experiences are still little shared across the young Islamic associations of Romandie; they rarely capitalise on past experiences and still struggle to make organisational structures durable.

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# 4 Muslim Organisations and the *Laïcité* Challenge in the Canton of Geneva

*Victor Sanchez-Mazas*

## 4.1 Introduction

In Switzerland, relationships between religious communities and public authorities are a cantonal prerogative. Swiss subsidiarity in general, and in religious matters in particular, has arisen in a context of cantonal religious homogeneity. Yet, religious pluralism has also increased to a different extent *within* the cantons. Among them, two cantons declare themselves as *laïque* in their constitutions: Neuchâtel and Geneva. While we can question whether Neuchâtel should be called *laïque* since it recognises some religious communities in its constitution, there is no doubt that the separation between the state and the religious communities is deeper in Geneva. The canton of Geneva only constitutionally proclaimed its *laïque* character in 2013, yet it took the road of secularisation a long time ago. Over the three past decades, the secularisation process has been fuelled to some extent by the growing presence of Muslims in the canton. Consequently, Muslim actors and organisations have played a significant role in this process. Indeed, being directly affected by several issues of religious regulation, their relationships with cantonal authorities increased and they were included into several consultative mechanisms. In April 2018, the canton of Geneva voted a law on *laïcité*. However, this law was recently the object of a facultative referendum launched by several groups, notably Muslim organisations. How has a law largely motivated by the growing presence of Muslims produced such a massive mobilisation from this population? The current chapter seeks to answer this question by discussing the procedural and substantial features of the process that led to such a puzzling situation. The practices and demands of the Muslim population, coupled with the self-identification of the canton with a particular type of *laïcité*, has turned Geneva into an active laboratory of the relationships between the state and religious communities in a context of religious pluralism. In this chapter, I describe the evolution of Geneva's *laïque* framework, focusing on the relationships between state actors and religious organisations, Muslim organisa-

tions in particular. Such an analysis informs which Muslim organisations are recognised (or not) as a legitimate interlocutor by the public authorities and why. It allows us to draw a conclusion about the democratic legitimacy of such a process and its outcome, envisioning further democratic routes to tackle the challenges of religious regulation in a context of deep pluralism. This analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with representatives of cantonal Muslim organisations, conducted within the framework of the Swiss National Science Foundation's research 'Public Deliberation, Network Analysis and the Political Inclusion of Muslims Living in Switzerland, France and Britain' (DELMUSNET) in the period 2014–2017. In addition, observant participation and unstructured interviews were conducted from 2015 to 2018 with key Muslim actors, other religious organisations, *laïque* groups and state representatives.

## 4.2 From the Protestant Rome to a *Laïque* Republic: the Long Secular Path of Geneva

### 4.2.1 Historical Landmarks

Since the people of Geneva embraced the Reform, the development of the “Protestant Rome” has been closely linked to religious regulation. During the past five centuries, the Republic of Geneva has slowly become more secular. The recent constitutionalisation of the principle of *laïcité* is a major step in Geneva's secularisation, though not the first nor the last. As the recent legislative process shows, *laïcité* is not yet self-evident or consensual in the Republic. Actual substantial controversies and the procedural features of this process have roots in the history of Geneva's secularisation, which is not possible to describe at length here (see Grandjean and Scholl 2010). However, in order to analyse the inclusion of Muslim actors in the current process of religious regulation, it is necessary to sketch some historical landmarks, from the “secularisation” of 1907 to the constitutional assembly of 2013.

Four centuries after its transformation into the Protestant Rome by Jean Calvin, the Republic of Geneva had become, with few exceptions, quite a secular state by the end of the nineteenth century. The main exception was the state funding of the two recognised churches. In 1878, a legislative proposal from the government attempted to suppress this state funding. As a constitutional modification (which requires a referendum), the people voted but largely rejected it (Scholl 2010). To some extent, the French secularisation of 1905 motivated a new attempt in Geneva. Yet, political actors framed the necessity of secularisation as a reaction to local problems (Herrmann 2010).

In 1906, the cantonal government once more proposed to suppress the state funding of the recognised churches. Public debates over the issue were not only numerous and vigorous in the press but also in public space through several public meetings (Cuénod 2015). Parliamentary debates reveal the deep division not only between political parties but also within them (Lescaze 2010). After eight projects of secularisation over sixty years (Lescaze 2010), the Republic of Geneva finally became secular. However, the separation between the state and the churches was far from total: some instead speak of “autonomy” (Mayer 1999). The main relic of the state’s funding of churches was the Faculty of Protestant Theology. In addition, the property of each religious building was transferred from the communes to the churches, but the Saint-Peter Cathedral remained dedicated to some state official ceremonies. In 1945, another step back from secularism was taken by the state, which granted a “technical help” to the three “recognised churches”<sup>88</sup> with the levy of the voluntary financial contribution to churches (Tanquerel 2010).

Most religious issues in the Republic were not subject to modification before the Constituent Assembly of 2008–2013. Nevertheless, there are two exceptions to this stability: the issues of *cemeteries* and *public education*. Over the past twenty years, both were salient in the Republic. Furthermore, both were caused to some extent by the growing presence of Muslims in the canton of Geneva.

#### 4.2.2 The Issue of Cemeteries

Since their secularisation in 1876, the cemeteries have remained a salient issue until a recent settlement. Initially, cemeteries became an issue because of the particular demands of the small Jewish population. However, the law of 1876 allowed the government to authorise the use of the cemeteries not owned by the communes, the Conseil d’Etat (CE) then authorised the Jewish community to continue to use the cemetery of Carouge, while refusing its extension (Cuénod 2015). In 1920, since the cemetery of Carouge lacked space, the Jewish community created a cemetery with an entrance in one country (Switzerland) and the graves in another (France), where private cemeteries were allowed. It is with the growing presence of Muslims in the canton that the issue of cemeteries reappeared in the late 1970s. In the city of Geneva, a “practical and informal” solution was the answer from the mu-

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88 The Roman Catholic Church being added to the two traditionally recognised churches, the National Protestant and the National Catholic. Tanquerel (2010) shows that the law of 1945 had no legal bases to state the “recognition” of those three churches, nor that it constituted itself a legal recognition as institutions of public law. Of course, it can be argued that it constituted a *symbolic* recognition.

nicipal government to the demands of the Great Mosque of Geneva (Gianni and Varone 2007, 16). Concretely, the solution was not to formally create a “confessional square”, but rather to redesign one of the cemetery’s lanes in order to orient graves to Mecca and create a minimal separation, visually at least, with non-Muslims’ graves (Cuénod 2015). This pragmatic solution satisfied all parties until 1992, when the city of Geneva’s executive withdrew the derogation because too many Swiss Muslims from other cantons were using that cemetery (Gianni and Varone 2007). The traditional pragmatic approach was thus supplanted by a more juridical approach (Gianni 2005) and no transnational solution was found either. Consequently, further proposals to solve the issue were necessarily legislative.

In 1999, the legislative battle started in the city of Geneva with a motion entitled ‘Let’s bury the *Kulturkampf* and let the dead rest in peace’, explicitly aiming to begin a legislative process at the cantonal level.<sup>89</sup> Due to the urgency of the situation, the municipal executive proposed, after demands and consultations with the Jewish and Muslim<sup>90</sup> communities, a modification of the cemetery’s rules allowing “family reunion”, but not directly any “confessional squares”.<sup>91</sup> Some cantonal deputies saw this municipal project of modification as a “provocation”. In reaction, they proposed a motion asking the cantonal executive to prevent this decision. After deliberation in commission, the motion was amended and the executive invited to “start a dialogue with all affected parties in order to examine options of modification of the cemetery’s law respecting religious freedom and *laïcité*” (MV 1468). Soon after, the cantonal executive was pushed to find an equilibrium between cantonal *laïcité* and federal religious freedom by two legal doctrine publications. The first was at the initiative of the city of Geneva, and reaffirmed the city’s autonomy in its willingness to create “confessional squares” (PL 9346-A, 8). The second was mandated by the Israelite Community of Geneva, and concluded that the cemetery law of 1876 was not applicable because it violated the freedom of religion protected by the new Federal Constitution of 1999 (PL 9346-A, 15). If no changes were made to escape this illegality, a recourse at the Federal Court would probably have condemned the canton. Thus, the cantonal executive and legislator were forced to find a solution acceptable by

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89 Memorial of the Conseil Municipal of Geneva sessions of 12–13 January 1998, 2943.

90 The Cultural and Islamic Foundation of Geneva (i.e. the Great Mosque) have been heard. The Islamic Centre of Geneva has been approached too, but not consulted (Gianni 2005).

91 Letter of Geneva’s mayor Manuel Tornare at the attention of the Grand Conseil, 12 November 2002.

the affected religious communities, respecting the federal constitution and not provoking a facultative referendum from the partisans of *laïcité*.

In 2004, the CE (in charge of the issue since the motion) started a consultation in two steps. The first step was a consultation of immediately affected actors, the Jewish and Muslim communities. Indeed, if the legislative proposal was directly rejected by those in need of accommodation, a larger consultation would have been useless. In substance, the project was to authorise the creation of confessional cemeteries with the approval of both the commune in question and the CE. While Jewish and Muslim communities were satisfied by this proposal, the second consultation (of communes, other religious communities, and political parties) did not reveal a unanimous acceptance for the proposal, which was sent back in commission. Over two years, the commission worked on the issue, notably considering with great attention the solution of the canton of Neuchâtel, and the process of negotiation it led with Muslim organisations in particular. After some refusals and back and forth between the plenary and the commission, a legislative proposal was unanimously accepted (L 9346), settling for good the issue of the cemeteries. In substance, it authorised unbounded (i.e. without physical or ornamental demarcations) confessional squares conditioned at the CE's acceptance and at the initiative of the commune in question. The Jews, who preferred the confessional cemeteries over the confessional squares, obtained the possibility of an extension on the cantonal territory of their transnational cemetery.

To sum up, the issue of cemeteries in the canton of Geneva illustrates a radical change of attitude on the part of the cantonal authorities towards religious regulation, in particular of Muslims practices, from a pragmatic to a juridical approach. Nevertheless, Muslim (and Jewish) organisations were included in several consultations, which led to a broadly accepted outcome. Of course, such an inclusion was largely motivated by the threat of a judicial recourse at the Federal Court that the canton would have probably lost. However, the formal inclusion (through consultations) of Muslim actors in the process of decision-making and its positive outcome were both a sign of the recognition of Muslims. Furthermore, it created a *precedent* for further processes of institutional regulation of religious issues, where Muslims might legitimately claim to be included.

### 4.2.3 The Issue of Public Education

In the nineties, religion re-emerged as particularly problematic in the sphere of public education in several cantons, including Geneva. Most of the time, the issue was stimulated by controversies and tackled through legal venues. In Geneva, whose public education has been *laïque* since 1872, the issue

had a particular resonance. The issue of public education in Geneva had two main dimensions: religious symbols in public classrooms and the *laïcité* of the teachers.

*Religious symbols in public classrooms* became an issue in Geneva in 1995 because a teacher wore a hijab in a public school. In reaction, the school authorities manifested an interdiction in virtue of article 6 of the cantonal law on public education, which states that public education guarantees the respect of the political and confessional convictions of the students and their parents. The teacher's recourse at the CE was rejected. Following this, a majority at the cantonal parliament voted a resolution of "firmness" towards her. During the parliamentary debate, several deputies reaffirmed consensual tolerance for students who wear religious symbols, in virtue of both their limited autonomy and by the fact that they do not represent the state. The teacher attempted a recourse at the federal level, and another at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), but both were unsuccessful. In consequence, teachers were forbidden to wear ostentatious religious symbols, interdiction stated in the law on public education of 2016. The tolerance for the wearing of religious symbols by students was not laid down in this law, but rather was stated by the Department of Public Education (DIP) explicitly in 2016 in a document for students entitled "*Laïcité at School*".

The *laïcité* of the teachers has also been an important issue in Geneva. In September 2002, the Muslim teacher Hani Ramadan published an article called 'The Misunderstood Charia' in the newspaper *Le Monde*, whose clarification of the meaning and conditions of the practice of stoning was seen by many as a defence of this practice. The DIP decided to suspend the teacher. After an investigation, the CE decided to licentiate Ramadan for two reasons. First, Hani Ramadan had been warned several times previously that his publications and public discourses contained elements that stood against the values that the public school must defend and transmit. Second, the investigation concluded that the activities of the teacher out of school had a religious nature, which conflicts with the obligation for teachers to be *laïc*. Ramadan appealed this decision at the first instance of recourse, which considered that the law prohibits clerics from teaching in public schools, but that what makes someone a cleric must be defined (Tanquerel 2010). The commission thus defined three criteria: the task given by the religious community to the person; his religious education; and the time dedicated by the person to religious activities. The commission concluded that the teacher was not a cleric according to that definition, but that he had been at fault anyway in not respecting his "duty of restraint". Based on this clarification, the new law on public instruction of 2016 states that "teachers cannot exer-

cise an ecclesiastic function or a preponderant role in a religious movement” (art 123. al. 4).

In 2016, Hani Ramadan was the source of a new controversy about teachers’ *laïcité*. Having been invited to a debate about Islamophobia in a public classroom, he was accused of having compared women wearing hijab to pearls protected by shells, and women without hijab as coins passing from pocket to pocket. It is not clear what the issue was here: was it that the guest was from the founding family of the Muslim Brotherhood; was it that he was dismissed from the DIP; was it that he made some controversial claims on some issues; was it that he was a cleric; was it because his intervention was of a religious nature; or was it due to the particular content of his intervention? While the press tends to combine all these aspects, in the Tribune de Genève the spokesperson of the DIP Pierre-Antoine Preta claimed that “[Ramadan]’s unilateral intervention in front of students is not compatible with a neutral and scientific approach of the religious fact” (Roselli 2016). Instead of clarifying the issue of the *laïcité* of teachers, the polemic reactivated the question of the “teaching of religious facts”, which is a distinct issue under debate since the eighties in Geneva.

To summarise, the religious regulation of public education stands in contrast to the consultative approach taken towards the issue of cemeteries. Indeed, both aforementioned school controversies were tackled through juridical venues. The attitude of the authorities towards these issues is characterised by a strong attachment to the principle of *laïcité* and a firmness towards any deviation from it by Muslim actors. However, the authorities have remained pragmatic, tolerating students wearing religious symbols. In addition, these controversies and their juridical reactions triggered a number of clarifications of the institutional framework related to these issues. As with the issue of cemeteries, public education issues were thus considered as “solved”, and not subjected to the democratic process on the law on *laïcité* begun by the constituent assembly.

#### 4.2.4 The Constituent Assembly

From 2009, Geneva’s *laïcité* experienced a major evolution through the work of the constituent assembly. Its main outcome was the explicit constitutionalisation of the principle of *laïcité* in 2013, which triggered in turn the development of a specific law on *laïcité*. It was not self-evident that *laïcité* would be tackled *at all*, yet the commission of “General Dispositions and Fundamental Rights” decided to tackle the issue. The emergence of *laïcité* as an issue on the commission’s agenda was quite spontaneous. According to its president Maurice Gardiol, “it was not obvious initially that there would be

an article on *laïcité*".<sup>92</sup> Yet, at the beginning of the commission's substantial work, the question was not whether or not *laïcité* should appear within the constitution, rather the question was already *where* it should appear: is it a goal of the state, a principle of the state's activity, or the status of the state? The commission decided to define the State as following: "The Republic and Canton of Geneva is a democratic law-abiding *laïque* State built on freedom, responsibility and solidarity".<sup>93</sup> However, the concept of *laïcité* was subject to several interpretations and thus needed to be defined.

While considering that actors affected by the issue of *laïcité* should be heard, the members of the commission disagreed on *who* should be heard. Some considered that the commission should not be exclusive and should invite the principal religious communities, that is "the three official churches and Islam and Judaism, ... even if for those two a choice will have to be made because there are many streams".<sup>94</sup> A liberal commissioner claimed that it would not be arbitrary to only hear the Rabbi Guedj for the Jewish community and a "moderate Muslim like Hafid Ouardiri for the Muslim's one".<sup>95</sup> Some suggested that representatives of the "free-thinkers" should also be heard.<sup>96</sup> In the same vein, some wondered which religious communities should be heard if the commission wished to respect equality of treatment: what about the Jehovah's witnesses, the Scientologists, etc.? Because there were too many people to hear, organising a single hearing was suggested. Furthermore, the commission considered that a *public* hearing could spark a public debate and facilitate the further acceptance of the texts because people would have felt included in their elaboration. Facing several demands, the commission decided to organise a single hearing and sent a questionnaire to the chosen organisations before it. The commission finally decided that only those who previously answered the questionnaire would participate in the hearing, and that it would not be public. Concerning the participants, all those who requested it were invited to fulfil the questionnaire and to participate to the hearing. Nevertheless, it is not clear how the participants *who didn't request to be heard* were selected. That selection was not part of a discussion in commission. According to the president, it is the secretariat and not the commission that decided who was consulted.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, there is no public list of the selected organisations for the questionnaire. However, with twenty-four responses to the questionnaire (which means it has been

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92 Personal communication with Maurice Gardiol, 14 June 2016.

93 Transcript of the session n°5 of the commission 1, 14 May 2009, emphasis mine.

94 Transcript of the session n°7 of the commission 1, 11 June 2009, 3.

95 Transcript of the session n°7 of the commission 1, 11 June 2009, 4.

96 Transcript of the session n°7 of the commission 1, 11 June 2009, 4.

97 Personal communication with Maurice Gardiol, 14 June 2016.

sent at least to twenty-four organisations), it is very unlikely that some key organisations were excluded from this consultation and from the possibility of being heard. While the commission aimed to be very inclusive, two special demands of hearing<sup>98</sup> had vanished into the commission's work: "The Muslim and the Jewish communities"<sup>99</sup> each asked to be heard *individually*, but the commission never discussed these particular demands.

Before the hearing, the commission had taken position on all the issues regarding *laïcité* on the agenda. While twenty-four organisations had answered the questionnaire, only ten attended the collective hearing. Within those ten, all those who requested to be heard were present (the Citizen Group religious and humanist culture at the *laïque* school, the Protestant Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Israelite Community of Geneva, the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism – LICRA, the Swiss Association for *Laïcité*). The Christian Catholic Church, the Free Evangelical Church, the Union of Muslim Organizations of Geneva (UOMG), and the Muslim League for the Confessional Peace were also present. Two main issues were discussed during the hearing. First, as in commission, the definition of *laïcité* was in tension between neutrality and separation. While the commission had decided not to write *separation* in the constitution but to add a comment that highlighted the importance of this concept, a majority of the commissaries did not support this position during the hearing and endorsed instead a *laïcité of openness* characterised mainly by religious neutrality. The second point of conflict concerned the issue of religious clothes. While presenting the commission's proposals, the president stated that the religious neutrality of the state implied the interdiction of wearing religious clothes in public administrations. A commissary noticed that the president was wrong in presenting the interdiction of religious clothes as an implication of the state's neutrality, since the commission never discussed it. The representative of the UOMG was Lucia Dahlab, the teacher condemned in 1996 for wearing a hijab in a public classroom (see above). She asked if someone wearing religious clothes could be elected. Some commissaries claimed that this question was the task of the legislator and not the constituent assembly. Finally, a commissary (and law professor) claimed that the Federal Assembly has recently broken the requirement of *laïcité* for legislative eligibility,<sup>100</sup> but that the interdiction of wearing religious clothes in public administrations was already clear following the judgment of the ECHR. Nevertheless, this is questionable since the decision of the court particularly rested on the fact

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98 Transcript of the session n°34 of the commission 1, 18 Februaury 2010, 10.

99 Transcript of the session n°34 of the commission 1, 18 Februaury 2010, 10.

100 Federal Decision concerning the guarantee of the revised Constitution of the canton of Geneva, 15 March 2007.

that Dahlab was a *teacher*, so it was not obvious that the jurisprudence would also apply to any other public employees.

The hearing did not lead to any substantial modification of the commission's proposals. According to the president, this showed that the commission's proposals were very consensual. Indeed, among the issues discussed during the hearing, only one organisation was clearly against the commission's proposals. Yet, there were important disagreements about the issue of religious clothes, which the commission has decided not to tackle. The aim of the hearing was not to convince the participants, or to let them challenge or improve the commission's proposals. Indeed, the hearing's aim was instead to understand the positions of the participants and to assess the possible degree of support of the commission's proposals.<sup>101</sup> For instance, the article on the "relations between the authorities and the religious communities" has been approved by the collective hearing. Some commissaries who were initially sceptical about it saw the necessity of keeping the possibility of some contact with the religious communities. In particular, they saw that some problematic issues require collaboration, and that it was good to lead consultations and to try to understand the perspective of religious actors before taking decisions, like it has been previously done for the issue of cemeteries.

The plenary sessions did not substantially modify the commission's proposals. Most of them were consensually adopted. Once the plenary had sketched a complete proposal of constitution, it led a popular consultation through a questionnaire. Since the issue of *laïcité* was controversial, the commission decided that some questions on *laïcité* were appropriate. However, the Bureau<sup>102</sup> considered that such questions were not necessary. In consequence, the constituency was not consulted on the issue of *laïcité*. Moreover, a few criticisms might be made about the organisation of the hearing by the commission. First, while the selection of the participants has been discussed, the final list was not decided by the commission. Fortunately, the selection made by the secretariat was large and pragmatic, and no one has claimed to be excluded. Second, the commission voted the proposals *before* the hearing. On one hand, this allowed the commissaries to take a common position in front of the heard organisations. On the other hand, it made the hearing appear as a mere presentation of the decisions of the commission without the possibility for the organisations present to influence those decisions. Of course, the fact that the hearing did not influence the commission's decisions might let think that they were consensual among the organisations invited to the hearing. They were for the most part. Nevertheless, the treatment of the

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101 Personal communication with Maurice Gardiol, 14 June 2016.

102 The Bureau was the organ of the Constituent Assembly in charge of the internal organisation and of the popular consultation.

non-consensual issues shows that the commissaries were not really open to being challenged, and that it was clearly not the aim of the hearing. Finally, the articles on *laïcité* did not lead to debate in public space, and were adopted in 2012 within the constitutional package.

### 4.3 From the Constitutional Principle to its Application: the Democratic Construction of *Laïcité* in Geneva

Although a general transitory disposition (art. 226 Cst.) imposed an implementation of the new constitution within five years, the dispositions on *laïcité* did not *require* a legislative development. As conceived by the commission of the constituent assembly, the three paragraphs of the article on *laïcité* allowed the *eventual* elaboration of some regulations or directives, but not necessarily a law on *laïcité*. Indeed, the dispositions on *laïcité* were not a legislative revolution that would require such a specific law. Even the paragraph on the relations between the state and the religious communities did not call for a specification, since the state already had several relations with religious communities. It can be argued that since these existing relations were influenced by different interpretations of *laïcité*, the precision of the notion of *laïcité* by the constituent assembly might imply the suppression of the relations at odds with the constituents' spirit. Yet, the article and the constituents' spirit on *laïcité* were too vague to help distinguish whether the existing relations were acceptable or not with regard to *laïcité*. The constitution might have changed nothing on the concrete application of the principle of *laïcité* in Geneva, yet the cantonal government took the initiative to elaborate a legislative framework for its application.

#### 4.3.1 The Working Group on *Laïcité*

In December 2013, the CE constituted a commission charged to study the implementation of the article 3 of the new constitution. This *Working Group on Laïcité* (GTL) was under the authority of the Department of Security and Economy (DSE), headed by Pierre Maudet. It aimed to produce “some concrete proposals of implementation in order to ground the CE’s reflection on *eventual* legislative and/or regulatory modifications”.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, it had to study “to what extent some legislative modifications [were] desirable or might be a danger for the confessional peace”.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the goal was not necessarily

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103 Report of the GTL, September 2014, 2 (my translation and emphasis).

104 Report of the GTL, September 2014, 2 (my translation and emphasis).

to legislate, and it was unclear what the CE would do with the report of the GTL. Nevertheless, the DSE intended to legislate. André Castella, the DSE representative within the GTL, considered that it was necessary to “occupy the field”.<sup>105</sup> Since the issues regarding *laïcité* were often tackled through judicial means, it was better according to him to legislate preventively rather than wait until a conflictual situation imposed the need to do so. Pierre Maudet also considered that the article 3 of the new constitution “must be transcribed in a legislative device”.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, Maudet claimed that “the process that leads us to define a modern *laïcité* is at least as important than the outcome, this process is eminently civic”.<sup>107</sup> This concern for a consultative process has probably motivated the creation of the GTL.

The GTL was composed jointly by the CE and its president Jean-Noël Cuénod (a journalist who wrote a book on *laïcité* in Geneva). The CE imposed three members representing its different relevant services, the president Cuénod chose the other members and Pierre Maudet validated them. These choices were not justified in the report. Yet, it indicated that these members were chosen for their competencies on religious issues and/or their knowledge of the social and political field of religious fact in Geneva, and that they were not representatives of the religious communities to which they belong. The GTL was not a “locus of deliberation between religious and philosophical institutions”<sup>108</sup>, it did not have to be representative. Instead, it was for Castella a group of “experts or scientists”.<sup>109</sup> According to one member of the GTL, the rabbi François Garaï, members were “specialists of their religious sensitivities”<sup>110</sup>, but not representatives of their religious communities. The religious “sensitivities” represented in the group were Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims. Two professors of the University of Geneva represented the academic sphere: Phillipe Borgeaud and Michel Grandjean. Professor Grandjean was a member of the commission that tackled the issue of *laïcité* at the constituent assembly. In addition, by its proximity with the Protestant Church, Grandjean was the only representative of the Protestant sensitivity. The priest Philippe Matthey represented the Catholic sensitivity. François Garaï, founder and rabbi of the Liberal Israelite community, represented the Israelite sensitivity. This choice has probably been motivated by his belonging

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105 Personal communication with André Castella, 22 June 2016.

106 Opening speech of Pierre Maudet at the conference-debate ‘Politique et Religion’ organised by the Institut National Genevois, 16 May 2016 (my translation).

107 Opening speech of Pierre Maudet at the conference-debate ‘Politique et Religion’ organised by the Institut National Genevois, 16 May 2016 (my translation).

108 Report GTL, 3.

109 Personal communication with André Castella, 22 June 2016.

110 Personal communication with François Garaï, 16 June 2016.

to the Interreligious Platform of Geneva (PFIR), his implication in the public sphere through the media and its previous participation on the cemeteries' issue. The representative of the Muslim sensitivity was Zidane Meriboute, a professor of international law at the University of London. It is unclear why he was chosen, but the Director of the Inter-Knowing Foundation Hafid Ouardiri claims to have suggested him.<sup>111</sup> According to him, Meriboute was chosen for its distance with the Muslims organisations. Since Muslims are divided along confessional and ethnic lines, choosing someone without organisational belonging might have prevented some tensions.

The GTL worked behind closed doors: its members were forbidden to speak of the work of the GTL, including with their religious communities. This confidentiality was motivated by the risk of polemics if the press discussed the issues tackled by the GTL. It was better to publish a complete report, rather than publicise follow-ups that may have led to polemics or controversies. As a result, during the work of the GTL, the issue of *laïcité* was not much discussed in the media. The GTL made its report public, but its working documents and the transcripts of its work remained confidential.<sup>112</sup>

At the inauguration of the GTL, Pierre Maudet announced that the issue of public education would be included in the group's mandate, and that a representative of the DIP would participate in the sessions. However, the DIP refused to participate. Willing to tackle the question of the school anyway, the members of the group got authorisation from Pierre Maudet to discuss the issue of the hijab at school. For President Cuénod, it was important to discuss this issue because it would soon occupy public debates and the media would look for a positioning of the group on this issue. At the opposite end, Castella considered that the group should not light a fire where there was none already. Discussing the issue, the GTL finally decided to recommend nothing on it, except that the CE might intervene in case of threat to the school's functioning. The other substantial outcomes of the GTL were not radical. *Laïcité* was defined by both "neutrality" and "separation". The inclusion of the latter aspect was at odds with the constituents' spirit. Religious communities were also defined, which highlights their specialty. Indeed, to define them expresses the fact that they are a *special* type of association or foundation.

The GTL also discussed an issue that was not part of its mandate: the visibility of religious communities in public space. The GTL proposed to grant a general authorisation conditioned on the respect of the public order. Concerning the specific case of the burka/niqab, the GTL preferred not to

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111 Personal communication with Hafid Ouardiri, 28 July 2016.

112 According to André Castella, these documents are public in virtue of the Law on Public's Information (LIPAD).

tackle that issue. Yet, it considered that hiding one's face jeopardises social ties and is a risk to public security. In addition, it claimed that the burka/niqab has no religious nature. However, the GTL proposed that the burka/niqab should be authorised for tourists and diplomatic personnel only. If such clothes were to be worn by a substantial number of residents, while threatening religious peace, the authorities should forbid them. Concerning religious symbols worn by public agents, the GTL was divided. While the potentiality of conflicts raised by such symbols was acknowledged, some considered that the intolerance of the users did not justify an interdiction. Yet, since the article on *laïcité* proclaimed the state's neutrality, they all accepted the *principle* of such an interdiction. The question became *to whom* it should apply. While some considered it should apply only to the public agents of the regalian functions, or only to those in relation of authority with the users, the GTL finally decided that it should apply to any public agent in contact with the public. In addition, the GTL found a consensus on the fact that this interdiction should not apply to elected officials except judicial magistrates.

Based on the report of the GTL, the CE launched a large consultation of political parties, religious communities and some organisations “concerned by the questions of religion or *laïcité*”.<sup>113</sup> The consultation consisted in a questionnaire where the consulted organisations had to take positions on the recommendations of the GTL. The number of consulted organisations (twenty-eight) suggests that the consultation was inclusive. Of the twenty-four organisations who answered, a majority were in favour of the GTL's proposals.<sup>114</sup> A small minority was against the fact that the authorities may have relationships with religious communities. Among the political parties, all except *Ensemble à Gauche* (on the far left) were favourable. The oppositions to the quite consensual proposals of the GTL came mainly from those with a stricter conception of *laïcité*. The Union of Muslim Organizations of Geneva (UOMG) expressed some disagreement with the proposals regarding religious symbols in public administrations and the wearing of the burka in public space.<sup>115</sup> Considering these responses and the GTL's report, an interdepartmental group led by the DSE wrote a legislative proposal. Substantially, the legislative proposal differed slightly from the GTL's proposals. First, contrary to the GTL's definition, the aspect of separation was not included in the definition of *laïcité*. Second, religious *communities* were replaced by religious *organisations*. According to the constituent assembly, these are not synonymous. Indeed, the constituent assembly had rejected *organisations*

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113 Legislative proposal on the *laïcité* of the State (PL 11764), 04 November 2014.

114 Personal communication with André Castella, 22 June 2016.

115 Personal communication with Vahid Khoshideh, secretary of the UOMG, 29 August 2018.

because it induces the need to be structured. In contrast, the CE preferred to have relations only with the communities structured in association or foundation. The Interreligious Platform asked to be flexible on that criterion in order not to exclude small communities. Third, while the GTL proposed a general authorisation for outdoor cultural activities, the CE's proposal stated that in principle they occur in private space, but that they can be authorised if they do not threaten the public order. Fourth, the legislative proposal moved away from the debate on the burka in public space and on the hijab at school in stating that the CE can restrict or forbid the possibility to wear "external signs manifesting a religious membership" in case of deep trouble to the public order, and only for a limited period. In sum, except these differences, the GTL's work has been substantially followed. Thus, the consultation did not lead to many substantial changes, if any. Nevertheless, some religious communities considered that their answers to the questionnaire were well taken into consideration. Notably, the president of the UOMG at that time, Hani Ramadan thought that the positioning of the UOMG on the issue of the burka has led the DSE to drop the distinction between tourists and residents that the GTL proposed in order to allow burka-wearing only to the former.<sup>116</sup>

In November 2015, the CE submitted its legislative proposal. In reaction, two alternative legislative proposals were submitted. The first was introduced a few days after the government's proposal by leftists deputies with a French-inspired conception of *laïcité*. The second was submitted seven months later by leftists deputies preferring the status quo and thus wishing not to legislate beyond the constitutional dispositions. The three legislative proposals were sent to the commission of human rights of the cantonal parliament.

### 4.3.2 The Commission of Human Rights

The commission's work was confidential. After two years of work, the commission published an 800-page report exhibiting a large part of its work. While the report claims to "have reproduced *integrally* the discussions of the commission" (PL 11764A, 515, my translation and emphasis), some discussions of the commissions are missing. Of course, the commission was free to choose what to publicise. While the transcripts of the several hearings it led are present in the report, the discussion *about* these hearings are not. This is important because the demands of hearings raised some tensions within the commission. The problem came mainly from the two criteria of approval of such demands.<sup>117</sup> First, commissaries were allowed to request any hearing. As

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116 Personal communication with Hani Ramadan, 17 November 2015.

117 Personal communication with Pierre Gauthier, member of the commission of human rights, 09 June 2016.

a result, some hearings were surprising, to say the least. Notably, the hearing (requested by a commissary) of the Association Suisse Vigilance Islam<sup>118</sup> is questionable since this organisation is explicitly against a *specific* religion, considering that Islam represents a danger for western civilisation. The second criterion of inclusion was that any organisations requesting a hearing should be heard, if they had not been previously heard by the GTL. Since not a single organisation was heard by the GTL, that criterion was misplaced and showed the lack of preparation of the commissaries. This second criterion was not respected by the commission. Indeed, the UOMG's request to be heard was rejected, and it was the only refusal from the commission. This refusal has not been justified nor even *notified* to the UOMG.<sup>119</sup> Instead, the commission sent to each component organisations of the UOMG an invitation to take a written position on the legislative proposals. No other religious or non-religious organisations received such an invitation. Instead of hearing the only umbrella of Muslims organisations of Geneva, the commission preferred to ask each of them to write their comments. As a response, the UOMG sent a *common* positioning to the commission.

In substance, this letter made two main comments. First, *laïcité* should not only have for purpose to protect freedom of *conscience*, but also of *practice* of a religion. The UOMG stated that this notion of practice is fundamental to solve the issues about the wearing of religious symbols. Second, the UOMG considered that the interdiction of religious symbols in public administrations is at odds with the article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UOMG proposed not to legislate on the issue in order to allow some pragmatic solutions on a case-by-case basis. As it is clear, the issue of religious symbols in public administrations was crucial for the UOMG. Nevertheless, they were not heard at all.<sup>120</sup>

It might be that such a refusal was legitimate. Because of the confidentiality of the commission, we can only sketch *interpretations* of what exactly happened. One legitimate reason to exclude the UOMG might have been its lack of representativeness of Muslims of Geneva. Of course, the UOMG does not federate *all* the Muslims organisations of Geneva, but a

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118 For details on this organisation, see Chapter 9 of this volume (Aykaç and Banfi).

119 Personal communication with Vahid Khoshideh, secretary of the UOMG, 29 August 2018.

120 It could be argued that Muslims were actually heard since the Director of the Inter-Knowing Foundation and former speaker of the Great Mosque of Geneva has been heard by the commission. Yet, it is obvious that the Inter-Knowing Foundation does not *formally* represent Muslims of Geneva. Of course, as in the GTL (see above), Ouardiri might have represented the Muslim "sensitivity". However, in contrast the *formal* representatives of the other major religious communities were actually heard by the commission.

very large majority of them. In addition, there is no other cantonal federation of Muslims in Geneva. Furthermore, the UOMG itself had been consulted by the constituent assembly *and* the GTL previously. Finally, the question of who might represent Muslims was asked by the commission itself during the hearing of a Professor of Political Science of the University of Geneva, specialised in the issue of Muslims in Switzerland. This professor mentioned the two classic Muslim organisations of Geneva (The Cultural and Islamic Foundation of Geneva and the Islamic Centre of Geneva), which are both part of the founding members of the UOMG. The professor also mentioned the UOMG itself, which tries to federate a form of representativeness. He also specified that Islam is not centralised and thus a unique representation of Muslims is not possible. As a conclusion, the professor advised the commission to remain flexible on that question. Considering these elements, it is unlikely that the possible lack of representativeness has *reasonably* been the reason to reject the demand of hearing of the UOMG.

A second interpretation is grounded on the reply from a liberal commissioner to the professor's suggestion. This commissioner expressed his fear of hearing "fundamentalist" people (L 11764A, 85). The example provided by the commissioner is Hani Ramadan (see above). This example did not come out of nowhere, since Ramadan was the president of the UOMG at that time. The argument of the commissioner is that the commission should not "give credit to him" (L 11764A, 86, my translation). Considering the conflicted past of Ramadan and the Department of Public Instruction (DIP), the grounds of the commissioner's fear are evident. Nevertheless, the conflict between Ramadan and the DIP was solved through legal venues: he is thus a priori a person respecting the rule of law. It is true that Ramadan has some ecclesiastic functions. Yet, many heard people were not *laïc* either. Furthermore, Ramadan was democratically elected president of the UOMG. With such factual elements in mind, it is easy to see the problematic aspect of Ramadan's exclusion in terms of democratic legitimacy. Indeed, what is at the heart of democratic legitimacy is *political equality*, which is the equal opportunity to influence political decisions through the different means of democratic expression (Christiano 1990; Verba 2001). This broad principle does not imply that everybody must be included in *any* venue of democratic influence. However, it implies that inclusion and exclusion in *specific* venues of democratic decision (here: to be heard by the commission) must respect the principle of equality of treatment. To put it in a nutshell, criteria for inclusion/exclusion must be the same for everybody. Since UOMG's exclusion from the commission was neither notified nor justified, we cannot claim with certainty whether this exclusion respected political equality or not.

Moreover, the exclusion of the UOMG is problematic because Muslims were *particularly* affected by one issue tackled by the commission: the interdiction of religious symbols for public servants. Of course, such an interdiction was not intended to be *specific* for Muslim women wearing hijab, but this group was most of the time mentioned as an example for this interdiction by the commissaries themselves. Furthermore, the interdiction of religious symbols for public servants was debated in length by the commission during its hearings. Some heard actors were against this disposition, in principle or in its current form. Yet, a majority of commissaries accepted the idea that the religious neutrality of the state implied that public servants *in contact with the public* were forbidden to wear religious symbols.<sup>121</sup> A minority of commissaries attempted to extend this interdiction to *any* elected officials, including legislative ones at the communal and cantonal levels. Interestingly, the commissaries mentioned an actual example several times: Lucia Dahlab, a major figure of the UOMG, was elected at the municipal parliament of the commune of Vernier, while wearing the hijab.<sup>122</sup> Several commissaries highlighted that her situation was not problematic since people elected to the legislative do not represent the state but the people, which have elected her for what she is. In addition, some commissaries warned that since such an interdiction was at odds with the recent decision of the Federal Assembly to break the requirements of *laïcité* for legislative eligibility<sup>123</sup>, the Federal Court would probably invalidate it. Hermetic to these claims, a minority of commissaries nevertheless tried four times without success to add this interdiction.

After two years of work, the commission issued a report divided into a majority report and two minority reports. The majority report was an amended version of the governmental legislative proposal. It has been accepted at a very small majority: four in favour, three against, and two abstentions. As such, it represented a “fragile balance” without the guarantee of being debated in plenary. Indeed, both minorities demanded not to legislate on *laïcité*. The first minority report was from the extreme right ranks. It considered there was no need to legislate. Yet, if the parliament decided anyway to debate the legislative proposal of the government, this minority would have demanded

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121 It must be specified that several commissaries were against such an interdiction *in principle*. They endorsed it considering that for the moment the constituency was not ready for a debate on such a “reasonable accommodation”. Personal communication with Yves de Matteis, former president of the Commission of Human rights, 02.08.2018.

122 Actually, at that time, Lucia Dahlab was no longer elected at the municipal parliament of Vernier. Yet, another major figure of the UOMG, Sabine Tiguemounine, was elected while wearing the hijab at the municipal parliament of Meyrin.

123 Federal Decision concerning the guarantee of the revised Constitution of the canton of Geneva, 15 March 2007.

one amendment: the extension of the interdiction of religious symbols for elected legislative. The second minority report came from the extreme left ranks. In substance, the minority considered that a *special* law on *laïcité* was against the principle of *laïcité* itself. Among other amendments requested if the parliament accepted to debate the legislative proposal, this minority would have demanded the suppression of the interdiction of religious symbols for public servants.

#### 4.4 Parliamentary Adoption and Referendum

During the presentation of the majority report at the plenary, the interdiction of religious symbols for public servants is the first issue presented as subject to deep divergences within the commission. Arguing about whether to tackle the legislative proposal, several deputies explicitly manifested that they perceive Islam as a threat, while other considered the legislative proposal as being anti-Islam. A deputy launched the issue of religious symbols for legislative elected highlighting that if a deputy wearing hijab was elected to an executive function, she would have to remove her scarf. He thus proposed that a global interdiction for any elected officials would be more coherent. Some deputies claimed that elected legislatives represent their electors and political party, and not the state. They said that the existing cases (the two deputies wearing hijab in the communal parliaments of Vernier and Meyrin) were never considered problematic. Others claimed that even if they do not *represent* the state, they *constitute* it. For them, wearing religious symbols manifest the fact that these individuals do not act freely, which goes against gender equality. Some among them considered that “ostentatious” religious symbols were a provocation. Others claimed that allowing religious symbols, including in public administration, instead shows the diversity of the state. In this vein, a deputy argued that it is the *provision* of public services that has to be neutral, not the way public servants are dressed. Several deputies also considered that if such an interdiction was accepted, the Democratic *Christian* Party would have to change its name, otherwise an “Islamist Party of Geneva” could theoretically enter the parliament.<sup>124</sup>

Once a majority decided to tackle the legislative proposal, thirty-one amendments were proposed. Among them, three concerned the interdiction of religious symbols for legislative elected. One was proposed from a few extreme left deputies, aiming to suppress the possibility of wearing religious clothes and holding religious statements in any legislative venues. Another was from the liberal ranks, aiming to suppress only religious clothes but allowing the

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124 Debate at the Great Council of the Canton of Geneva, PL 11764-A, 23 March 2018.

expression of religious statements, such as: “As a Christian, Muslim or Atheist, this law hurts my sensitivity”.<sup>125</sup> A majority of deputies agreed that political opinions might be inspired by religious concepts and thus can be expressed as such. Nevertheless, several deputies considered that members of the elected legislative could remove their scarf before entering the parliament. Others claimed that such an interdiction directly targeted Muslim women and would imply an exclusion from democratic life for some people. Yet, the amendment was accepted, with a majority of fifty-three in favour, thirty-four against and two abstentions. In contrast with all the other dispositions regarding *laïcité*, this vote followed a perfect left-right repartition: the left being against and the right in favour. This vote, and the vote for the entire article (50 against 38), were the tightest of the entire legislative proposal. The third debate was open with an amendment aiming to suppress this new disposition, which triggered a vigorous and agitated debate on Islam and veiled women. The Swiss People’s Party announced that if this disposition was dropped, it wouldn’t support the entire legislative proposal anymore. Without this disposition, it was unlikely that the legislative proposal could have been accepted at all. Once again, the right majority won the vote, and rejected this amendment. A speech from the initiator of the project, the State Councillor Pierre Maudet, closed the debate on *laïcité* at the cantonal parliament. In his speech, Maudet praised a “peaceful debate, notably on the specific question of Islam in our society, which is good to ask before eventual problems”<sup>126</sup> and concluded by saying that “interdictions liberate”. His legislative proposal has finally been accepted by sixty-three in favour, twenty-five against, and three abstentions.

In parallel with this adoption, the extreme left party Ensemble à Gauche contacted the UOMG. Initially, the intention was only to discuss whether they could collaborate or not on few projects.<sup>127</sup> Yet, the adoption of the law on *laïcité* motivated both of them to organise a public meeting in order to discuss what could be done in reaction. One week after the adoption of the law, the meeting gathered around forty people from different backgrounds and some deputies from the commission of human rights (the left minority). While participants disagreed on why they were opposed to the law, the interdiction of religious symbols for legislative elected was unanimously condemned. Two strategies were proposed: referendums against the law; or recourses against this interdiction. Some considered that a referendum was dangerous for two main reasons. First, if the referendum was lost, the legitimacy of the law would be increased. Second, such a referendum would trigger

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125 Debate at the Great Council of the Canton of Geneva, PL 11764-A, 26 April 2018.

126 Debate at the Great Council of the Canton of Geneva, PL 11764-A, 26 April 2018.

127 Personal communication with Matias Manriquez, member of Solidarités, initiator of the meeting, 04 August 2018.

a public debate on hijab (and Islam more broadly) which would provide a great platform for Islamophobic discourses. Others considered instead that this interdiction was an infringement to democracy and that it was only a start if they do nothing. For them, a societal debate is necessary on these issues. Sabine Tiguemounine, who is the most immediately affected actor because she wears the hijab at the communal parliament of Meyrin, claimed that she will not remove her scarf and that “they would have to bring [her] out of the parliament with tied hands”<sup>128</sup>, and that she would recourse to the Federal Court. Finally, a referendum was launched and divided into four different positions statements: the democratic; the feminist; the labour and the fundamental rights angle. In one month, 8,300 signatures were gathered (only 5,300 were necessary). The great involvement of Muslims individuals and organisations has substantially contributed to this outcome.

#### 4.5 Discussion: the Political Inclusion of Muslims in Geneva

As the previous analysis sketches, the canton of Geneva is a unique case of the *democratic* transformation of its relation with religion(s). The recent process shows that the canton tries to find an appropriate balance between religious freedom, state neutrality and the separation of the state and religious communities. As such, it can be considered as a “laboratory of *laïcité*” inspiring other cantons and countries. The different authorities implicated in this process adopted a consultative approach, and their concern for inclusion is obvious. However, the exclusion of the UOMG from a crucial moment of the process has led us to question the political inclusion of Muslims actors. It was unfortunately predictable that a large part of both the public and parliamentary debates would concern Islam and veiled women in particular. From the Dahlab case to the work of the GTL, Islam was central to any discussion on *laïcité*. Furthermore, several dispositions particularly and specifically affected Muslims. The commission of human rights has heard for a second time the different Christian churches because some dispositions affected them specifically (regarding religious building) and particularly (regarding the voluntary ecclesiastic contribution). In contrast, the commission did not hear for a single time the most representative organisation of Muslims even if they were both *specifically* and *particularly* affected by some dispositions. In addition, two central members of the UOMG were the only two individuals of the canton directly affected by a very contested disposition within the com-

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128 Statement by Sabine Tiguemounine at a public meeting (discussed above) that took place 02 May 2018 at the *Maison des Associations*, Geneva.

mission (the interdiction of wearing religious symbols for elected officials). From a democratic point a view, this is a clear infringement to the “all-affected principle”. This principle asserts that all those affected by a decision must participate to that decision (Habermas cited by Dermange 2016). Here, two persons were identifiable as directly affected by this disposition: it is thus clear that they legitimately deserved a hearing to express their arguments about it. Moreover, these individuals could have told their experiences of wearing the hijab as communal deputies.

It can be argued that it was not certain that these two women would have been sent as representatives of the UOMG. Indeed, the president Hani Ramadan might have come alone. Nevertheless, the fact that these two women were directly affected by a disposition was not the only reason to hear the UOMG. Indeed, the UOMG *requested* to be heard. Moreover, even if it would not have requested a hearing, it should have been invited by the commissaries themselves to represent the Muslims of the canton, just like any other religious community. In light of the academic literature, the exclusion of Hani Ramadan might be explained (yet, not justified). As Monnot (2015) argues, Muslims actors are pressed by cantonal authorities to unite in order to constitute a single interlocutor for any relevant issue. The constitution of the UOMG was also motivated by the necessity to facilitate the dialogue with the authorities. On the other hand, Monnot (2015) shows the tendency of the media to highlight “iconic” individuals to defend a “real Islam” in total independence of a number of organisational constraints. These two types of representations (organisational and individual) can be in a tension, which might have occurred with the exclusion of the UOMG from the consultative process. For several reasons, Hani Ramadan as the president of the UOMG might have *appeared* to the commissaries as not representative of the members of the UOMG, but representative of a type of Islam and discourse on Islam which commissaries would not consider *audible*. There are three main reasons for this probable perception from the commissaries: (i) Ramadan is a member of the founding family of the Muslim Brotherhood; (ii) he was involved in several controversies about Islam in the canton of Geneva (see above); (iii) he has been largely present in the mainstream local and global media for at least fifteen years. Yet, Ramadan was the president of the most representative federation of Muslim organisations of the canton of Geneva. Thus, what happened is not that commissaries wrongly believed that Ramadan had only an individual-type representativeness. What happened is that *despite* the certainty of Ramadan’s organisational-type representativeness, the commissaries considered that Ramadan’s individual “problematic” features made him a representative of a discourse that should not be legitimised by its official consideration. As such, the *anticipated* content of Ramadan’s discourse

trumped its representativeness, and as such undermined the democratic legitimacy of the whole consultative process.

Finally, the outcome of the process is also *substantially* exclusive. Indeed, the interdiction of wearing religious symbols in legislative venues prevent a part of the population to fully participate in democratic politics. As such, this interdiction is an infringement to the democratic agency of individuals wearing religious symbols. While a majority considered that wearing religious symbols was incompatible with legislative functions, it is striking that nobody expressed *why* this was problematic. In democratic theory, there is indeed a debate on the inclusion of religious actors within political processes. Yet, what is considered as *potentially* problematic is the religious frame of political *statements* by religious actors (Habermas 2006), not the way they are dressed. The idea being that “religious reasons” (in opposition to “public reasons”) cannot be endorsed by everybody because they are particular to the faith of the claimant. In complete opposition to the debate in democratic theory, Geneva’s parliament consider that religious clothes were problematic but not religious discourses. Following Gianni’s conclusions (2016), the regulation of individual religious practices (here: wearing the hijab) produces a *direct depoliticisation* of Swiss Muslims.

## 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described the process of religious regulation of the canton of Geneva, especially the period from the work of the constituent assembly in 2009 to the parliamentary acceptance of a law on *laïcité* in 2018. This case study focused on the inclusion of Muslim actors and organisations within this process. It showed that Muslim organisations were unjustly excluded at the final step of the process. Moreover, it argued that the interdiction of wearing religious symbols for those elected to the legislature is an infringement to democratic legitimacy since it institutionalises the political exclusion of a specific population. Finally, such an interdiction risk hindering the pursuit of the democratic evolution of the *laïcité à la genevoise*. In February 2019, the referendum against the law was lost (by 55 percent in favour of the law; 45 percent against), but the popular opposition to the law was far greater than the opposition in parliament. In addition, the new law currently faces several judicial recourses, which could even settle some important European jurisprudence in the next years. As such, the law on *laïcité* constitutes a fragile balance rather than a consensual settlement on religious pluralism.

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**Controversies  
and Recognition:  
Islam and Social  
Engagements in  
Switzerland**



# 5 Islamic Social Services in Switzerland: Crossing Religious Boundaries to Benefit Society as a Whole

*Baptiste Brodard*

## 5.1 Introduction

In Switzerland, as in other European countries, grassroots Islamic associations have developed initiatives to address the needs of the broader population, as well as those of Muslim communities. This chapter is based on a case study of a small number of Islamic organisations in Switzerland that tackle social exclusion and religious radicalisation through faith-based projects. It outlines the projects' specificities by exploring the role of Islamic references in social work practices – and thus aims to initiate reflection on the inclusion of such projects within mainstream society, observing relationships between Islamic associations, the state, and civil society.

For decades, following their settlement in non-Muslim societies, Muslims in western Europe and north America focused on organising worship and education to meet their basic religious needs (Cantori 2021; Brodard 2022).<sup>129</sup> With the exception of the United States, where Islamic presence was strongly influenced by those Afro-Americans who converted to Islam, Muslim communities in the West did not generally develop religious-based social projects until the late 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>130</sup> Since then, a new range of Islamic-based social welfare services and initiatives has emerged in various European countries, although most

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129 French academic literature addressed the different steps of Muslims' settlement in France since the second part of the twentieth century, see Césari 1998.

130 In his autobiography, Malcolm X showed the importance that the Nation of Islam gave to social work and community empowerment. The New Yorker Imam Siraj Wahhaj testified to having been involved in a war on drugs in Brooklyn with his fellow Muslims in the 1980s. The local Muslim community tackled drug trafficking issues in the neighbourhood. These brief examples highlight an early concern of Afro-American Muslims to address social issues in their local environment (see also: Brodard 2014).

focus on Muslims through a community empowerment consideration. More recently, a novel kind of social engagement has been devised by Muslims and Islamic organisations that aims to reach the broader society beyond the boundaries of Muslim communities.<sup>131</sup>

## 5.2 From Community Development to Local Social Work Practice

Islamic social engagement has often been conceived of and studied in a community empowerment context – a practice conceptualised as “Islamic social work” by Rosalind Warden in her PhD research on an Islamic organisation providing social welfare services in Wales in the United Kingdom (Warden 2013). In this framework, Islamic organisations and mosques help their fellow coreligionists by facilitating access to education, housing, work, and social welfare. This approach remains predominant in a number of European countries where the main Islamic social engagement has prioritised Muslim communities. But more recently, a new way to involve in Islamic social work has emerged in several countries, including Switzerland, where Muslims implement activities and projects that aim to reach needy people regardless of their religious belonging or convictions. Engagement is hence designed at the local social scale, beyond the “boundaries” of the Muslim communities themselves. Welfare services and projects whose beneficiaries include both Muslim and non-Muslim residents aim to tackle various social issues such as poverty, homelessness, or drug addiction, and to foster integration and citizenship amongst Muslims and minorities. The key actors thus show concern for wider society and the needs of the local population; their involvement in the social field therefore seems to indicate a step towards the public sphere, alongside responsiveness to the current societal challenges.

However, the social welfare services implemented by Muslims vary strongly according to different organisations and project managers who devise services differently due to different purposes, objectives, and religious understandings. Therefore, several factors, including the political context surrounding social challenges and ideological trends within Muslim communities, shape a range of viewpoints on Islam and aid. It is useful to notice that the social engagement of Muslims in Switzerland, as well as in other countries, remains overall an individual practice motivated by faith. Most charity and assistance are provided by Muslims individually, often outside of any forms

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131 The denomination “Muslim communities” is more often used in plural in this chapter, since it refers to various Muslim organisations and populations whose diversity prevents us from identifying them as a sole and unified community.

of association or collective organisation. Despite the link between both individual and collective faith-based practices, the Islamic welfare activities of individual actors, a topic explored in a PhD research study (Martens 2013) and an article by the same researcher (Martens 2014), will not be addressed here. Rather, this chapter focuses on Islamic organisations and collective projects through observing three main on-site case studies of associations that provide faith-based social services in Switzerland. After a brief presentation of the associations' profiles and ongoing projects, I highlight a few points to discuss the challenges faced by Islamic social work in non-Muslim countries.

### 5.3 A Problem of Terminology

Current studies on Islam and Muslims often encounter problems in the use of concepts and terminology. For a long time, Islam was discussed from a Eurocentric perspective using a common series of concepts, often derived from Christianity, to describe Islamic phenomena. This explains the difficulty in identifying an accurate terminology to define Islamic practices and concepts for categorising data accurately, without overlapping with Eurocentric and Christian denominations.<sup>132</sup> For instance, terms like *Khidmah*, *Zakat*, or *Sadaqah* are difficult to translate.<sup>133</sup> In a similar vein, the concepts of *social work* and *humanitarian work* are difficult to situate within Islamic tradition and history, since they refer to particular social and historical contexts even if they have been used in different Muslim societies over the last few decades.<sup>134</sup>

Additionally, there is no consensus on the definitions of the concept of *Islam* itself, although commonly used in public discourse and academic writing. A Muslim theologian perspective would approach the definition of Islam through the lenses of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, implying a dimension of power, legitimacy, and authority within the religious tradition. Conversely, some anthropologists would conceptualise Islam only through its concrete

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132 At a theological level, it is well documented that from its early stages Islam developed a multitude of norms and recommendations to help the poor and tackle various social issues. Indeed, the outcomes of prophetic and Quranic recommendations about concrete involvement in the field could today be termed Islamic social work or Islamic humanitarian aid. For example, one article notes the influence of Islamic texts on humanitarian aid (Krafess 2005), a point moving beyond the social sciences to address more theological considerations beyond the scope of this chapter.

133 These terms refer to key concepts in the traditional Islamic literature. *Zakat* can be defined as compulsory alms while *Sadaqah* describes a wider practice which includes both donation and positive behaviour. *Khidmah* is normally defined as a “service” given to the creation (including humans) for the sake of God.

134 For example, the concept of Muslim NGOs has been borrowed from the Western “development system” denominations since the 1970s (Juil Petersen 2014).

manifestations within a society, ignoring the textual tradition and a theological perspective, thereby providing relativist conceptions of Islam depending solely on Muslims' practices. To overcome this dichotomy, the anthropologist Talal Asad proposes the term *discursive tradition* to qualify Islam (Asad 2009), which he suggests can encompass both the principle of unity of this religion and the diversity of its forms and interpretations (Meziane 2017).

In another context, the sociologist Nilüfer Göle addresses the difference between the “production of an ideological corpus” and the “production of a collective imaginary” within the Muslim community (Göle 2013, 171–173). This suggests that the “Islamic habitus” or identity trends among Muslims should not solely be investigated within the scholarly speech of religious “authorities”. Therefore, following the contributions of both Talal Asad (2009) and Nilüfer Göle (2013), this chapter assumes there may be some variation between the “Islamic practices” of the associations and the “Islamic theological discourses” to which they may refer, considering that both may influence the other. It thus focuses on the concrete practices of the faith-based organisations using an empirical approach, without addressing theological analyses.

Moreover, traditional Islamic theology<sup>135</sup> does not consider the common division between the sacred and the profane that is derived from secularism. In their article *Muslim Perspectives on Welfare*, Harlley Dean and Zafar Khan discuss the specificities of Islam, contending that “it eschews the dualism of the Western Enlightenment and thereby the inherently ambiguous distinctions between body and soul; between the secular and the religious; between state and church; between politics and morality; between public obligation and private belief” (Dean and Khan 1995, 194). For some Muslim believers, Islam is understood as a “complete way of life” and not as a religion that stays confined to a limited area (Barise 2005, 114). From this perspective, every field can be considered as religious – and Islam applies to any sphere of life, depending on the actor's intention.

However, Islamic presence in both western European countries and also in Muslim countries has led to sociological studies of Muslim communities and their practices that use common and local sociological terminology

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135 Here, “traditional Islamic theology” refers to the mainstream “orthodox” theology that has been dominant within Muslim societies for the last century, mostly represented by the four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali*). Since the eighteenth century, new theologies often qualified as reformist have emerged. However, most of these are in line with the “traditional” viewpoint of non-distinction between sacred and profane practices. For instance, we could emphasise the point that smiling when meeting someone can be considered as a *Sadaqah* and therefore as an act of worship according to both the traditional and reformist schools of thought.

that is consequently also adopted by the Muslim actors themselves. Thus, the engagement of Muslims in the name of their religion in the social field has been conceptualised as *Islamic social work* (Warden 2013), *Muslim charity* (Martens 2014) or the *Muslim charity sector* (Barylo 2016), *faith-based welfare services* provided by Islamic organisations or *Islamic social services* (Banfi 2013). All these terms combine a type of investment, which could be assumed to be social welfare services, and a qualification related to belonging to Islam, whether or not this applies to the organisations or their leaders. The combination of both features is used to define the personal or collective engagement of people who identify as Muslim in the field of welfare or social work, for either Muslim or non-Muslim beneficiaries. In some cases, the adjective *Islamic* underlines an ambiguity in definition: does the term refer to Islam as a core of values and norms that are supposed to define social engagement, or does it simply denote the religious identity of the organisation and its leaders? As introduced above, this point addresses not only the question of the role of Islam and its norms in the social engagement of Muslim associations, but also the meaning of the definition of *Islamic* and deeper reflection on the interaction between scholarly theological discourses and the concrete religious practices of Muslims.

## 5.4 Methodology

A large range of Islamic organisations implements social welfare services in distinctive ways according to the contexts and cultures of aid or the ideologies within the organisations. Most associations involved in the field have been set up in western Europe and north America within the last two decades, they have constantly developed new strategies and visions. Hence, welfare social services provided by faith-based organisations within an Islamic framework evolve in *ongoing* processes both with regard to theory development and practice. Said processes remain unchartered and call for further research. These points justify using case studies as a methodical approach to *Islamic social work*. This methodological choice furthers an inductive approach that aims to study the field without restrictive theoretical frameworks (Hamel 1993). It intends to explore the phenomenon of grassroots Islamic social work through a broad collection of empirical data within various projects and organisations as a first stage, and as a second stage conducts a critical analysis of these social work services, including a discussion on wider issues. This latter stage implies expanding the analysis beyond individual cases towards a broader conceptualisation, as the case study approach recommends (Yin 2014).

For this study, field research was conducted within different organisations using a qualitative method borrowed from the ethnographic field. The research first included a *long-term participant observation* in Islamic communities and mosques at the grassroots level in order to apprehend the main ideological and theological frameworks, and to accumulate some knowledge of Islamic organisations and community social engagement. Conducted in France and Switzerland, the research study began with an ethnographic immersion that allowed us to identify the Muslim organisations involved in the charity field. This improved the understanding the internal issues and challenges related to social work and social engagement within these organisations and the broader Muslim communities.

The Islamic projects identified take a variety of forms and aim to tackle a range of social issues.<sup>136</sup> Focusing on issues related to the wider society beyond community borders, the associations and projects studied here sought to address the interconnected problems of social exclusion and identity-based conflicts. The selection was done based on two criteria crucial to the research question. The first identified faith-based organisations led by Muslims who wanted to tackle social exclusion, poverty and identity-based issues related to racism, violence, and religious extremism. A second criterion required projects to attempt to reach the broader society beyond Muslim communities. Both criteria drastically restrict the field of investigation in Switzerland: only three relevant cases were identified. Therefore, a previous two-year empirical research on Islamic social work in Paris, France (Brodard 2011), was included to broaden the reflection and offer a comparative angle, as well as some shorter and more informal research studies previously conducted in the United States of America (2009–2011) and the United Kingdom (2016–2017).

In Switzerland, the empirical research conducted between 2016 and 2018 included a case study and utilised ethnographical methods, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews. Data collection was often possible only through informal and non-recorded interviews, while the conventional interviews often led to “official” discourses that censored more controversial elements (Brodard 2020). Most interviews were held with the organisations’ leaders and volunteers (Brodard 2021). It is important to note that access to Islamic organisations at the specific time required establishing

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136 The social issues targeted by the Islamic organisations studied here include poverty, youth unemployment, inclusion of migrants and refugees, drug addiction, violence and petty crime, homelessness and exclusion. The organisations normally aimed to meet the needs of the population at the local level, which led them to design their projects according to the needs and problems they observed in their own environment.

close contact with leaders. The three main cases studied are introduced in the following. Theoretical issues are discussed thereafter.

## 5.5 Faith-Based Social Welfare Services in Switzerland: Insights into Three Islamic Associations

Although both researchers and members of the Muslim organisations asserted that social welfare services were widespread in Islamic associations and mosques in Switzerland, it was nevertheless difficult to identify organisations that extend their involvement beyond the Muslim communities.<sup>137</sup> The leader of the Islamic Social Welfare Service / Service d'Aide Sociale Islamique (SASI) thus maintained that it is only his organisation that provides real social welfare to the wider society, whereas, according to him, the (few) other Islamic projects in Switzerland exclusively target Muslims. While SASI in Geneva was certainly the first and most active Islamic organisation in social work in the country over recent years, two other cities, Lausanne and Biel, also host Islamic organisations that have developed faith-based projects to tackle social issues beyond the boundaries of their faith such as exclusion, unemployment, and identity-based conflicts.

### 5.5.1 Tackling Social Exclusion

The Islamic Social Welfare Service / Service d'Aide Sociale Islamique (SASI) has delivered social welfare services for about ten years in Geneva. This section outlines the specificities of the organisation and charts its evolution through time, from when the mosque developed a community-orientated social welfare sector up until 2018 when SASI struggled to be independent and ensure impartiality in its social services.

In 2009, a mosque launched a social service to tackle poverty, exclusion, and inequality. Later, this service gained independence in its management through support from the municipality; it thus became SASI. Since its beginning, it has been managed by a Muslim man who regularly attended the mosque's activities and thought there was a pressing need for social welfare involvement within the Muslim community and beyond. Over the years, SASI implemented various projects successfully. The activities devised by SASI can be analysed from a common perspective, since they focus on poverty and

137 This shared mistaken belief was detected in my exploratory researches and informal interviews, during which academic staff and community members insisted on claiming that several Islamic-based social welfare projects existed in various parts of Switzerland, and that they addressed the wider society and not only the Muslim communities. The reasons of such a belief will be addressed later in this chapter.

exclusion. I focus this overview on the social round-ups, before turning to points related to the general focus of this chapter.

At the beginning of his social involvement with the mosque, the main leader of the emerging association developed social round-ups and food distributions in the streets of various neighbourhoods. First, with his family, he walked around different central areas to meet homeless people and provided them with food and clothes. He explained this initiative saying that he sought to put his faith into practice, which implied contributing to meeting the needs of the homeless people he saw daily in the city. Later on, he found volunteers, mainly young Muslims, who accompanied him once or twice a week on these food distributions. Over the years, these social round-ups became regular.

The food distributions that took place twice a week in the evenings were frequently observed for this research.<sup>138</sup> Volunteers gathered at the main station and walked or drove to different parts of the city to meet homeless people and provided them with food, hot beverages, and other items. They went further in establishing contact with marginalised people who suffered from various difficulties such as poverty, loneliness, addictions, mental and psychological problems, illnesses and depression. The volunteers brought warmth and social presence which, in some cases, were as important as the material contribution.<sup>139</sup> The regularity of the social round-ups contributed to creating relationships between volunteers and homeless people, leading to a more effective social support process whereby several volunteers could play a crucial role in crisis prevention and resolution.

For instance, the patrol once met a homeless migrant who screamed and threatened to commit terrorist attacks. He was drunk and irritated, his words visibly uttered in despair. Instead of considering him a radicalised zealot, a group of volunteers decided to listen to him with empathy until the situation calmed down. The man could then put his suffering into words and shared his feelings in confidence and trust.<sup>140</sup> The example illustrates the role that volunteers can play in crisis management and conflict prevention, which goes beyond offering material aid. Due to its visibility in the streets,

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138 These participant observations took place between 2015 and 2018, more regularly in 2017 and 2018.

139 The president of the association mentioned on several occasions that the best contribution and added value of those social round-ups was human contact rather than food provision. However, some volunteers, much younger than him, seemed to disagree by focusing more on the material side and neglecting contact and communication with the recipients.

140 This event was explained to me during a field observation by a leader and a volunteer of SASI in March 2017. According to the leader and the volunteer, the event happened in 2015, however, they could not remember the exact period.

this project's food distribution to the homeless has been among the most obvious and visible expression of the association's involvement within society over recent years.

In 2016, SASI's leader delegated the responsibility and management of the project to younger volunteers. A SASI youth team was launched and Muslim students and young people, most aged between 20- and 30-years-old, managed the activity twice a week. During the same period, SASI organised weekly welfare social services on its premises, inviting needy people to attend different types of activity. Most took place inside the mosque, situated in a central neighbourhood of the city. More rarely, activities were organised in a public hall lent by the local authorities. Every Monday afternoon, needy people came to the mosque to collect food and items. They previously had to be registered and were listed based on their social situation. Many were asylum seekers from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, or Syria, while others came from Latin America or even Switzerland.

During the autumn of 2016, a French course was improvised after the food distribution in the same premises. Volunteer teachers gave a basic French lesson to participants with the help of a translator. However, due to the lack of volunteer teachers and organisational issues, the course was temporarily interrupted within the same year. During the same period, weekly culinary workshops were held, which were available to the same public. Their objective was for people to learn to cook healthy and cheap meals, taking into consideration factors of both economy and health. The activity also aimed to bring people together by fostering cooperation and mutual aid between different communities. Since most participants were migrant women, the workshops were also considered as a means of social integration by helping vulnerable people to acquire useful skills and self-confidence, as well as participating in social activities.

All these projects were open to people regardless of their gender, religion, or country of origin. However, the majority of the beneficiaries came from Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, or Iran. The leader of SASI explained this by the migration path of the asylum seekers and of the residents of the public houses. He played a crucial role through his intense personal involvement in the struggle against social issues. SASI's leader repeatedly claimed that the social services aim to meet the needs of everyone, regardless of their origin, religion, ethnicity, or gender.<sup>141</sup> SASI also tried to design future projects to help reduce poverty and social exclusion at a local level. Among

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141 The SASI leader regularly repeated this statement during all the periods of the field research from 2015 to 2018. His emphasis on impartiality in social welfare services could be driven by a perceived suspicion towards Islamic organisations.

ongoing projects, a support group for vulnerable people regulated by a social worker was considered but not implemented due to lack of human resources.

### 5.5.2 A Focus on Youth and Integration

In 2017, the Vaud Union of Muslim Associations / Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes (UVAM), an umbrella organisation gathering most of the mosques and Islamic associations together in the French-speaking canton of Vaud, highlighted its social contribution and welfare services during its annual meeting. Several speakers presented an array of social services and initiatives implemented by the umbrella organisation or its affiliate mosques and associations in various locations. The presentations emphasised the positive outcome of those social projects and the added value of the local Muslim community for the common good and public interest. Between 2016 and 2018, UVAM organised several meetings and public events. Social projects and welfare services were shown to the public, who were invited to witness the recent development of various social initiatives at a local level. These were not just designed to target the Muslim community but also broader society without religious or cultural discrimination. Such events indicate that the Muslim community was particularly particularly active in the field of social work and regularly involved in welfare projects. Meanwhile, the umbrella organisation had made efforts to obtain public and political recognition for the Muslim community in the canton.

Our data analysis shows that most social projects highlighted at the open days were one-off or short-term activities; they thus took place for specific periods but were not extended over time. Therefore, public events that highlight positive Muslim contributions in various fields might be understood by some as a wider communication strategy to present a positive image of the Muslim community in the quest for both public and political recognition in the region. Nonetheless, the umbrella organisation and its main mosque have implemented valuable social services that benefitted both Muslim and non-Muslim recipients, as will be elaborated in the following. Between 2016 and 2017, several projects were set up, including a sociocultural centre that intended to host youth on Friday and Saturday evenings. The sociocultural centre was created by middle-aged migrant Muslims who regretted that youth had no other option for entertainment other than going out to pubs or being on the streets with activities such as drug-taking or drinking alcohol. Therefore, they devised an alternative space for leisure activities so young people could go out in a safe and positive alcohol-free environment. At the same time, volunteers tried to build trust with youth through dialogue, hoping to

initiate discussions on issues concerning them.<sup>142 143</sup> However, most young people at the centre came to enjoy the leisure activities, therefore, it was often difficult for volunteers to engage them in serious conversation. Open to every young person under 20-years-old regardless of gender, culture, and religion, the centre attracted a majority of Muslims. However, the presence of youngsters from other religious was quite usual.

Other social projects were developed in the region. Partially funded by public agencies, the umbrella organisation devised a coaching and counselling project to help youth access the labour market. It had a positive outcome, although it was affected by a significant turnover on management level. After two years of operation, the people in charge aborted the project without providing any clear reason.<sup>144</sup> Another project aimed to tackle youth radicalisation and social issues by providing one-to-one counselling. The person in charge left the project after about one year, due to overwork and the failure to gain support from the local authorities despite high expectations. After he went, the project collapsed. About two years later, the same person set up a team of skilled and trained Muslim social workers in order to design a new association. His aim was to create an Islamic social service that would address the needs of Muslims as well as non-Muslims.

The imam of the Muslim Cultural Complex of Lausanne / Complexe Culturel Musulman de Lausanne (CCML), one of the main mosques of the region, also played a key role in promoting welfare activities, social work, and engagement for the common good. Indeed, he expressed theological viewpoints that emphasise the nexus between faith and social welfare services. It is therefore interesting to examine his profile. Self-taught, he studied Islam for years and is particularly interested in Sufism (*Tasawwuf*), the spiritual dimension of Islam. Deeply rooted in the Sunni Islamic tradition, he however does not belong to a specific theological movement or ideological organisation. This imam developed and taught his own understanding; some of his viewpoints differed from other Islamic organisations. In that sense, his teaching cannot

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142 Regularly UVAM invite the public to visit their affiliated associations in order to see activities that happen there. See many organisational documents of UVAM cited in chapter 6.

143 Some of the sociocultural centre's managers expressed their expectation of undertaking substantial discussions with the youth regarding their difficulties, identity, positioning towards religion and society and other issues and challenges. This concern to foster on-depth discussion and counselling was even depicted as the real purpose of the centre by some of them.

144 According to a board member of the umbrella organisation, the project was not renewed due to a lack of time and human resources, despite of the success of its implementation and positive impact for two years (statements collected in an interview in February, 2018).

be affiliated to specific transnational theological movements. Teaching the rationalist Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali's<sup>145</sup> books in the mosque, he often called the audience for debates and fostered the implementation of Islamic values in daily life. Therefore, he frequently addressed concrete social issues in his speeches, highlighting solutions from the Islamic tradition and encouraging his audience to put them into practice.

In the mosque, he repeatedly claimed that helping others and providing social welfare should be considered as *worship* in the same way as ritual prayers. The imam delivered speeches that urged worshippers to enhance their involvement in society for the common good, as well as develop their own social projects to tackle various global and local issues<sup>146</sup> and to meet the social needs of the local community. This attitude, specifically observed in this mosque, reveals a deeper relationship between spirituality and social work from an Islamic perspective. In that *Weltanschauung* (a whole world-view), the boundary between religious involvement and social engagement must be reconsidered, since both are implemented "for the sake of God" and are therefore considered as spiritual and religious work.

As highlighted above, social projects implemented by Islamic organisations in Switzerland, as well as in other countries, often try to address concrete issues at a local level. Since these projects are developed to meet gaps in the field, or locations where social problems are often identified out of clear religious concerns, they seem akin to secular associations without displaying any obvious faith-based trends. However, this point is mitigated by the fact that many of the Muslim actors consider their involvement within the social field as a spiritual act of worship. Some Islamic organisations also use their religious identity and community networks to address more specific challenges related to Islam and Muslims. The third case study thus shows another way of thinking and designing a faith-based social project from within the Muslim community. It was developed in the canton of Bern in the recent sociopolitical context influenced by Islamophobia and the fear of religious extremism.

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145 He was a Muslim scholar, law specialist and rationalist born in Tabaran (1056/1111).

146 The imam addressed the need to tackle social problems that he had personally heard about or observed himself in the region, such as suicide, drug addiction, homelessness, and domestic violence. Moreover, he addressed the current ecological issue at the global scale. Systematically, he proposed solutions to tackle those different issues in line with Islamic teachings and ethics.

### 5.5.3 An Islamic Contribution Addressing “Radicalisation”

Tasamouh was launched in 2016 in Biel as a community project to respond to “radicalisation” and identity-based conflicts that involve Muslims as either offenders or victims. The project was devised by a practising Muslim woman to prevent religious extremism and address social issues affecting the youth in the region, as well as to counter Islamophobia by enhancing Muslim participation in the public sphere. Tasamouh was not presented as an Islamic project, it insisted on the religious diversity of its core members. Nevertheless, it can be affiliated with an Islamic engagement insofar as its two main leaders are Muslims who claim to work in the name of their faith. In contrast to the SASI and some of the Islamic social projects addressed in the second case study, Tasamouh does not provide material items but offered services based on counselling, mediation, and prevention. Its engagement focussed on two distinct fields. First, it worked concretely with the youth and their families through counselling and mediation; second, it implemented activities in the public sphere that communicated a more positive picture of Islam and Muslims to the broader society.<sup>147</sup>

The first area of involvement is particularly interesting here as it represents an innovative community approach developed to address a local issue related to radicalisation that had become a wider challenge, highlighted in the news and by political discourses. The project intended to train counsellors and mediators to address the risk of radicalisation at the local level. In 2017, about ten people were trained to become cultural mediators. The participants included men and women, Muslims, Christians, and atheists from different cultural backgrounds. The points of view on Islam differed considerably amongst the Muslim participants. For instance, some were practising Muslims while others did not follow any religious worship. All shared common values, such as respect, integrity, openness to cultural diversity, and expressed the same commitment to tackle social issues and be a positive value for society. However, only two people, who were also involved at the head and management of the project, were really active in the field after the training. For various reasons, other members were not able to take part in concrete social services such as counselling or meetings with the beneficiaries. In her concrete work, the founder of Tasamouh revealed that she did not encoun-

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147 For instance, a public *Iftar* (collective meal which daily breaks the fasting’s period of Ramadan) was organised in the city center of Biel. More than 1000 people attended this event, including politicians and local authority representatives. Tasamouh organised visits of mosques for schools and public events for refugees at different times.

ter cases of “real radicalisation”.<sup>148</sup> Instead, she worked with young people who had to deal with social problems such as addiction, depression, family conflicts, violence, or petty crime. She noticed that in another context, the behaviours of said youth would have been interpreted as mainstream social issues and not as signs of religious radicalisation. However, schools and statutory social services refer to youth as people who might become radicalised, merely because they had a Muslim background and occasionally used Islamic references in their speech, most likely due to identity trend or provocation. Mentioning only a few related cases, Tasamouh’s leader explained it is a common trend among young “Muslims”<sup>149</sup> concerned by social and familial issues to express themselves using Arabic words and religious references in a provocative manner. For instance, this behaviour can include anti-Jewish statements and threats of violence.<sup>150</sup>

During team meetings and informal interviews, the founder of Tasamouh regretted the lack of financial and human resources.<sup>151</sup> Several times she expressed hope that the association would be more active and effective, whilst deploring the lack of support from local authorities. She also thought that it was the authorities’ lack of confidence and trust that had caused the absence of state funding and support. This is a point relevant on a larger scale and must be studied in depth. In the city, radicalisation and religious extremism among young Muslims was highlighted in 2016 and 2017. Although Tasamouh was presented as a community response to these issues, the local authorities subsequently created a parallel project. Three different Muslim Tasamouh members pointed out that the absence of partnership could be due to the reluctance of the authorities to work with an “Islamic” organisation, despite its efforts to present itself as non-religious. For some of them, the attitude of the local authorities might reveal fear and reluctance to integrate Muslim actors into public policy.

Using the same logic, based on his own experience, a member of Tasamouh observed that statutory social agencies were in some cases reluctant

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148 In that specific context, “radicalisation” was mainly understood by the organisation’s members as a process or behaviour which may potentially lead to terrorist attacks or departures to conflict zones in the name of Islam. This specific understanding of “radicalisation” also applies to ideological supports to terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, even without deeds.

149 The term “Muslims” is put here in quotes as it does not refer to the religious belongings of the youth but to the way they are perceived, qualified, and labelled by some of the actors.

150 Information collected during two interviews (in November 2017 and March 2018 on Tasamouh premises) with the founder of the association.

151 Information recorded during a team meeting (February 2018) and other informal interviews conducted between January and March 2018.

to include their Muslim employees in addressing issues related to Islam and Muslims, even when social workers expressed a desire to use their cultural skills or religious knowledge to contribute.<sup>152</sup> To an extent, the Tasamouh member supported the assumption that some authorities may be circumspect about working with Muslim experts because of their “suspicious” religious identity, and especially within fields where precisely Islam is considered a problem. In addition, participant observation and informal interviews with several officials supported this assumption, indicating that some statutory agencies’ employees expressed concerns about the lack of neutrality and impartiality of Muslims involved in social work.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, this point deserves to be explored further since it may reveal a contradiction within statutory social work in terms of discrimination and dealing with minority groups. On another note, in an article based on an empirical research study addressing cultural tensions in social work practice, Miu Chung Yan highlights both the positive and negative aspects of a shared cultural background between social workers and their clients, particularly stating that “shared culture and experiences are a unique set of resources through which workers can understand and help their clients better” (Yan 2008, 324). Whereas it does not seem considered as relevant in the statutory social work agencies, this point is in line with Tasamouh’s vision and strategy promoting an “intra-cultural” approach in social work.

Indeed, Tasamouh managers argue that common religious and cultural backgrounds between counsellors and the beneficiaries of social services constitute an important asset, especially considering Muslim youngsters and families whose lack of trust towards the authorities makes the intervention of statutory agencies difficult. Borrowing the concept of the intra-ethnic approach outlined by Emmanuel Jovelin (2002), Tasamouh qualifies their approach as “intra-cultural”, emphasising the added value of its involvement produced by a common cultural and religious background between mediators and recipients. Whereas some local authorities may consider such proximity a risk, Tasamouh promotes this approach by highlighting its positive outcomes.

In other Muslim contexts, the idea of encouraging an intra-cultural approach has already been widespread for several years, like in France. Dounia Bouzar (2001) addressed this trend nearly twenty years ago; she assumed that Muslim religious actors often took advantage of their stronger credibility

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152 This point, which had seemingly not been fully explored in research studies, was highlighted during some of the interviews with Muslim social workers.

153 Interviews and participant observation revealed that within some statutory agencies, some employees and managers expressed concerns over the Muslim identity of some social workers. According to them, it bears the risk of proselytism and discrimination in their work with the recipients.

with young Muslims living in popular neighbourhoods as compared to statutory social work agencies. About ten years later, a part of my own research examines the shared cultural background between grassroots Islamic organisations and the beneficiaries of their social services in the Paris area, noting this intra-cultural approach positive impact on the acceptance and successful integration of these “social workers” in deprived urban areas (Brodard 2011).

Although Tasamouh claimed to focus on social work with youth, various meetings with the main actors showed that they also aimed to address issues at a political level.<sup>154</sup> On a number of different occasions, the leaders insisted on the failure of the statutory agencies to tackle social issues related to young people. Moreover, some members criticised the positioning of the local authorities: they insisted that they did not support them financially despite their positive work, which made it difficult for the association to continue its projects. It then appeared to some members that the government was not fulfilling its responsibilities in terms of social services. At the same time, it was emphasized that the local authorities did not care about Muslims’ needs and that Islamophobia often prevented Muslims from becoming reliable actors in society. On another occasion, some of the association’s members said that actually it was the duty of the government to develop further projects and services to meet the needs of the youth and to respond to the current “tragic” social situation of the town.<sup>155</sup> Such claims thus indicate that some of the volunteers considered social work as the responsibility of the government; this assumes they should not necessarily be involved in an assignment whose prerogative belongs to the authorities and statutory services. This positioning introduces a paradox inherent in the work of the members of an association whose main aim is to meet social needs. Moreover, Tasamouh managers pointed out the impossibility of volunteers sacrificing their time and energy without reward or recognition, while lamenting the inadequate response of local authorities. This point underlines a dependence on public policy as well as a particular way of designing the association’s strategy, which indicates that social work may be difficult to think about outside of political considerations. These characteristics represent a contrast with grassroots Islamic organisations in France and the United Kingdom.

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154 As an example, among other things, Tasamouh participated in the organisation of a Muslim event, which gathered citizens, journalists, and politicians to discuss the conditions of citizenship and integration for Muslims in Switzerland.

155 On several occasions in 2017 and 2018, the two main actors of Tasamouh elaborated on the particular social issues of the city using a strong vocabulary to describe the situation. Such discourses were for instance observed during a political event held in Geneva in April 2018, where a member of the association informally gave some details related to the situation in his city to local journalists.

## 5.6 Specificities and Challenges of Islamic Social Work in Switzerland

Our data concern only three case studies in Switzerland. There is a small number of other Islamic associations and mosques that provide social welfare services in the country; however, they aim to meet the needs of Muslim communities and normally do not extend their contribution to the wider society. These local initiatives are often one-off social projects that mostly address issues related to education and sociocultural concerns.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, the projects are usually temporary. In this context, social work is only one small aspect of a broader religious involvement that emphasises worship and religious education. It is useful and relevant to extend the outlook of other European countries to identify similarities and distinctions in social engagement.

### 5.6.1 Insight into other Islamic Social Initiatives in Europe

In the United Kingdom and France, Islamic social work has developed over a longer time period and within other social and cultural contexts.<sup>157</sup> This short section is designed to point out some differences between these countries in order to underline the Swiss specificities.

First, the social projects of Islamic organisations in Switzerland often depend on non-community funding such as private donations or public subsidies, whereas their counterparts in France and the United Kingdom rely on financial resources mainly from within the Muslim communities themselves (Brodard 2011). During a political event, a leader of Tasamouh declared that the association would not accept funds from the Muslim community, more particularly from the mosques, explaining that such funding would place the association in a difficult position if the respective mosque were found guilty of something wrong. Similarly, the SASI leader has recently insisted on the necessity of mosques and Islamic organisations being fully independent to

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156 Various mosques and Islamic organisations in Switzerland implemented one-off social projects. For instance, the organisation Ummah held a workshop on radicalisation for one day. It also organised a financial donation for refugees one time, as well as a blood donation drive in Switzerland at another occasion. Moreover, a mosque occasionally provided an asylum seekers' centre in Regensdorf with aid packages. Several mosques and Islamic centres extended academic support for children and teenagers. Occasional financial assistance to the needy was also provided within some mosques and Islamic centres in Switzerland.

157 The history of Islamic welfare and social services implemented by Muslims in the United Kingdom is documented in Rosalind Warden's dissertation (2013). For the French context, readers can refer to an empirical research study in Paris (Brodard 2011).

retain freedom in the design of the association's policy and projects. This Swiss specificity may also explain the considerable attention devoted to reporting to and communicating with the authorities and media, whereas grassroots Islamic associations in France prioritise communication within the Muslim community, usually avoiding the media and political spheres. The dependency on public funding can also explain the vulnerability of the Swiss projects, which often struggle to sustain their actions due to a lack of resources.

During my research studies, no consistent strategy for community social projects to be self-sustaining seemed to exist in Switzerland. Hence, the management of *Zakat* (Islamic compulsory alms) may be of particular importance in collecting donations from Muslims and using them in a more organised and collective way in the future, if we assume that Muslims in Switzerland may follow the same patterns as some of the British and French Muslim communities. In the United Kingdom, the National Zakat Foundation established the collection and distribution of *Zakat* exclusively at a national level. Such efforts were innovative and unique since until then *Zakat* had mostly been delivered outside of the country through personal relationships or Islamic NGOs. The National Zakat Foundation delivers *Zakat* to needy people facing poverty, as financial aid to heavily indebted people, to foster the rehabilitation of ex-convicts as well as to support students through scholarships – all exclusively in the United Kingdom. Between 2011 and 2018, more than nine million British pounds was distributed according to the website of the National Zakat Foundation (<https://nzf.org.uk>). Recently, the National Zakat Foundation considered financing social projects implemented by Islamic welfare organisations. The strategy announced was to empower the Muslim community in the United Kingdom to foster its independence. Similarly, in France, a *Zakat* project was set up a few years ago called Zakat France (<https://zakatfrance.fr>); Based in Lion, Zakat France was the first French organisation aiming at collecting and distributing alms at a local and national level.

Such *Zakat* initiatives could trigger a turning point in funding Islamic social projects in Switzerland. However, the mainstream theological viewpoint still identifies the potential beneficiaries of *Zakat* among Muslims only or those expressing the intention to convert to Islam.<sup>158</sup> This understanding could be an obstacle in the use of *Zakat* for social projects that address society

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158 This is the current main theological viewpoint in Sunni Islam, shared by both the traditionalist movements (following one of the four major schools of thought) and the mainstream transnational movements such as the Wahhabiyya (often called Salafiyya) and the Muslim Brotherhood organisation.

as a whole beyond community boundaries, although some theological ideas claim that *Zakat* can also be delivered to non-Muslims without restriction.<sup>159</sup>

An outlook on social projects held by Islamic organisations in various western European and North American countries emphasises the apparently similar ways of participating in society at grassroots level (Cantori 2021; Brodard 2022). Whereas mosques and Islamic associations continue to focus on the community and the specific needs of Muslims, it is increasingly common that Muslims organise collectively to address general social needs and tackle issues to benefit the broader society, in the name of their faith. Regardless of whether they are in Switzerland, France or the United Kingdom, Islamic organisations thus propose similar social programs related to local issues and needs. This common trend has motivated comparative studies between different countries, such as William Barylo's (2016) empirical research study of three European countries (the United Kingdom, France, and Poland). However, some differences between ways of thinking about and designing social projects according to the characteristics of both the Muslim communities and the sociopolitical systems can be highlighted. Some points on the specificities of the Swiss context are briefly presented below.

### 5.6.2 Acting Locally

The three organisations introduced above display a similar trend in the design of their social projects, they wanted to address local social issues and meet the needs of the surrounding communities. Whilst SASI focuses on its own city and ignores what is happening in other parts of Switzerland, Tasamouh builds its social engagement at a local level taking into consideration the specificities of the location. Consequently, these Islamic associations do not work together and do not create any network based on Islam or religious identity. Conversely, their networks are built on the proximity criterion, gathering associations from different religious and cultural backgrounds but working within the same geographical areas.

In other countries, such as the United Kingdom and France, it has been noticed that many different Islamic associations are likely to establish networks and partnerships regardless of distance (Barylo 2016). Networks are generally built on a sense of Islamic identity and the type of social service at play. For instance, an Islamic association in Bradford (United Kingdom)

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159 In France, this position is held by the Moroccan group Al-Adl wa Al-Ihsan (locally known as PSM for Participation et Spiritualité Musulmanes) and by independent Muslim scholars or thinkers who address a new theological methodology differing from the traditional frameworks, such as Tarek Oubrou, Islam Ibn Ahmed, and Ousmane Timera.

that tackles homelessness built relationships with other Islamic organisations based in other cities further away such as Birmingham and London. In France, one can witness the same kind of partnerships, which take place due to criteria of faith and area of involvement rather than location. In Switzerland, Islamic organisations still seem to restrict their involvement to their local area, without thinking at a national or transnational level. The social projects were also first grounded in a mosque or an Islamic centre, which could create a stronger relationship with the local neighbourhood, as was the case for SASI. However, some organisations, such as Tasamouh, were created independently without any links to the mosques.

### 5.6.3 Partnerships and Funding

The field research first addressed the question of partnerships with civil society and local authorities. All the projects and associations concerned here worked in networks, at least partially, including religious or secular associations of the civil society as well as statutory agencies. As mentioned before, partnerships gather together organisations that share a common goal in terms of social work at the local level. The three different organisations studied also displayed a similar trend in funding policy, they mostly searched for public subvention and strive for political recognition. This point is certainly one main feature that distinguishes between the Swiss Islamic welfare associations and their homologues in other countries.<sup>160</sup>

SASI has been searching for funding from both private and public sectors, avoiding Muslim community-based networks. It has tried to become financially sustainable without dependency on funds from the Muslim communities, even if this has not yet been achieved. According to its leader, showing evidence of impartiality in social work has been the main condition for obtaining public funding. In the canton of Vaud, the UVAM began to campaign to obtain state recognition of the Muslim community. In parallel, the managers of some community-based social projects expected public funding and support from local authorities, which did not transpire. According to some of the interviewees, this lack of funding triggered the failure of the social services, including a project aiming to prevent radicalisation and violence among the youth. One of the managers claimed that the absence

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160 In an ethnographic research on Islamic social work in Paris and its suburbs, I noticed that in all cases studied, the Muslim associations were self-funded through private donations, mostly from Muslims. In those cases, public funding was generally not even considered as an option (Brodard 2011). In the United Kingdom, I observed the same trend in various charities, both in the London area and in west Yorkshire in 2016 and 2017.

of public recognition and political support was the main cause of the abandonment of projects, expressing disappointment that led to his decision to withdraw from social engagement within any Islamic organisation. For its part, Tasamouh has been working for about two years without any consistent public funding. Consequently, its managers deplored the lack of support of the authorities, announcing on some occasions that the project might have to cease due to lack of financial resources. From this perspective, the likelihood of success and sustainability seems to be closely dependent on partnerships, public funding, and political recognition.

Interestingly, the leadership of social projects did not consider financing from within the Muslim communities an option. Some leaders of the Muslim associations indicated publicly or privately their fear of being suspected or stigmatised if any of their donors were found to be involved in extremism or wrongdoings. This perception is not particularly linked to the Swiss context but to the broader Muslim communities, at least in western Europe and even in the United Kingdom, whose political system has for a long time been qualified by many as the “most open” for Muslims.<sup>161</sup> The climate of suspicion and fear amongst Muslim leaders was recently highlighted by Samantha May (May 2017). Others emphasised that they want to remain independent in their work, considering that Islamic organisations or foreign countries may fund them if they abide by their rules. Finally, the *Zakat* and *Sadaqah* were never mentioned as a potential source of funding.

#### 5.6.4 Communication and Public Recognition

The focus on communication is another particular feature of Islamic associations involved in social work in Switzerland, especially compared to other Islamic organisations from abroad whose involvements seem more results-oriented and less publicised. Indeed, empirical observation shows that communication to the media and events linked to political advertising or advocacy played a major role in two of the three cases studied here, whereas concrete social work remained at relatively low levels compared to the organisation of public events and participation in media and political activities. According to my observations, some people, including members of the Muslim communities and also academic staff, share the assumption that Islamic social welfare services exist in; they cited the names of various associations and argued that they provided sustainable social work.<sup>162</sup> However,

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161 This assumption is commonly shared by many practising Muslims met both in France and Switzerland.

162 This trend among academic staff and students was noticed during various courses, events, and informal talks in 2016 and 2017 in Switzerland.

field observations and interviews with members of the selected organisations suggested the opposite. Because some Islamic organisations advertised their contribution in this area, either through their websites or at events where different social projects and one-off social services were briefly featured, it thus seemed that they were providing sustainable welfare services to Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. However, a closer look revealed that in most cases, the social services highlighted were sporadic and highly dependent on external factors, such as uncertain financial and human resources. Additionally, some of the social projects presented publicly as success-stories were interrupted a few months after their initiation due to lack of funding or the removal of project managers.<sup>163</sup>

Although this pattern did not apply to all associations, it highlighted a distinguishing feature in Switzerland, where many Islamic associations seem more involved in communication and public events than concrete social welfare services. This could be because some organisations prioritise other fields over social work. In one case, for the organisation the main challenge was the public and political recognition of the Muslim community. Within this context, social welfare services might have been used to show evidence of their positive contribution to the common good. In another case, highlighting the social projects seemed to have been partially considered as a strategy to negotiate public and political participation. Indeed, the latter association regularly asked to become a consultative partner with the authorities. Feeling left out of the political field and partially ignored by the state system, the association began to speak out against some of the local authorities, underlying their failure to tackle social issues and meet the social needs of inhabitants. This attitude, mostly observed in internal meetings, might also indicate actors' aspiration to advocacy and lobbying to act beyond social work at a more political level.

## 5.7 Conclusion

A serious study of Islamic social work in Switzerland cannot be conducted without a thorough understanding of Muslim communities: both aspects are related and should not be approached separately. Moreover, the Swiss case(s) should not be studied independently without a wider insight into other western European countries. In fact, although certain researchers and community actors may be reluctant to consider it, Islam in Switzerland is connected to Islam in the world, at least in its ideological and theological

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163 This was the case of a project that was not renewed after two years of operation despite its positive outcomes.

forms. Indeed, the main religious currents that dominate the Islamic sphere in Switzerland today are transnational and grounded in other countries. Many ideas and concepts are also seen worldwide. For instance, the principles of *Zakat* transcend local contexts and the Muslim communities' understanding of charity from a religious perspective in Switzerland is also affected by a discourse shaped through scholars in other countries. Having said this, it is necessary to consider the local contexts and the sociopolitical specificities of the countries and regions that strongly influence how Muslims live their religion.

In Switzerland, although the limited case studies are not sufficient to propose a "Swiss" pattern, an array of trends demonstrate a contrast with some neighbouring countries. First, the social engagement of Islamic associations in Switzerland remains at an initial stage. The involvement of Muslims in the social field in the name of their religion began only recently and the few projects introduced above are in their initial stages. The cases studied here are grounded in three different cantons and therefore have to deal with various political and sociocultural frameworks, in which the place of religion and its links with the social and political sectors are viewed distinctively. This point underlines the difficulty of studying the theme of Islamic social work as a unique and unified phenomenon. Nevertheless, although they are settled within different social and political systems, Muslim organisations in Switzerland still display some common trends and characteristics.

The outcome of this study demonstrates the willingness and capacity of Islamic associations to address social problems beyond Muslim community boundaries, and to provide projects aiming to contribute to the common good. Various projects have been designed and implemented to address the needs of the local population, regardless of their religious affiliations. This new trend represents a shift, as previously Islamic social work was mainly approached through the Muslim community empowerment lenses. This recent expansion brings social engagement within Switzerland closer to what has been practiced in other western European countries, where Muslims have provided consistent social welfare services to the wider society for about a decade and have therefore made a positive contribution to society. In acting in this way, Muslims also work towards stronger integration, especially at the local scale.

Another point underlined by this study shows the dependence of the Islamic welfare organisations on public funding and state recognition. This indicates a certain fragility, alongside the incapacity of Muslims in Switzerland to self-fund their projects. In contrast Muslim organisations from other countries such as France, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America usually rely on their own resources (Cantori 2021; Brodard 2022). In these countries, Muslim communities have been settled for a long time and have

managed their religious, educative, and social projects quite independently, which could partially explain their relative self-sufficiency. Conversely, Islam in Switzerland is much more recent and seems to not have grounded itself yet on efficient and independent structures. Whereas the Islamic organisations are still mostly divided in terms of theological affiliations and nationalist belongings, the new associations involved in social work are more inclined to search for funding outside of the Muslim community and to turn to authorities to support their projects of general interest.

Finally, it appears that Muslim organisations involved in social work generally do not refer to clear religious guidelines to design their projects. In this regard, the link between Islamic norms and concrete projects is often unclear; the conceptions of Islam and social work are highly dependent on the organisations' leaders and project managers, without a shared community-based strategy or a common understanding being identified. Therefore, the social practices within Islamic organisations and their Islamic codes and values highly depends on the individuals who work and develop projects according to their own understanding of Islam. From this perspective, the Islamic identity of the leaders and volunteers plays a more important role than religious norms or theological considerations in the design and development of social work. Shared references to Islamic values and personal motivation based on faith and spirituality are therefore more important in these kinds of faith-based organisations than compliance to theological viewpoints. The concept of "Islamic habitus", outlined by Nilüfer Göle (2013), among others, could be particularly relevant to the study of these Muslim practices and identities. To explore this subject more deeply, a broader research study on the relationship between these faith-based organisations and Islamic theological discourses is currently being conducted (Brodard 2020) with the hope of proposing a new conceptualisation of Islamic social work.

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# 6 Swiss Welfare Politics and Local Islamic Organisations: A Case Study of the Islamic Social Service of Geneva

*Jérôme Grand*

## 6.1 Introduction

The Islamic Social Assistance Service (Service d'Aide Sociale Islamique, hereafter SASI) is a non-profit and non-religious association created in 2014. It runs a social grocery at the facilities of the Islamic Centre of Geneva in the district of Eaux-vives; its statutory mission is “to undertake diverse actions to offer moral and/or material help to the needy people, without any distinction of nationality, religion, colour, origin or political belief” (SASI 2015).<sup>164</sup> To realise this mission, SASI runs a social grocery (named in this chapter *Epicierie Sociale*) where free food baskets are distributed on a weekly basis, but it also: carries out weekly patrols to provide assistance to homeless people; offers free collective meals every Sunday; has taken on a liaison role to facilitate access to legal and administrative information to migrants; organises occasional activities for family and provides individual moral and material support when needed.

SASI is therefore a welfare provider in the Swiss canton of Geneva. Its location within the Islamic Centre allows it to contact groups that would otherwise be difficult to reach, especially undocumented migrants and new arrivals of Muslim faith (BIE's Delegate 2018). Moreover, its activities – that cross religious or ethnic cleavages – not only contribute to meeting social needs but also promote networking within Swiss mainstream society. This structure is unique in Switzerland; one would be hard pressed to find an equivalent in Europe (Banfi 2018).

In its foundation, the social grocery was embedded in the Islamic Centre of Geneva. Between 2009 and 2012, the group organising the *Epicierie Sociale* formed a department of the Islamic Centre of Geneva and therefore reported directly to the Imam of the Islamic centre. Social activities were

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164 All sources are translated by myself from French to English.

exclusively aimed at the Muslim community and the beneficiaries of the *Epicserie Sociale* were all Muslims practising Islam. Over three years, the group underwent transformation from a modest Muslim welfare department acting on a confessional and communitarian base to a major civil actor in the social landscape of Geneva, reconstituting itself in 2014 as a secular and non-profit association (SASI 2015). What can explain the expansion of the organisation and its new secular orientation? How have institutional policies and public funding contributed to influencing SASI, its network, and activities?

Institutional opportunities that characterise the Swiss canton of Geneva, the ideological orientation of the Islamic Centre of Geneva, as well as characteristics of individuals with a key position in the organisation are all obviously part of the story. But they are, as will be shown in the following, *only a part* of the story. SASI has never benefited from regular public financial support; it refers to universal moral obligations without any reference to Islamic principles. Finally, if key individuals have definitely played a determining role in the development of SASI, it will be demonstrated that particular skills were missing and that external associative support was needed. To understand the major shift of SASI and the secular pressures at work, I argue, we need to pay attention to tangible interactions on the ground that link SASI with secular, public, and private actors.

This chapter is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2012 and 2018 in Geneva. Direct observations were used to identify the key partners of SASI and to examine how their interactions influenced its orientation. Data are based on regular participatory observations in the activities of the social service between 2012 and 2015 and non-structured interviews conducted in 2017 and 2018 with representatives of the identified actors.<sup>165</sup> I also refer to focus groups organised with public welfare actors in 2014, and analyse the projects of the social service of the municipality of Geneva as well as institutional documents of SASI and of the Islamic Centre of Geneva. I use these data to understand SASI's shift as outlined above and to identify the interactions on the ground that link SASI with secular actors. Results point to the importance of the non-profit association *Partage*<sup>166</sup>, the main food bank of the canton of Geneva (<https://www.partage.ch/fr>/<https://www.partage.ch>). As a key player in the field of food supply, the association *Partage* and its conditions of collaboration have led SASI to make important changes. Most especially, the necessity of providing an “impartial” service has led SASI

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165 The President of the association SASI, the Director of the foundation *Partage*, and the Delegate of the Office for the Integration of Foreigners of Geneva.

166 Founded in 2005 by five founder members active in charity: The Salvation Army, Emmaus, C.A.R.E, Caritas, and *Collis du Cœur*. Note that three founder members of five are Catholic organisations.

to regulate and diversify the beneficiaries of the social grocery through a system of vouchers. The second key partner that I identify is the social service of the municipality of Geneva. While refusing direct financial support, the municipality has accompanied the group active in the social groceries of the Islamic Centre between 2010 and 2015, orienting it toward a new form of organisation and introducing it to sociocultural and socio-sanitary networks. The third actor identified is the Department of Security and Economy of the State of Geneva, through the Office for Integration of Foreigners. This is the only public actor offering (indirect and punctual) financial support to SASI.

## **6.2 Theoretical Framework: On the Influence of Institutional Opportunities**

Welfare states have undergone significant changes in recent decades. Despite what Esping-Anderson terms a “frozen institutional system” (1996, 24), adjustments of welfare program have occurred since the 1970s and welfare state reforms are today a key issue on the political agenda. A driving factor therefore is that welfare states are under fire for being too costly and largely inefficient (Rhodes and Méry 2016). Their financial resources have become scarce under budgetary pressures and austerity cures (Hemerijck 2013). Their sociological foundations have been shaken by changes in the labour market, population, and family structure (Castel 2009; Taylor-Gooby 2004); their hierarchical and rigid management has been challenged by New Public Management doctrines seeking to substitute the bureaucratic rigidity of the state by mechanisms of competition (Hood 1991).

All in all, welfare states now have to do more, with less, and in a different way. Among the numerous implications of these changes, welfare policies have reconsidered the role of the non-government welfare sector. Decentralisation and marketisation in social policy, combined with budgetary pressures, have opened up a space for the voluntary and private sectors. A plurality of public and private actors is now part of the conception and implementation of social policies, including regional and local authorities, for-profit corporations, and non-profit actors. In this context, religious organisations – which have been increasingly invested in secular political issues since 1980 (Beaumont 2008; Bruce 2003; Haynes 1998) – are now seen as potential social actors in the voluntary sector. Several studies have documented the contribution of the voluntary sector, including religious associations, in the provision of welfare (Leis-Peters 2014; Lyons 1995). There is a wide literature on the subject, where the term “Faith-Based Organisations” (hereafter FBOs) has been developed to describe “any organisation that

refers directly or indirectly to religion or religious values which functions as a welfare provider or as a political actor” (Beaumont 2008, 156). Askeland (2016, 44) has recently proposed to distinguish between *faith-based organisations*, defined as social organisations (voluntary or professional) with a “focus on the provision of welfare according to a self-imposed aim derived from a religious tradition” and *religious organisations*, which are “more explicit[ly] religious and which gather believers and religious practice”. In this respect, between 2009 and 2012, the Epicerie Sociale was a *religious organisation*. As a part of the association of the Islamic Centre of Geneva, it belonged to an organisation with religious purpose. Even if exceptions were made in its daily work, SASI’s actions were not impartial<sup>167</sup> in the sense that they were in fact selective and related to religious membership. But since 2014, SASI has become a *faith-based* organisation, only indirectly related to religion and focused on the provision of welfare (Askeland 2016), as with the Salvation Army in the Christian tradition. If SASI still today refers to itself as an “Islamic association”, associative membership prevails over a sense of membership to Islam and no religious considerations are put forward to justify its social commitments. Interviewed on whether it would be better to drop the term “Islamic” from its name, the president of SASI explains (2017, 3): “We showed good faith, so why remove ‘Islamic’? Because somebody had proposed to me to put ‘Muslim’... But the Catholic centre, the Protestant centre exist, so why we would remove ‘Islamic’?”. It is important to note that such a posture that strictly distinguishes the social commitment from the religious commitment, while the action is still realised within the framework of an Islamic association, is quite rare in Europe (Brodard 2011).

The question of the influence of secular public institutions on faith-based organisations takes a prominent position in research on FBOs. Research either adopts a macro-level perspective, examining how different political, social, and historical contexts affect the development of religious social activities (Melville and McDonald 2006; Banfi 2018), or a micro-level perspective, exploring the influence of public funding on the identity and activities of particular FBOs. Regarding the first perspective, Elisa Banfi (2018) has recently propounded that institutional opportunities – models of citizenship and migratory regimes, public recognition of religion, and the degree of subsidiarity of the welfare state – directly affect religious social activities. According to the second perspective, authors are mainly interested in the link between an FBO’s social services and government funding, particularly how the former manage pressures associated with the latter (Ebaugh et al.

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167 As we will see, this is the term used by the partner Partage to specify the conditions of collaboration, it has to be understood as a social action addressed to all persons in need, regardless of their ethnic origin or their religious affiliation.

2005; Fitzgerald 2017; Vanderwoerd 2004). While the study of Ebaugh et al. (2005) shows that greater religiousness dissuades organisations from both seeking and receiving government funding, several studies suggest that the organisations that receive such funding are generally able to preserve their faith's traditions and values (Fitzgerald 2017; Vanderwoerd 2004). Results thus suggest a high selectivity of FBOs participating in state welfare programs and a weak normative influence of secular institutions on identity, values, and actions of FBOs involved in these welfare programs.

Switzerland is also reconsidering its welfare state; the proliferation of non-government welfare is largely favoured by the “high fragmentation of the Swiss landscape of social policies” (Bonvin and Dahmen 2017, 274). This fragmentation is mainly due to executive federalism, to the superposition of different levels of government that are in charge of specific fields, and to the long-standing importance of corporate and private actors in Swiss welfare programs (Bonvin and Dahmen 2017). The Swiss welfare state is, as such, quite permeable to potential new non-government actors. However, institutional opportunities for FBOs' participation vary from canton to canton because, according to executive federalism, each Swiss canton manages the relationship between cantonal institutions and religious communities (Banfi 2018).

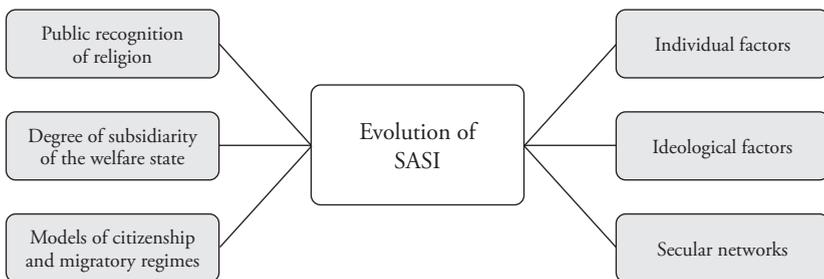
The SASI case could thus furnish an explanation for the institutional opportunities that characterise the canton of Geneva. The state of Geneva has indeed a “special secular model of interaction between religious communities and state authorities” (Banfi 2018, 128; see also: Monnot 2015), and one translation of this secular model is that “the Canton of Geneva does not classify any religious community or group as an association of public law (*de droit public*) that would allow them to receive public subsidies, which occurs to other cantons” (Banfi 2018, 128). The “*laïcité* institutional identity” thus frames institutional opportunities and encourages Islamic FBOs to adopt “a citizen attitude” (Banfi 2018, 127). As a result, “Islamic associations in the city build their organisational identities no longer as religious actors but more as civil society actors and more specifically as sociocultural ones” (Banfi 2018, 127). The “citizen turn” of SASI could thus be interpreted as an attempt to conform to institutional opportunities, to be part of the decentralised Genevan welfare state in a context characterised by the non-recognition of religions by the cantonal authorities and – to a lesser extent – by the Swiss restrictive regimes of citizenship and migration. SASI, providing services to the community and beyond, would thus be a pure product of the laic institutional opportunities of the canton of Geneva. This is a plausible explanation of the development of SASI. The decentralised Swiss welfare state, the secular orientation of the canton of Geneva, its social policies based on a plurality of actors could have pushed SASI in the direction of rationalisation and secularisation. However,

SASI as a non-profit and non-religious association has never benefited from any regular public support. The municipality of Geneva – the main source of public subsidies for local sociocultural actors – has systematically refused SASI’s grant applications. As we will see, an explanation for this rejection could be the potential suspicion that potentially the secular municipality is suspicious of the relationship between SASI and the Islamic Centre. Despite never having benefited from direct public subsidies and been contractually bound to public authorities, SASI has taken a “citizen turn” since its creation in 2009. This doesn’t mean that institutional opportunities have not pushed SASI down the path of rationalisation and secularisation, but rather that the changes adopted have not affected the public recognition of SASI.

### 6.3 On the Need for a More Comprehensive Perspective

How can we thus explain the secular turn and its persistence? I argue here that despite SASI not benefitting from government funding, it has still had to deal with pressures associated with its broader secular environment. To understand these push factors, the existing studies that adopt a micro-level perspective and mainly focus on public contractual relations seem to be of little help. The SASI case thus begs the question of how institutional policies regulating welfare politics can influence local Islamic organisations, their network, activities, and social activism beyond the influence of contractual public funding and thus under a context of limited institutional opportunities.

Figure 1: *Factors influencing SASI’s development*



To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the tangible interactions on the ground that link SASI with secular, public, and private actors. To be sure, an assortment factors related to the local context influence the orientation of

SASI's activity. The most important are probably the ideological orientation of the religious organisation (Brodard 2011) and the communication skills of individuals with key positions in the organisation (Elander and Fridolfsson 2011). I will, however, show that in addition to the institutional, ideological, and individual factors, the secular network of public institutions and non-profit associations at work in Geneva has deeply influenced the orientation of SASI.

## 6.4 Micro-Level Analysis: Inside the SASI Revolution

Located in a lively popular central district of Geneva, the Islamic Centre of Geneva is hosted in a little white house with green shutters and features a place of worship, a conference room, a classroom, and a reading room. Also called The Green House, the centre offers one of the two biggest Muslim places of worship in Geneva, a Swiss canton where the Muslim community represents around 5 percent of the total population (OCSTAT 2013). Said Ramadan, an active member of the Muslim Brotherhood and the son of Hassan El-Banna, a founding member of the movement, created the Islamic Centre of Geneva in 1961. Originally designed to “support young Islamic intellectuals in Europe”, the Islamic Centre is one of the oldest Islamic centres in the continent (Banfi 2018, 128; see also: Otterbeck 2015).

Upon the death of Said Ramadan in 1995, Hani Ramadan, one of his five sons, took over the management of the centre. Hani Ramadan, who is clearly a contested public figure, is still today the current Director and Imam of the Islamic Centre of Geneva. Former teacher at the public school, he was fired in 2002 for comments written in an op-ed of *Le Monde* on the stoning of adulterous women.<sup>168</sup> Since April 2017, he has been banned from French territory because of past and present polemical declarations. More recently in 2018, he took strong and polemical positions in defence of his brother, the Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan, in French detention over several rape accusations. Perhaps this controversial public figure explains the mistrust of the public administration towards the Islamic Centre of Geneva.

If the Islamic Centre of Geneva has always provided assistance to needy people through occasional help, in 2009 it experienced the increasing precariousness of the population attending its religious services. At this time, the activities of the centre were mainly focused on its religious and cultural functions and it could not provide for the social needs it suddenly faced. As a

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168 The Department of Public Instruction of the State of Geneva has invoked the incompatibility of the religious function of Hani Ramadan with his public position and the neglect of his duty of allegiance.

matter of fact, this situation generally reflects the regional pattern, since social needs have drastically increased in the canton of Geneva over the last decade (République et Canton de Genève 2016). Between the end of my participant observations in October 2015 and the final interviews in October 2017, food assistance in Geneva has grown by 36 percent (Les Colis du Cœur 2016).

In this context, people attending worship began to supply informal financial help, funded by the Zakat,<sup>169</sup> and set up food supports and orientation towards the existing social resources. On the initiative of a volunteer who was giving French lessons at the Islamic Centre of Geneva, a former volunteer of a local secular charity, *Epicerie Sociale* was created. The first efforts were made to create a social grocery where food baskets were freely distributed once a week.

For this purpose, the Islamic centre of Geneva contacted the non-profit association *Partage*, the only food bank in the Geneva. While the first request made by the Imam of the Islamic Centre of Geneva was rejected by *Partage* because of its exclusive religious dimension, the second request, formulated in the name of the future SASI president, was accepted. This founding anecdote illustrates the link that exists between the Islamic Centre of Geneva and the publicly contested figure of *Hani Ramadan*, viewed with suspicion by institutional actors – and shows how problematic said link is for interactions with other social welfare providers in the locality. Consequently, it underlines the need to develop an independent and non-religious organisation to design social activities addressing local needs; an independent organisation that will – as we will see later in this chapter – soon escape from exclusive religious control.

*Partage* made its first delivery to *Epicerie Sociale* in October 2009. Since then, *Epicerie Sociale* every Monday has freely distributed more than one hundred food baskets to the needy. During my first direct observations, at the end of 2012, only a handful of people from the Muslim community were active in organising the social activities of the Islamic Centre. Their actions were financially and hierarchically dependant on the Imam of the Islamic Centre of Geneva and almost all volunteers and beneficiaries were Muslims practising Islam. The efforts were focused on the operation of the social grocery, which at this time functioned without registration. Tickets with hand-written numbers were attributed to people corresponding to their time of arrival, so that they should wait their turn to choose from the products of the social grocery; latecomers could consequently not receive a food basket, or at least, not necessarily one with the products they needed. Operations focused on the needs of the local Muslim population. Fewer than

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169 The Zakat, as one of the Five Pillars of Islam, is a religious obligation for all Muslims who meet the necessary criteria of wealth.

fifty people regularly used the groceries, most of them attended the place of worship. The volunteers, a non-organised group of ten people, were also all Muslim. SASI's president explains (2017, 3): "I got wide publicity [for the grocery], but with the idea that it should be Islamic, everyone was thinking 'there is finally something for Muslims'. In this perspective, it should be for Muslims. I didn't know, I knew that Partage's Charter specified the inclusion of all, not only for Muslims, but I had only seven persons on hand to help."

However, the news spread quickly and the beneficiaries soon came from all over Geneva and beyond. SASI's President recounts (2017, 4): "It passed overnight from fifteen to twenty, only Muslims, to sixty to seventy-five people ... the weakest had to wait across the street ... nothing worked." The number of beneficiaries then increased until they reached 200 (SASI's President 2017). The grocery opened twice per week and became a major customer of Partage and one of the biggest social groceries of Geneva (Partage's Director 2017). The volunteers, non-trained and unorganised, were overwhelmed by the success of the social grocery.

As a result, the local visibility of the Islamic Centre, as well any environmental inconvenience and noise pollution, created tensions in the neighbourhood – as much as in the 2010s, when the Islamic Centre was increasingly regarded with distrust by local residents (Felder and al. 2015). Indeed, the Islamic centre was a concern for most residents interviewed in a sociological study conducted in the district. If all inhabitants interviewed asserted they did not know much about the centre, many considered it a "separate place" in the district and suggested a link between the Islamic centre and the problem of drug dealing (Felder and al. 2015). Many single men, mainly young North Africans, attended the social service and the place of worship of the Islamic centre – this population was quickly likened by the neighbourhood to problems associated with drug dealing

It was at this time that the Community Action Unit,<sup>170</sup> (Unité d'Action Communautaire, hereinafter UAC) contacted the Islamic Centre of Geneva. An agent of UAC requested a meeting with the Imam,<sup>171</sup> who put her in touch with the person in charge of the social grocery, who was seeking help rationalising distribution and complying with the requirements of the association Partage. The number of beneficiaries then stopped growing and the food distribution was able to concentrate on the neediest. Moreover, the selection of beneficiaries began to follow a logic of needs and partnerships and,

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170 The Community Action Units are cantonal institutional structures promoting social cohesion by the help of residents.

171 Initially, contact was made to exchange on the increasing stigmatisation of the local Muslim community, in the context of the federal ban on minarets accepted in 2009 and the local problem of drug dealing.

quickly, the profile of the beneficiaries was diversified. After the beneficiaries were provided with vouchers, they came from all over the canton and beyond and belonged to different communities, groups, and sociocultural categories (SASI's President 2017). In particular, the Roma population, an important needy population in Geneva, invested in the groceries.

The number of volunteers also increased exponentially coming from every part of SASI's wide network, most with no links to the practice of Islam. Students, mostly from the social schools of Geneva, Spanish-speaking migrants, mostly women who have benefited from the grocery, as well as retired people, mostly Swiss women, came to reinforce teams active in the social grocery as well as in other SASI projects, such as the night patrols and the collective dinners. The engagement increased to such an extent that, in 2012, SASI's President (2017) had to refuse new volunteers.

During my last direct participant observations in the ongoing activities of SASI between March and September 2015, I observed an organised group of fifty people, men and women, old and young, Muslim and non-Muslim, working together. The two loyal organisers of Monday's market distributed more than 120 food baskets; a group of four or five men and women, armed with sandwiches and tea, were roaming the streets on Friday night helping people sleeping in the street. Families were cooking and serving Sunday lunch for other families. Swiss people in receipt of an invalidity allowance, Roma families, Iraqi and Syrian refugees, and Spanish-speaking economic migrants attended the Monday distribution.

By then, SASI was already recognised as a local actor: it co-organised an annual local festival with the other local associations by providing a large part of the volunteers. It participated actively within the the Union of Muslim Organisations in Geneva / Union des Organisations Musulmanes de Genève (UOMG) in a photographic exposition entitled *Me, racist?* as part of "The Week Against Racism". SASI's president was also involved in the co-ordination mechanisms of local associations and participated in the STAM, a professional network of sociosanitary associations combating exclusion in Geneva.

As a side effect, SASI's organisational change helped to reduce the problems of drug dealing. SASI's President expresses his astonishment (2017, 19): "Thanks to the association, through all these activities, through the families, through this diversity of Muslim and non-Muslims, no more dealers. Incredible, no? Actually, we didn't tackle specifically this problem. We did our activities and we were opening up." Consequently, the organisational change also contributed to improving neighbourly relations:

At a time before the establishment of the association, a table or a plate left outside the Islamic centre, on the sidewalk, and inhabitants

would immediately call the police ... But since the creation of the association ... neighbours are happy. They come. Because they really see the beneficiaries, not only Muslims but people of all ages and from all walks of life ... Neighbours support us, they give us clothes, and they give us food. It has been a good point for the Islamic centre and, they recognise it. (SASI's President 2017, 20)

Interviews suggest that the diversification of beneficiaries and the subsequent diversification of volunteers have now had an impact on the leadership structure of the association (SASI's President 2017). The Latino community in particular has largely invested in the leadership of the social grocery and they now represent the ethnic majority within SASI's committee. Indeed, SASI's President reports (2017, 12): "The committee is now composed of 90 percent of non-Muslim people. The Latino community is much represented, most people benefited from the social grocery and became members." This change in the leadership reinforces the more impartial orientation of the social action and fosters compliance with Partage's requirements. Since the people involved in the committee and the volunteers come from multiple origins, religions, and ages, they consider that their social action must be open to all. Since then, for instance, SASI does not refuse the delivery of pork. SASI's president explains:

People who were here at the beginning didn't want that us to collaborate with LGBT; or that we collaborated with *Le Bateau*, which uses pork meat; but these people have left because they did not share the ideal of a non-political, non-religious association, which is for everybody ... Now we distribute non-halal meat, pork meat, that doesn't matter ... Before, we depended on the Islamic centre, we could not. But since the establishment of the association we take all ... Now we order everything from Partage. (SASI's President 2017, 12–14)

As a result, in 2015, people from diverse backgrounds attended the social grocery and the Islamic Centre of Geneva is crowded every Monday afternoon. This situation has recently created tensions between people attending worship on the first floor of the centre and people attending the social grocery on the ground floor. There are regular comments that the skirts are too short and necklines too wide (SASI's President 2017). Altercations occasionally happen in front of the centre; recently, a SASI volunteer had to call the police to stop an altercation between believers and people attending the social grocery (SASI's President 2017).

## 6.5 On Ideological and Individual Factors

Regarding religious ideological affiliation, and if we follow the classification proposed by Baptiste Brodard (2011), SASI belongs to the trend of *associative Islam*. This refers to a trend of Sunnite Islam, close to the movement of Muslim Brotherhood, which advocates the commitment of the Islamic community to social and political problematics (Brodard 2011).<sup>172</sup> Moreover, the Imam of the Islamic Centre of Geneva, Hani Ramadan, has always supported the existence of religious rights and duties toward non-believers and the necessity of being committed to social life (Brodard 2011).<sup>173</sup>

In addition, SASI can be qualified as *pragmatic* because its actions are motivated by non-ideological and contextual factors. It adopts what Brodard (2011, 38) has called an “inversed perspective”, taking into account the local context and the ground needs without direct ideological considerations. This is a model of commitment considered by Brodard (2011, 16) as a rupture with the classical model of commitment of associative Islam, in which Islamic social interventions “are motivated, justified and framed according to religious considerations”. This does not prevent these organisations from extending their actions to all the needy, but they do so in virtue of their interpretation of religious principles. Associative Islam thus generally considers Islam as the end-point of social work, an implementation of religious convictions into practice (Brodard 2011). This is why this pragmatic approach is considered by Brodard (2011, 38) as “a new definition of Muslim social action, related to the local context”.

However, most volunteers and leaders of SASI don't refer to religious convictions to justify their commitment (SASI 2017). If the president (2017, 2) affirms that his initiative intended to “revamp the image of Islam”, he asserts that he is not mainly motivated by religious convictions. He explains his motivation by cultural considerations related to his Burkina roots and to the will “to be a little closer to what [he] lived in Africa”, as well as by humanist moral principles related to the necessity to act (SASI's President 2017, 2).

As with other organisations related to associative Islam, SASI functions using an impartial and non-communitarian approach to social work; its

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172 In the French context, Brodard contrasts this trend with the two-other major Islamic trends: the Tabligh movement and Salafism. The social commitment of the former is religiously motivated and oriented toward the community, the latter exhorting disinvestment to political and social affairs (see: Brodard 2011, 57 and 110).

173 Beyond the Zakat, which requires special rights and duties toward other believers and which limits Muslim charity to Muslim people, there also exist, according to preachers and theological interpretations, religious injunctions to impartial charity, such as Hani Ramadan, who supports the existence of religious rights and duties toward non-believers.

actions are intended for all persons in need, regardless of their ethnic origin or religious affiliation. But where the main organisations related to associative Islam justify their action by religious injunction, SASI and its representatives only refer to moral obligation without any reference to Islamic principles. Moreover, the diversification of the beneficiaries of the social grocery resulted in not only a more diverse composition of an increasing number of volunteers but also reshaped the governance structure of the association with most members now being non-Muslim. The change is so drastic that we can wonder to what extent SASI is still an FBO and not merely a secular welfare provider at the facilities of the Islamic Centre of Geneva.

Regarding individual characteristics, the president of SASI has played a determining role. Former employee of the state of Geneva, the president of SASI started volunteering with the charitable organisation *le C.A.R.E.*,<sup>174</sup> he was also a voluntary worker for the social service of Vernier, a suburban municipality of Geneva. The social grocery was inspired from this social service (SASI's President 2017). Certainly, these personal secular motivations and this individual process have influenced – in a specific way – the orientation of SASI. However, it will be shown that the Vernier municipality has played a crucial role in regard to accessing the knowledge and skills necessary to conform to SASI's institutional partners.

## 6.6 On the Influence of Local Network

Without receiving any government funds, SASI has interacted with a multiplicity of public and private actors who have influenced the orientation of its activities. This study focuses especially on the secular network of non-profit associations and of public institutions. As such, the communitarian network of UOMG will not be part of this research. It is however important to note that this network plays an intermediate role between the institutional context and the social activities deployed (Banfi 2018).

### 6.6.1 The Foundation/Association Partage

Partage is the main food bank in the canton of Geneva. Between 2012 and 2016, Partage as a private, non-profit association designed to support associations and social services in offering foodstuffs and hygiene products to needy people and families. In 2016, this association took the form of a private foundation in preserving the same objectives. The activities of the

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174 A secular organisation created by member of the Christian FBO Caritas.

foundation were publicly funded at 40 percent, mainly by the state of Geneva and by the municipality of Geneva (Partage 2018).

Partage deals only with groups organised as association according to the Swiss civil law, implying a non-profit objective and a democratic decision-making process (Swiss Civil Law 1907). According to Partage's Director, this request is considered as a guarantee of the necessary sustainability of the activity once started (Partage's Director 2017). Therefore, to benefit from Partage's services, groups have to be constituted in formal association, if possible recognised by public utility, and have to submit their statute, minutes of the general Assembly, and their last activity report (Partage's Director 2017). The only substantial requirements are that the activities of the association must be directed to "extremely vulnerable people" and that "the cake should be fairly shared to all associations and foundations that benefit from the service" (Partage's Director 2017, 7). According to the Director, the only requests refused missed one of the previous points: either the demand was incomplete or the food was used for something else (Partage's Director 2017).<sup>175</sup>

Of the fifty-one non-profit associations who regularly benefit from the support of Partage, eight are FBOs (Partage 2018). All major religions active in Geneva are represented: the Islamic community through the SASI, the Jewish community through the social service of the Israelite Community of Geneva, the Protestant community through the Protestant Social Centre, YMCA, and the Open Church; and finally, Roman Catholics through the Salvation Army, CARITAS, and Emmaus (Partage 2018).<sup>176</sup>

Most of them are FBOs in the sense that the provision of welfare is a self-imposed aim derived from a religious tradition. As for Emmaus, their purpose is not explicitly religious and their activities are not related directly to religious practice (Askeland 2016). Only the Israelite Community, the Islamic Centre, and Open Church (the evangelist Church) are strictly religious associations to the extent that their main objective relates to religious exercise. In this respect, Partage treats SASI as other associations: "We work with Catholic associations also. We work with Pro-Juventute, with CARITAS, all these associations have also a religious connotation. We imagine that these partners make no distinction" (Partage's Director 2017, 5).

While Partage works with many FBOs, and among them some religious associations, its Charter requires that associations that benefit from its services should be *impartial* (Partage 2018). The Charter of Partage emphasises four *essential values*: respect, solidarity, equality, and innovation. In particular, equality requires them "to act with impartiality and with accountability,

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175 As, for instance, feeding volunteers of the supported association.

176 Of course, each of the organisations embodies a specific religious trend and represents only a fraction of the community of believers.

with a perspective on social justice” (Partage 2018, 1). In fact, it means that the associations that benefit from the support of the foundation have to act impartially and that the food distribution should be *in principio* open to all. The distribution cannot be ruled out by partial religious considerations and the “products served are not reserved to the consumption of followers of a particular religion” (Partage’s Director 2017, 11). Partage collaborates with religious organisations to the extent that these organisations preserve a clear distinction between their religious and their social functions. In this regard, the selection of beneficiaries on a religious basis is incompatible with the Charter.

This halfway position explains both why the request made by the Imam of the Islamic Centre of Geneva was refused in 2009 (the impartiality could not be guaranteed) and why Partage agreed to supply the social grocery of SASI and to enable it to progressively emerge as an Islamic FBO through trial-and-error adjustments.

However, in 2009, Epicerie Sociale was a special case for Partage, both in regard to the non-professionalisation of the organisation (it emerged later in 2009 with important needs and is still today entirely ruled by volunteers)<sup>177</sup>, as well as in regard to its links with the Islamic Centre of Geneva and the requirement of impartiality. Actually, it is the Islamic Centre of Geneva that hosts the social grocery in its main hall and, until 2014, financed the service of Partage with the donations collected during the prayers. Yet, as we have seen, the actions of Partage are based on the value of *impartiality* and the association is not at ease with the selectivity of distribution according to religious criterion as well as with the fact that, between 2009 and 2014, the Islamic social service didn’t accept the delivery of pork (Partage’s Director 2017).

In the early 2010s, SASI became more and more aware of Partage requirements regarding an impartial distribution and SASI’s president was increasingly afraid of a spot check (SASI’s president 2017). However, contrary to what some leaders of SASI thought, even if Partage expects no partiality in the distribution, they never proceed to controls (Partage’s Director 2017). Answering this question, the Director contends: “we are a food bank, not the police” (Partage’s Director 2017, 3). As such, Partage works “on trust” and according to the principle of need: “If someone is hungry, *Colis du Coeur* gives him food. If you go to Emmaus it is the same. For me, that is a good philosophy. Afterwards, there is a relationship based on trust” (Partage’s Director 2017, 11). Interviewed on this issue, the SASI president contends: “We were clearly headed for trouble, we never would have made it, as in 2009; without the support of the municipality of Geneva, we were headed for trouble. Partage’s Charter would have been transgressed. And even if Partage

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177 By contrast, the Israelite Community of Geneva has an experimented to create a highly professionalised social service of three employees.

doesn't have eyes everywhere, we would have ended up locking ourselves in and doing something not good" (SASI's President 2017).

### 6.6.2 The Municipality of Geneva

The Department of the Social Cohesion and Solidarity of the City of Geneva works to strengthen social solidarity and improve the well-being of the population. Through its *Unité Vie Associative*, this department is the main source of public subsidies for local sociocultural actors. However, the last application by SASI was refused in 2014. SASI's President understands the refusal as a misrecognition of the secular action of SASI (SASI's President 2017). The reason for this refusal is hard to identify but the head of the Department of the Social Cohesion and Solidarity does not dissociate SASI from the Islamic Centre.<sup>178</sup> Nonetheless, while refusing direct financial support, the department has accompanied the group active in the social grocery of the Islamic Centre between 2010 and 2015 through its social service.

The social services attached to the Department has for its mission to improve "the conditions of existence of the most vulnerable and the financial situation of those of modest condition, at improving the living environment of those who need support and to develop the participation and the commitment of the community" (Sa Barretto et al. 2015, 2).<sup>179</sup> This last general objective especially relates to the community sector, composed of four UAC teams and two Neighbourhood Centres (Espaces de Quartier, hereafter EdQ), which provide free rooms and facilities for associative activities. The official mission of the community sector is to bring "an organisational and technical

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178 During the financial committee of 6 May 2018, a commissioner referred to the program of the EdQ Eaux-Vives which mentions SASI in the section entitled "to adopt a good behaviour, small price, good food". She wanted to "know why an activity proposed by the Islamic Centre of Geneva, which is managed by Mr. Hani Ramadan, great son of Hassan El-Banna, founder of the Muslims Brotherhood, was proposed by the municipality". Esther Alder, at the head of the Department, answered that she will check the association in question and that "she would be very annoyed if it turned out that these people enjoyed a free access to public facilities, while she does not share most of their opinions and subject (in particular positions on women)" (Ville de Genève 2017, 106–107).

179 The individual social assistance and the unemployment agencies are regulated by the canton of Geneva through the "Hospice General" and through the "regional placement offices" (ORP). The forty-five municipalities provide complementary assistance in relation to their size and capacities. The social services of the City of Geneva, the most important municipality of the canton, is in charge of the emergency accommodations and facilities for homeless people, offers various social and cultural services for elders and isolated people, and has the special task to support local community actions.

support for a group of people or for a community, which undertakes a community action or which faces a problem to which a collective answer can be brought” (Sa Barretto et al. 2015, 2). As such, the term *community action* is understood here as a public device to reinforce the social and cultural action of local communities (Bury 1988).<sup>180</sup>

Active since the early 2000s in Geneva, the community sector supports any kind of civil organisations which pursue a non-profit purpose: associations like informal groups for elders or for foreigners, neighbours, caregivers, or young mothers (Sa Barretto et al. 2015). Between 2010 and 2015, the social workers of UAC enjoyed an important professional autonomy and most of their actions emerged bottom-up from people’s needs. Their mission, through the initiation or the support of projects, is to meet the needs of the population and to promote the local network and the “de-compartmentalisation” of actors.

It is important to note that the community sector has been under political pressure since November 2013, when the Finance Committee of the Municipal Council of Geneva proposed a budgetary cut implying the suppression of the entire community sector (Ville de Genève 2017). The municipal parliament refused the budgetary cut with a small majority, but this event produced a long and profound questioning of the municipal social service. An audit was performed in 2015 (Ville de Genève 2014) and as a consequence, the social service is still today in a process of change.<sup>181</sup>

Interestingly, while the principle of *laïcité* is strongly and increasingly affirmed in the public administrations of Geneva:<sup>182</sup> both at the cantonal and municipal levels, the action of the community sector was not limited to non-religious groups and associations. Between 2012 and 2015, UAC’s frontline social workers were regularly in contact with diverse religious groups. The

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180 This definition, in line with its US original meaning (Community Service Consortium 2017), contrasts as such with community action understood as an action of the community itself.

181 The Audit concluded that the mission of UAC was relevant but that organisational changes were needed. The report criticises their mode of intervention “according to the demand” and the differential of treatment that results from it. Authors regret the lack of coordination and of cross-cutting approach in the management of these units (Horber-Papazian et. al. 2015). Since then, the social service experiments a new transversal approach through the new Politique Sociale de Proximité. The relation between this new approach and community action is not clear today.

182 I have already highlighted the “laïcité institutional identity” that frames institutional opportunities in Geneva. In this regard, it is important to note that in 2015, at the municipal level the administrative tribunal of Geneva issued a verdict against the municipality of Geneva which systemically refused the use of the public domain to religious organisations. At the cantonal level, in April 2018 the cantonal parliament has accepted a contested law on *laïcité* prohibiting expression of the faith of civil servants.

team active in the district of Eaux-Vives/Champel in particular was in touch with the Catholic and Protestant churches through the two local parishes, with the cultural service of the Israelite Community of Geneva and with its youth and social departments, and with the Muslim community through the social service of the Islamic Centre (but through an initial contact with the Imam). The interaction between UAC and religious communities were diverse and various. For instance, the Muslim, the Israelite, the Protestant as well as the Catholic local organisations are part of the organisation of the “Week of Religions”, an Open House Day and coordinated by the UAC teams (Sa Barretto et. al. 2015, 12). Furthermore, UAC, as an entrance gate to the public administration, also offers individual help regarding administrative and organisational orientations. UAC has for instance helped a local Catholic parish to formulate a request to the urban department of the city of Geneva regarding the crossroad surrounding the Church. The same church has later made rooms available for local non-religious and non-profit activities during the refecton of an EdQ. Result of another interaction between UAC and religious centre is that the cultural service of the Israelite community has been included in the Welcome Day that welcomes newcomers in the district and the local sociocultural network.

The case of SASI is especially interesting because it consists of the long-term support of a religious community by the municipal administration. The Epicerie Sociale of the Islamic Centre of Geneva has benefited from organisational and technical support from UAC in the development of its social activities and in its move to create an independent organisation. In particular, UAC has accompanied the group active in the social grocery of the Islamic Centre during 2010 and 2015, orienting it towards an adapted form of organisation and introducing it to the sociocultural and sociosanitary networks. It is neither a mere partnership, as with UAC when they cooperate with religious organisations for a common Open House Day, nor a one-shot orientation, as with the UAC following the request of the Catholic parish. Here, UAC has adopted a position of facilitator aiming to empower the organisations and the local actors.

UAC helped the Islamic social service to rationalise its food distribution, in particular by setting up a system of vouchers with partner social institutions. Through UAC, SASI has made a partnership with the Red Cross, the Hospice General, and with diverse municipal services, which receive vouchers for the grocery according to the needs of their organisation. Moreover, through UAC, SASI has also been connected to the associative resources necessary to improve its services and increase the benefits for the recipients, as for example through the partnership with the association Mesemrom regarding the regulation of Roma presence at the social grocery or with the

Association for the Promotion of Human Rights regarding the setting up of legal consultations during the food distribution (SASI's President 2017).

At the same time, social workers of UAC and of the state-founded community centre *Maison de Quartier des Eaux-Vives*<sup>183</sup> helped SASI to integrate local activities and district networks. At the beginning, local associations were resistant to collaborate with an Islamic association which had, according to them, “no clear links” with the Islamic centre (SASI's President 2017, 2). The mediation of social workers gave an institutional credit to the *Epicierie Sociale*, still organisationally dependent on the Islamic Centre but already adopting an impartial approach.

Furthermore, the mediation of social workers allowed SASI to contribute to the organisation of the “*Ville est à Vous*”, an annual bloc party with concerts and garage sales. Since then, SASI have regularly provided volunteers for this event and held an information stand every year. The mediation of the UAC also allowed SASI to be a part of the local district coordination, at which the Catholic and Protestant local parishes were already present. This coordination aims at “facilitating the creation of contacts between the partners, at improving the circulation of information and at identifying common problems that can lead to common project” (MQEV 2017, 1). It was hosted two times by SASI in the Islamic Centre between 2012 and 2015.

After two years of collaboration, UAC was requested by the group involved in the social grocery to help them to create a formal association, secular, and independent from the Islamic Centre. Since 2014, the group in charge of the social activities has thus been constituted as a non-profit association, the Islamic Social Assistance Service, recognised by article 60 and seq. of the Swiss civil code, financially and hierarchically independent of the Islamic Centre. According to SASI's president, this official structure has improved the social recognition of SASI by social partners and strengthened its independence from the Islamic Centre:

We were not directly linked to the Islamic Centre, but they were asking how can you prove it? We had no statute ... We had no resources, no partnership, we depended exclusively on the Islamic Centre, and we totally depended on religious contributions. It is because we have constituted an association that there are committees, contributions, and members and that we are here. (SASI's President 2017, 9–11)

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183 The *Maison de Quartier des Eaux-Vives* (MQEV) is a state-founded community centre. There are forty-seven leisure centres and community centres in the canton of Geneva, all managed by a local association and by the Genevan Foundation for Sociocultural Activities (FASe) which has the mission to foster and reinforce social cohesion in the canton of Geneva (FASe 2018). FASe works in close collaboration with the UAC of the municipality of Geneva.

He underlines that, at this time, he didn't know how to create a formal association and that the group did not have the trust, resources, and competencies to create an association of their own (SASI's President 2017). In particular, interviews and observations suggest that Latino members of SASI's committee, often with irregular migration status and fearing being spotted by authorities, were especially suspicious of having their name on an official document.

The municipality of Geneva, through UAC, has been very active; social workers helped the organisation to integrate local activities and district networks and to rationalise the distribution, in particular by setting up a system of vouchers with partner institutions and later creating an association with formal rights and duties. In this regard, their intervention has allowed SASI to meet the requirements of Partage. While UAC had led such an action before with other local associations (residential associations, festive associations, sportive associations), this case is a unique instance of long-term support given to a religious-related organisation. Since then and until 2018, UAC remained in contact with SASI for regular project and occasional administrative tasks.

This support was, however, discrete. Personal identification prevails on institutional affiliation and the President of SASI considers that "It is all about personality" (SASI's President 2017, 5). UAC's street-level workers are scarcely identified with the municipality and their institutional affiliation remains unclear to SASI volunteers. Note that this finding is in line with the thin existing literature on the community sector of Geneva. An ethnographical study conducted by Ossipow Wüest and Bozzini (2013), intended to analyse the practices, experiences, and representations which take place within EdQ. The study considers the community sector as a "bridge between the Department of the Social Cohesion and Solidarity of the City of Geneva and local associations" and highlights "the presence and the intervention of the City in the everyday reality" as so distant that it is sometimes hard to identify institutional affiliation (Ossipow Wüest and Bozzini 2013, 10). Building on this observation Ossipow Wüest and Bozzini (2013, 10) theorise the "presence-absence" of the municipality in the EdQ. The lack of visibility and the difficulty of identifying the UAC is also a recurrent theme in the audit of the sector by the Institut Des Hautes Etudes en Administration Publique (Horber-Papazian et al. 2015).

### **6.6.3 Office for Integration of Foreigners**

The Office for Integration of Foreigners (Bureau de l'Intégration des Etrangers, hereafter BIE) of the Republic and State of Geneva "supports actions and projects of integration, sensitises, informs and directs the population on all

the questions relative to migration” (République et Canton de Genève 2018a). It fights “discrimination and inequality of opportunity and encourages the common efforts of associations, of the State and Municipalities, for harmonious relations between populations which make up Geneva” (République et Canton de Genève 2018a).

In order to fulfil its mission, the BIE, conceived by the Delegate to integration as a “skills centre”, has three modes of intervention: it can respond to associative requests, it can produce calls for projects, or it can generate projects with specific partners (BIE’s Delegate 2018, 3–4). According to the Delegate (2018), the BIE’s work must be strongly oriented toward the generation of projects; it identifies a problem or a social need and looks for actors with whom to resolve it. In the past, they have even tried to establish ad hoc associations related to specific projects, but, according to the Delegate, such attempts are always unsuccessful. As with UAC, we see here a public service oriented towards ground-needs and which works in a bottom-up manner. However, contrary to UAC, this support takes the form of a centralised coordination (communication, financial package) and takes a specific focus on the issue of integration.

The BIE supports approximatively 200–250 projects per year<sup>184</sup>, selected according to their congruence with the objectives defined in the Cantonal Integration Plan (BIE’s Delegate 2018). The BIE has never directly supported a religious association and, as an example of such limits, the Delegate refers to the recent refusal of a young Muslim’s application to organise a religious festival for Eid (BIE’s Delegate 2018). In parallel, the Delegate considers that there are also no reasons to finance purely social activities:

There are almost 150 communitarian feasts each weekend ... They absolutely do not need the state for that. They neither need the state nor do they need to be constituted in a formal association. They don’t care. They want to dance, to party, to talk, to exchange, to help, to help each other, to laugh, to have fun. For that they don’t need a framework. (BIE’s Delegate 2018, 5)

In this sense, UOMG was founded by BIE as a non-religious umbrella association, a faith-based organisation that can contribute to the realisation of the Cantonal Plan of Integration, especially with its contribution to the theme of “new arrivals”, a central objective of this plan (République et Canton de Genève 2018b).

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184 For a total amount of 5–6 million CHF.

Two projects involving SASI have been supported indirectly by BIE via the UOMG.<sup>185</sup> First, to underline the International day for the elimination of racial discrimination, the Office of the Integration of Foreigners of the Canton of Geneva organised an annual “Week against Racism”, for which a call for projects was made to every association. SASI annually benefits from this subsidy through the Islamic Centre of Geneva and the Union of Muslim Organizations in Geneva. Second, the project “Citizenship Workshop” – also held under the auspice of UOMG that was specifically founded for that purpose – was mainly carried out by SASI. It aims at “making a bridge between migrants, institutions of the Canton of Geneva and Swiss people” (UOMG 2017). The project especially seeks to create relationships between new arrivals and local residents. For this purpose, information sessions have been introduced before the opening of the social grocery to notify new arrivals about national and regional laws, informal rules and customs, the social resources available to them, and about their respective rights and duties (UOMG 2017). This project was perfectly in line with BIE’s objectives:

What I have seen in this project is that it is an extraordinary opportunity to reach a public that we don’t necessarily reach. These things simply have a lot of success. The proposed framework had interested us, the theme, there was an openness, it was not religious in the sense that this was clearly not a space for religious proselytising. After that, it rests on my experience, I know all these people, I know what there is besides, I know that it fits our mission. (BIE’s Delegate 2018, 6)

The project involved asylum-seekers from Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Iraq, Turkey, Yemen, Angola, Congo, Cameroon, Peru, Mexico, and Colombia; as well as many representatives of public institutions (as police officers, social workers, and academics) and representatives of the civil society, in particular those operating in the non-discrimination area (UOMG 2017).

From this perspective, the Department of Security and Economy of the State of Geneva, through BIE, is the only direct financial public support to SASI. The BIE’s Delegate (2018, 7) is aware of the symbolic importance of this support: “I am aware that the financial public support is important for them, not only for money, but for recognition; there is really a strong recognition issue.” While this funding is a clear institutional opportunity for SASI to carry out impartial social actions (Citizenship Workshop) and

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185 It is important to note that the most active individuals in SASI are also active in UOMG and that SASI, in this regard, has a special place in UOMG. In fact, SASI has no direct membership of UOMG, only multiple membership of key individuals active in both organisations. However, all UOMG projects involved SASI participation.

to interact with the ethnic and religious majority (Week against Racism), it is important to underline its one-time and indirect nature. First, the funding is only indirect because the State of Geneva acts through the Office for Integration of Foreigners and because SASI is only funded through its indirect membership to UOMG (BIE's Delegate 2018). Second, this funding has no effect on the ordinary functioning of SASI. BIE supports one-time projects related to the themes of integration and anti-discrimination; it doesn't support the social activities of SASI on which these integrative projects are built. The BIE's Delegate is clear about that: their support is only related to providing information for new arrivals. "It is an especially important place for transmitting information, on how to find an accommodation, on what social peace means, on the respect of every person, on the health care system; all that is our work, we have to inform ... this is our perimeter of action. But we will not fund the food bank, this is not our role" (BIE's Delegate 2018, 7). SASI thus has to operate in a restrictive institutional framework focused on integration programs. In this respect, the support of BIE provides a symbolic recognition of the integrative role of SASI, but not material support of its social role.

Furthermore, this one-time financial support is not easily accessible for all kinds of organisation: individuals should be organised in formal association to submit an application and need to produce diverse administrative documents. Moreover, associations have to provide a report of execution and a financial report to the BIE at least two months later in order to justify the subsidised project (République et Canton de Genève 2018a). These conditions for being admitted to BIE's programs are easily met but are often beyond the reach of small non-profit associations, at least when composed of migrants and cultural minorities. They require French writing ability, accounting expertise, communicative skills, and trust in public institutions.<sup>186</sup> SASI was scarcely able to provide such administrative documents. In particular, interviews suggest that members of SASI's committee, drawn from different backgrounds and cultures, mistrusted public institutions and were ill-skilled to conform to these requirements (SASI's President 2017). Again in this respect, UAC played an important role in regard to the access of knowledge and skills necessary to conform to SASI's institutional partners: they not only helped SASI to form a legal association but also provided administrative support for the application.

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186 The Delegate underlines that, in such situations, the BIE can act through partner actors in order to support these informal groups.

## 6.7 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to examine the influence of the secular network on the orientation of SASI. In addition to institutional opportunities and ideological and individual factors, I have highlighted the role played by the non-profit association *Partage*, the social service of the municipality of Geneva, and the Office for the Integration of Foreigners.

Results support that public authorities and secular associations have greatly influenced the orientation and development of SASI. Without a service contract or regular financial support, SASI has become a welfare provider that crosses religious and ethnic cleavages. The cantonal non-recognition of religion and the high degree of subsidiarity of the Genevan welfare state are embodied on the ground by concrete services and partners with their own influences. Local welfare politics and individual agents can have a direct impact on Islamic social services and their capability to act.

Three important lessons emerge from this case study. The first relates to the importance of the secular non-profit network for Islamic organisations. Islamic social associations do not exist in a vacuum; their social activities may require collaboration with an existing network. Private organisations such as *Partage*, which is partially publicly funded, can act as a catalyst for secular change. In our case, the quasi-monopolistic position of the association as a food provider and its requirement of “impartial” distribution led to important organisational changes in SASI. While this requirement initially could have been an obstacle to the FBO’s participation in food programs, the tolerance of the *Partage*’s leadership and the practical support provided by UAC enabled SASI to slowly overcome it. In this regard, actors engaged within the secular and decentralised social policy framework of Geneva seem more able to accommodate an emerging FBO such as SASI than more institutionalised actors.

The second lesson of this case relates to the useful, original, multiple, and ambiguous support provided by the public authorities to SASI. On the one hand, the municipality of Geneva has provided a determinant support to SASI, through UAC, to meet the requirements of its associative and institutional partners. The municipality accompanied the group active in the social groceries of the Islamic Centre between 2010 and 2015, orienting it toward an adapted form of organisation and introducing it to the sociocultural and sociosanitary networks. On the other hand, street level workers of the municipality are scarcely identified with the municipality and their institutional affiliation remains not clear to volunteers of SASI. From the latter’s perspective, the municipality is far more identified with the fact that the Department of Social Cohesion and Solidarity refused to

provide a financial support to SASI. This refusal is understood by the person in charge of the association as a misrecognition of the secular orientation of the association. The only direct public financial support SASI received, came from the state of Geneva, through the Office for Integration of Foreigners. This latter offers a punctual funding of projects related to the Week against Racism and Citizenship Workshop program. However, this support offers a one-time grant in the specific field of integration and non-discrimination actions and has no influence on the social activities of SASI.

The third lesson relates to the way these actors have interacted. The actions of UAC are complementary to those of Partage, the former providing practical support to meet the requirements of the latter in order to benefit its services. The support of BIE, in providing a financial and symbolic recognition of (some) activities of SASI, is in turn complementary to the practical support provided by Partage and the municipality. In this light, the actions of the municipal, cantonal, and civil levels appear to be complementary, while there was no official coordination between these different actors on this specific intervention (BIE's Delegate 2018, 16).

However, this approach, as a non-coordinated strategy, has severe limits. SASI, financially and organisationally independent of the Islamic Centre of Geneva, today cannot find the resources necessary to finance its independent social activities and, in 2017, SASI was in payment default for the deliveries of the association Partage. In the absence of a viable alternative, the risk is that SASI will turn back to religious funding, giving up the condition of impartiality. The restrictive institutional framework focused on punctual support in the specific field of integration (BIE) is not sufficient to avoid this step backwards. Regular public funding of SASI's social activities is needed. This is a worsening situation for the President of SASI:

Partage delivered foods for Tuesday's meal. Now, it is no longer possible, they don't make the delivery because we didn't pay them. Sunday and Tuesday are off now. We still have the Monday distribution, but until when?

And now within the Muslim community it is said "you see, even if you show good will, and even if you are opening up, see, there is no answer". And they try to have us back, "we can give to you", it is the danger. We should not disappear because we are the only ones.

At the level of the associations, of the STAM or of the district coordination, our activities are proven. It is clear, we are here and it is recognised as such. Even the high school of social work send us interns, truly, the school. Only the municipality is missing. In

order not to disappear, in order to stay, the social grocery, the street patrols, all by contributions; we all pay with our own money. It is hard. (SASI's President 2017, 21)

In any case, these non-coordinated interventions have engendered deep organisational and sociological changes within SASI. The informal and multifaceted support has reinforced the impartial dimension of SASI's social action, while exacerbating tensions with the communitarian and confessional base of the Islamic Centre of Geneva. As we saw, the diversification of volunteers and beneficiaries active with SASI, and in particular how these people behave and dress, have led to tensions with people attending worship. In light of these increasing conflicts between people attending the social grocery and people attending worship, it can be stated that the influence of the secular network has exacerbated the internal tension that the Islamic Centre faces between its different constituents. I have left open in this chapter the question of whether the reinforcement of such tensions is a good or a bad thing.

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# 7 Navigating between Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion: The Making of a Swiss Muslim Community in the Canton of Vaud<sup>187</sup>

*Akbar Nour*

## 7.1 Introduction

Switzerland has witnessed the permanent presence of Muslim populations since the end of the twentieth century, along with most European countries. The first generation of Muslims, who initially came to the country as temporary guest workers in the early 1960s, have remained. Their children are now the second and even third generation and have since integrated into mainstream Swiss society; most have accessed the status of Swiss citizenship by birth or naturalisation *inter alia*, holding rights and duties as citizens, combined with their Muslim identity on a wide spectrum of (non-)religious practices.

Following the increasing visibility of the Swiss-settled Muslim population in the early 2000s, a new socioreligious and political debate arose in the country. An underlying – and what should be understood as distorted – conception of Islam and Muslims in Switzerland was further exacerbated by events that disseminated a misrepresentative image of Muslims on both international<sup>188</sup> and Swiss<sup>189</sup> levels. The resulting tensions and controversies<sup>190</sup>

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187 I am really thankful to Mr. Pascal Gemperli, a former president of UVAM (from 2009 till April 2018) and a local politician (city councillor for the City of Morges, Green Party) for the numerous discussions. I also owe warm thanks to Mr. Montassar BenMrad, president of FIDS (Federation of Islamic Organisations in Switzerland) who gave me useful insights.

188 We can quote the various terror attacks since the 9/11 tragic events; youth radicalisation; Middle East political crises and armed conflicts, etc.

189 The trigger event was the 2009 constitutional ban on the construction of minarets and subsequently various cantonal and regional issues related to Islam and Muslims (veil, hand shaking, funding of mosques, training of imams, etc.).

190 The “Muslim question” has been politicised in Switzerland during these two last decades: “Now that Muslims have become a salient political issue and their claims

are of two kinds: (a) security: Muslims are subject to suspicion as potential “radical terrorists” and (b) culture: Islam is presented as a “cultural monolith” in opposition to western secular and democratic values. Taken together, these produce the idea of the Muslim as a “controversial” figure.

Despite these controversies, the structural trend is that most Muslim populations in Switzerland have settled down permanently – and indeed, constitute a growing and quite heterogeneous minority. The majority of Swiss Muslims are mainly of European origin: Balkan countries (Bosnia, Kosovo/Albania, Macedonia) and Turkey. There are also some groups from (Northern) Africa and the Middle East (Schneuwly Purdie 2009).

Since Switzerland is a federal state, the twenty-six cantons manage the relationship between religious communities and cantons, granting the status of public recognition to religious communities.<sup>191</sup> In most Swiss cantons, the process of publicly recognising Muslim communities is either non-existent or else in its early stages, such as in the cantons of Basel-Stadt and Vaud. This chapter focuses on the canton of Vaud in the western French-speaking part of Switzerland. It explores the endeavours of a local Swiss Muslim umbrella organisation, the Union of Vaud Muslim Associations / Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes (UVAM), to create a local Muslim community that is socially included in the fabric of Vaud society, despite still facing some forms of social exclusion.

## 7.2 The Canton of Vaud and “Vaud Muslims”

### 7.2.1 The Fragmentation of Local Muslim Organisations (before 2000)

Since the first waves of migration of Turkish workers in the late 1950s entered Switzerland up to the latest influx of populations stemming from the Balkans as well as to a lesser extent from the Middle East and Northern Africa, today the Muslim community in Vaud (“Vaud Muslims”)<sup>192</sup> amounts to more than

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or practices have been made visible in the public debate, a formalist and legalistic approach toward Muslim claims has become dominant. ... They have become political problems and are considered threats to the foundations of the state” (Gianni 2016, 27).

191 Historically, most Roman Catholic and Protestant religious communities have a full public recognition status in Swiss cantons; the Jewish communities have full public recognition in some cantons. (Marti et al. 2010; Cattacin et al. 2003; Banfi and Annunziata 2013).

192 I avoid “essentialising” the “Muslim community” by agreeing with Williams, for whom this term “describes entities at many scales and levels of meaning. ... Community is always a claim, a fiction inscribed through symbols, ceremony or a set of practices” (Williams 2002, 348).

30,000 people. Most are of Sunni extraction, forming around 5 percent of the whole cantonal population (785,000 people; figure as of December 2016).<sup>193</sup> In almost thirty years, the trend has shifted from Muslim immigrants coming to Switzerland to a general increase of settled Swiss Muslim citizens (Wa Baile 2011).

Vaud had several Muslim organisations before the year 2000. One of the oldest associations, the Islamic Centre of Lausanne (also known as the Mosque of Lausanne), was created in 1974. The Mosque of Lausanne was the main Muslim organisation on the cantonal territory almost up to the 1990s and the principal partner for local authorities regarding Muslim issues. However, other local Muslim associations have questioned the Mosque's legitimacy because it belongs to a minority movement (*Al-Abbash*) that blends elements of Sunni Islam and Sufism.

## 7.2.2 Internal Coordination and the First Steps of UVAM (2000–2009)

The 9/11 terror attacks in the USA in 2001 profoundly influenced the public perception of Muslim populations in the west.<sup>194</sup> Since then, public debates on the inclusion of those Muslim populations already settled in Europe have often related to matters of public security.<sup>195</sup> In Switzerland, 9/11 had a significant impact on political debates and the media, giving rise to fear and distrust towards Islam and Muslims (Behloul 2010).

Some groups stood against this climate. In Vaud, right after the tragic events of 9/11, in 2002 a group of Christians and Muslims formed a voluntary group to strengthen interfaith dialogue, *Musulmans-Chrétiens pour le Dialogue et l'Amitié* (MCDA). MCDA's objectives were to reduce prejudice between religions, to promote interfaith dialogue, and create relationships in places of everyday life. MCDA groups were created in various towns in

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193 There are no precise statistics regarding the number of Muslims residing in the canton of Vaud. The most accepted rough assessment amounts to around 30,000 Vaud Muslims, with one third being Swiss citizens (UVAM 2013).

194 Western Muslims were used as scapegoats for the attacks and therefore there was a significant increase in discriminations, negative stereotyping, illicit labelling, and even physical violence in some cases in various European countries (France, Germany, UK, etc.) (Mythen et al. 2009).

195 A large body of academic literature has been devoted to the "securitisation" towards Muslims in Europe (Bleich 2009, inter alia). Indeed, after the 9/11 events, European states reacted to the "threat of terrorism" and adjusted their security and legislature in order to limit immigration. Even, in the Swiss case, "despite not being part of the EU, but still being a Western Europe country that entertains important relations with the EU, Switzerland undergoes a similar experience". (Casagrande 2012, 12)

the canton of Vaud. The idea stemmed from regular meetings at Arzilier, an interfaith dialogue platform based in Vaud's capital, Lausanne. Since 2001, the platform has hosted various information events such as open days (to visit churches, temples, mosques, and Muslim associations), conferences, roundtables, cultural and theological exchanges, alongside facilitating relationships between various youth communities on religious and cultural topics.

An important turning point for Vaud Muslim centres happened in 2003. The new Vaud Constitution of April 2003 instituted important changes to canton-church relationships and introduced new relationships between the canton and local religious communities. The main difference was an openness towards other religious communities and their legal recognition as "religious communities of public interest" under specific conditions: (a) recognition of the Swiss legal framework; (b) respect of the constitutional rights of its members, mainly the freedom of thought and belief; (c) safeguarding the country's religious peace; (d) recognition and respect of democratic principles; (e) financial transparency. The law on the recognition of religious communities was only enforced in 2007. Since then, the issue of legal cantonal recognition has become a key issue for UVAM.<sup>196</sup>

Some Muslims involved in MCDA decided to go further, conceiving concrete steps to get together and mobilise themselves to defend and represent Vaud Muslims.<sup>197</sup> At first, various Swiss Muslim associations began to gather and discuss informally. Initially, a definitive structure with legal recognition was not the main objective. Rather, there was mainly an internal willingness to get together. The discussions about creating a local Muslim umbrella organisation began in 2003; after an intense round of ten monthly meetings, nine Vaud Muslim associations decided to create the Union of Vaud Muslim Associations (UVAM) in March 2004. UVAM was to incorporate seventeen members by 2018.<sup>198</sup>

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196 As the Swiss legal researcher Stephanie Kurt puts it in an interview: "The Canton of Basel-Stadt is the first canton in Switzerland to have granted recognition to various religious communities: two Christian and two Alawite ones (a strand of Shia Islam). These groups, visible in the canton for quite some time, are known for their social engagement." (Quoted in Abdeleli 2015)

197 MCDA is an informal group of Muslim and Christian personalities, whereas UVAM comprises seventeen Muslim centres. So the dynamics of these two entities are quite different.

198 In 2004, UVAM included nine members. In 2018, the Union encompasses seventeen Muslim centres (eleven ordinary and six associate members) with various sociocultural backgrounds (Albanian, Bosnian, Kosovo, North African, Bangladeshi, Turkish, Middle East, Somalian) and situated in various locations on the cantonal territory (Lausanne (4); Lausanne region (6 – Prilly, Chavannes (2), Renens, Ecublens, Crissier); Morges (Préverenges); Vevey; Montreux; Moudon; Payerne, Yverdon; Nyon). For a

It is interesting to note that the emergence of UVAM falls into a broader trend of a growing number of Swiss Muslim umbrella organisations on the Swiss territory.

### 7.2.3 UVAM: a Swiss-Based Organisation

UVAM is a Swiss association, since it is grounded within the Swiss legal framework (article 60 and following the Swiss civil code). As with most Switzerland-based associations, UVAM complies to several compulsory conditions to be acknowledged as such:

*Statutes:* The written *statutes* were adopted by the constitutive General Assembly of all UVAM's member associations' delegates (two delegates for each member association) in March 2004. They were modified and updated in March 2015.

*Membership:* UVAM distinguishes three categories of *membership*: (1) founding members who took part in the creation of UVAM; (2) ordinary members, who were admitted after UVAM's creation, fulfilling all admission criteria; and (3) associated members, who were admitted after UVAM's creation and willing to contribute to UVAM's aims and mission (art. 2 of the Statutes). According to the Swiss civil code, associated members become ordinary members after three years.

*Bodies:* UVAM has three *bodies* in terms of governance:

(1) *The general assembly:* During annual general assembly the delegates of all the member organisations meet; it is the highest body in UVAM's structure. Regarding designating delegates with the right of vote to represent it, each founding and ordinary member is entitled to be represented by two delegates who have the right to vote, whereas each associate member is entitled to one. Any member may appoint an additional delegate when he/she gets fifty additional members, but with a maximum of six delegates.

(2) *The committee:* This is UVAM's executive body, it gathers at least once a month. It has all competencies to manage daily matters, as long as they do not relate either to the council or the general assembly. The president is elected by the general assembly, the other committee members by the council. After receiving the committee's mandate, the general secretary coordinates all the activities and projects of the Union. The general secretary can rely on a secretariat that helps both the committee and the general secretary with administrative work.

(3) *The council:* This is the body supervising the Union's activities. It encompasses the president, a delegate per member organisations as well as

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complete list of the members: <https://uvam.ch/associations-members> (accessed June 30, 2018).

elected members elected by the general assembly. Concerning the Union's activities and projects, the council is the main interface between the members and the Union and gathers four times a year.

#### **7.2.4 A Watershed Event for Swiss and Vaud Muslims: the 2009 Constitutional Vote on Banning New Minarets in Switzerland**

In November 2009, despite opposition from the Swiss government and religious institutions, the Swiss citizens accepted the Swiss far right coalition's<sup>199</sup> referendum on banning the erection of new minarets in Switzerland, with a clear majority of 57.5 percent of voters, the vote against amounting to 42 percent. Since the referendum had been accepted by twenty of Switzerland's twenty-six cantons, the object was added to the Swiss Constitution. Interestingly, the canton of Vaud was among only four Swiss cantons that rejected the referendum, with 53.1 percent of voters. The canton Geneva rejected the referendum with a clear majority of 59.7 percent of voters (Dodd 2015; Gonzalez 2014).

The growing anxiety about Islam compelled beleaguered Muslim communities in Switzerland to leave their almost invisible position within Swiss civil society and start to voice their willingness to defend themselves from being "othered" and discriminated against. After the 2009 vote, most Swiss Muslim associations also expressed their eagerness to be involved in Swiss society to a greater extent for various reasons: (a) a willingness to dissipate their compatriots' fears and concerns regarding Islam and Muslim-related issues; and (b) a necessity to distance themselves from the hard-line Islamic Central Council of Switzerland / Islamische Zentralrat Schweiz (IZRS), that was created in 2009 by a small group of Swiss-Muslim converts during the campaign versus the construction of new minarets. Swiss Muslim associations did not want IZRS to represent and defend the interest of Swiss Muslim communities. Indeed, even if it only represented barely 1 percent of Swiss Muslims, mainly converts and second or third generation immigrants, IZRS was regularly in the headlines due to its provocative and ambiguous stance

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199 The far-right coalition that launched the campaign against the erection of new minarets in Switzerland included the political party SVP (Swiss People's Party) and the small Christian-right Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland (UDF). The promoters of this campaign argued that it was framed as a preventive strike to stop "the creeping Islamisation" of Switzerland. So in their strategy of dealing with alterity, the promoters had a short-sided and essentialising perspective of Islam, as being a "threat to Western (read 'Judeo-Christian') civilisation". (Gonzalez 2014; Haenni and Lathion 2011).

regarding issues related to a literalist approach of Islam and supposed links with various Islamist organisations (Schneuwly-Purdie 2013).

In Vaud, one of the few cantons voting against the referendum, Muslims were no longer invisible: they started to voice their opinions, to move away from a victim/scapegoat stance and asserted themselves as part of Swiss society after the 2009 vote banning the construction of minarets.

### 7.2.5 UVAM's Strategy of Social Visibility

In January 2010 UVAM adopted its strategy of social visibility. As UVAM's president Pascal Gemperli puts it: "Right after the acceptance of the vote against minarets in November 2009, everybody within the community felt uneasy. So we thought of sharing dialogue and ideas within the community. So, in March 2010, we organised our first strategic annual conference known as *Assises de l'UVAM*". After UVAM's *Assises*, the following strategy for Vaud Muslims' social inclusion was adopted. It rests on four components: <sup>200</sup>

*Visibility:* Positioning UVAM as the reference organisation in Vaud and ensuring the following aspects: representing and defending Vaud Muslims' interests; improving their image and visibility in Vaud's population; ensuring transparency in UVAM's activities and opinions to consolidate local population and partners' confidence.

*Needs and positions:* The objective is to ensure that mainstream Vaud society considers its Muslim minority's needs within a climate of dialogue and in a constructive way. So the Union intends to:

- express and communicate Vaud Muslims' needs and opinions, while taking into account the canton's cultural, social, political, and legal context.
- actively take part in the search for constructive solutions in handling Vaud Muslims' related issues by combining various identity layers: Muslim, Vaudois, and Swiss.

*Social inclusion and recognition:* becoming a trustful partner for local social and political actors; ensuring emotional and social recognition of Vaud Muslims; facilitating UVAM's legal recognition in canton Vaud; fostering Vaud Muslims to live as good citizens.

*Consolidation:* enlarging the number of UVAM's members; strengthening existing structures; creating synergies among members, and promoting a climate of brotherhood and well-being.

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200 My translation from French to English: cf. <http://www.uvam.ch/axes-strategiques> (accessed June 30, 2018).

## 7.2.6 UVAM's Occupation of Public Space through Events

After the 2009 vote that created a challenging environment for Swiss Muslim communities, UVAM decided to act. The Union launched a strategy of social visibility by holding various sociocultural events.

### The Annual Conference (Les Assises)

This annual open event aimed to host debates to encourage reflection on issues related to the social inclusion of Vaud Muslims. It was also a strategic event for the Union to confront, discuss, and change its policy when required.

The first annual conference was staged in January 2010 in response to a common willingness to act against the popular acceptance of the vote banning minarets in 2009. So this conference stemmed from UVAM adopting a strategy of public visibility. It mainly targeted Vaud Muslims and UVAM's individual and group members. It also hosted non-Muslim speakers from Vaud's civil society and local authorities. The following Assises in 2011 turned to other issues important for the Vaud Muslim population: "Muslim children in school and the Vaud school"; "the legal recognition of Islam in Vaud: duties and advantages"; "Muslim burial: which solutions for the canton of Vaud?". The format of the event was to host various key speakers and then hold specific interactive workshops as an opportunity for participants to ask questions and express their individual and group concerns about the place of Vaud Muslims in local society. The 2012 edition was titled *Vaud Muslims, All for Recognition*. The following editions in 2013 and 2014 were more strategic events. In 2013, the debates were based on a policy paper developed by UVAM: *Muslims and Society: Needs and Priorities* (UVAM 2013). Among the key speakers were two Swiss scholars with expertise on Islam in Switzerland. The 2014 edition was an important event, since it celebrated UVAM's tenth birthday. The event revolved around four specific workshops with additional experts of the Vaud local society: two sociologists of religion; two Vaud Muslim members of the cantonal parliament; three Christian personalities involved in interreligious dialogue; a Vaud member of cantonal parliament. The 2014 debates and workshops resulted in an important strategic paper for UVAM that summarised the previous achievements (2004–2014) and acts as a roadmap for the next decade (UVAM 2014).<sup>201</sup> The 2015 edition saw the presence of a political member of the cantonal section SVP and the president of the Jewish community of Lausanne and the canton of Vaud, the topic of the annual conference being *Living together between religious communities in*

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201 It is interesting to note that this document uses for its planning activities a methodology widely implemented in project management, the logical framework approach, which gives an overview of a project's objectives, activities, and resources.

*Canton of Vaud.* This opening to debate, with a voice hostile to Muslims in Switzerland and a representative of the local Jewish community, expressed the willingness of UVAM to strengthen institutional and social inclusion. For the 2016 event, a roundtable titled *In Search of Peace*, with a Swiss academic specialising in Swiss Islam, a Christian theologian, and a Buddhist monk was organised. The workshops, gathering participants from the audience and a facilitator, focused on two burning issues: youth radicalisation and citizenship. Among the main conclusions of the youth radicalisation workshop was the necessity of higher rates of involvement of Swiss Muslims in society through taking part in local associations, voting, and being represented on a political level. For the citizenship workshop, two important issues were raised: (a) the individual responsibility of each citizen (the importance of being open to one's neighbours and society; the duty of exemplary behaviour) and (b) the collective responsibility of Swiss Muslim citizens (solidarity; focusing on stronger links among Muslims as a community; partnerships with local educational and political authorities).

The 2017 edition focused on the seventeen Vaud Muslim centres that are part of UVAM and their strategies and activities to constitute plural and contextualised Islam in Vaud, in cooperation with local and cantonal authorities.

The main conclusions of this edition were as follows: (a) the centres need to be social actors fully involved in their regional context; (b) the importance of centres and imams to focus on contextualised Islam addressing the genuine needs of the Vaud Muslim population (such as more religious preaching in French; locally trained and French-speaking imams aware of and knowing the Swiss environment, etc.); (c) the younger Vaud Muslim generations should get attracted and more involved in Muslim centres; (d) Muslim centres should be financed mainly through local resources; if exceptionally external funding is considered, it should be transparent and submitted to the Swiss legal framework regarding non Swiss funding.

### **The Eid Feast**

The Eid-al-Fitr feast is an important religious holiday for Muslims worldwide, since it marks the end of the month of Ramadan. From 2011 onwards, UVAM chose to celebrate this feast in the contextual setting of Vaud. Usually held in September, UVAM decided to make this event a tool for social visibility. The staged event combined various aspects: religious aspects (opening of the event with a quotation of the Qu'ran); recreational aspects (a line-up of various artists and games for children); official aspects (discourses from UVAM's president and various representatives of local authorities and religious communities; the Interknowledge Award).

Interfaith dialogue was emphasised, since (a) invitations to various Vaud religious communities were extended every year and (b) the Inter-knowledge Award was introduced in the 2011 Eid Feast and awarded various Muslim and non-Muslim personalities working to set up bridges between Vaud religious communities. Furthermore, as the event intended to gather families and individuals, games and various recreational activities were also organised, with various stalls of halal food and Muslim-inspired products (books, clothes, fashion items, etc.). The line-up of artists, such as musicians, comedians, and singers, was chosen to represent the diversity of the various Vaud Muslim communities. The artists were local Muslims but also non-Swiss Muslims (mainly from France).

Setting up such an important annual event rested mainly on UVAM's committee, the UVAM members (Muslim centres), and often a group of Lausanne Muslim youth. The sponsors tended to be drawn from UVAM circles and networks of firms and entrepreneurs; a key sponsor was a Swiss-based Muslim charity, Islamic Relief Switzerland. The event also created internal tensions, with some individual and collective members expressing criticism about certain artists not being "Islamic", such as a magician or comedians. However, the committee defended its track record by emphasising the importance of such an event in their strategy of the social visibility of the Vaud Muslim community.

Therefore, both the *Assises* and the Eid Feast show the willingness and increased efforts of UVAM, in a somewhat challenging post-2009 environment, to be regarded as serious and legitimate partners to local and cantonal political authorities and other local religious communities. Furthermore, although the events are religiously inspired, they foreground the diversity of Vaud Muslims' sociocultural references and practices, as evident in the musical line-up, food stalls, and other Muslim-inspired products. They stage and celebrate both 'Swiss/Vaud' and 'Muslim' belongings to display the willingness of the Vaud Muslim community towards social inclusion and legal recognition as a "religious community of public interest" within the Vaud legal framework.

### **7.2.7 Vaud Muslims: Navigating towards Social Inclusion, despite some Drifts towards Social Exclusion**

Vaud Muslims' relationships with Vaud civil society and the local authorities tend towards social inclusion. However, analysing social inclusion does not mean that social exclusion should not also be taken into account (O'Reilly 2005). Therefore, a dialectical approach of the dyad exclusion/inclusion is important to consider when evaluating relationships between Swiss Muslim

communities and their regional/cantonal context. So, visibility is double-edged: willing to be regarded as normal citizens, while being compelled to ask for arrangements to live by one's faith along guaranteed freedoms, is sometimes a "balancing act" (UVAM 2012, 3).<sup>202</sup>

Social inclusion in everyday life for Vaud Muslims remains in its early stages and still sometimes drifts towards social exclusion. However, it seems that within the Vaud context there are positive signs indicating a shift towards including the Muslim communities and Islam in the public imaginary and social systems, even though local authorities remain cautious and intend to keep Muslims centres as discrete as possible. Several recent local stories highlight the tension between social inclusion and sometimes social exclusion.

### **Payerne: Getting a Muslim Centre**

For several years, the association of Vaud Muslims of the city of Payerne<sup>203</sup> had asked the municipal authorities to build a Muslim centre, since most of them had to travel at least 25 kilometres to other similar places in the region (to Moudon in the canton of Vaud, to Fribourg or Morat in the canton of Fribourg) for the Friday prayer. However, in 2011 the local municipality turned down this request, citing problems related to building law and the neighbourhood. To resolve the issue, in March 2013 UVAM with some local partners organised a public meeting between the association of Payerne Muslims, the local population, and the municipality. Christian Catholic and Protestant churches brought their support. This event was a turning point in the negotiation process between the Muslim association and the municipal authorities; it led to the establishment of a Muslim centre that opened in an industrial area in 2014.

### **Vevey: a Former Garage converted into a Muslim Centre**

In 2009, the local Muslim association, an UVAM member, bought a former garage in the centre of Vevey<sup>204</sup> and converted it into a Muslim centre.<sup>205</sup> The 700 square meters of the centre were in poor conditions in terms of health, being stuffy in summer and very cold in winter. So, in 2015, the association

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202 My translation from French to English.

203 The Payerne Muslim association (Association Culturelle Musulmane de Payerne, ACMP) is a member of UVAM. The association includes a majority of Muslims from Albanian/Kosovo, that form around 15 percent of Payerne's population (around 10,000 inhabitants) (Penda Ndiaye 2012).

204 Vevey, a town of around 18,000 inhabitants and located on the north shore of the Lemman Lake, has a Muslim community that represents around 10 percent of its population.

205 It was the third time that the association, founded in 1994, had to move its centre.

decided to renovate the building to improve conditions for their religious and sociocultural events. It asked the town authorities for financial help.<sup>206</sup> The intent was for the Vevey Muslim association to show its eagerness to become socially included within the local society's fabric and not resort to external funding.

Therefore, a public inquiry was launched in 2014. In June 2014, after tense debates, the city council decided to grant 300,000 Swiss francs (out of a total sum of two million Swiss francs for renovation costs), reimbursable over a period of seventeen years. During the centre's renovation process, the city of Vevey lent a provisional space for its Muslim community. The decision of the local authorities is an interesting example of its Muslim community's support and social inclusion, despite numerous protests from the Vevey section of the Swiss People's Party.

### Muslim Cemetery in Lausanne: Protracted Negotiations

As already mentioned, religious issues depend upon cantons in Switzerland. In the case of Vaud, it was only in 2016 that a special Muslim section of a public cemetery opened in the cemetery of Bois-de-Vaux (Lausanne). The opening came after a decade of controversies and protracted negotiations. Indeed, the issue of special Muslim plots in Swiss public cemeteries began to surface in the 2000s.<sup>207</sup> Before then, the majority of deceased Muslims were repatriated to their country of origin. However, with increasing number of Swiss-born Muslims, there has been both a generational shift and also an eagerness to be buried in their home country in specific plots within the public cemetery and not in their parents' country of origin. Burying has become a symbol of social inclusion, to some extent.<sup>208</sup>

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206 The intent was for the Vevey Muslim association to show its eagerness to get socially included within the local society's fabric and not to resort to external funding from rich Arabic countries. As the Vevey imam said it to a local newspaper: "Vevey's financial aid would anchor more the worship place in the town's patrimony. So Veveysans would be proud of their mosque, as well as of their temple or their church. And the relationships that has been existing between the Muslim center and the local authorities for twenty years would be more strengthened." (Our translation from French to English, cf. Boillat 2014).

207 The first Muslim plot in a communal cemetery in Switzerland opened in Petit-Saconnex (Geneva). Then came Basel and Bern (2000), Lugano (2002), Zürich (2004), Liestal (2007), Thun (2009), La Chaux-de-Fonds (2011), Biel (2011), Winthertur (2013). (Gigon 2012).

208 As the Swiss Islam expert Andreas Tunger Zanetti put it in an interview: "There is no question that the number of Muslim burials in Switzerland will rise as the younger generation, who were born here and who have their roots here, grow old" (Gigon 2012).

To handle this issue, all Vaud Muslim organisations (UVAM, the Mosque of Lausanne and the small Swiss-Muslim Association 1421) met to discuss with the City of Lausanne authorities.<sup>209</sup> The trend in Switzerland has been to obtain Muslim plots in a public cemetery for several reasons: having a plot in a private cemetery is expensive<sup>210</sup>; being buried for a Swiss Muslim in a Swiss public cemetery also connotes a sense of belonging to Switzerland. Furthermore, a compromise had to be found regarding the manner of burial: the use of a coffin was made compulsory, even though in the Muslim tradition the body should be washed and shrouded in cloth. The public cemetery of Bois-de-Vaux created a Muslim plot to enable bodies to be placed in graves necessarily positioned with the head facing Mecca, even though the public cemetery had a quite restrictive architecture and is classified as an historical monument.

The Lausanne Muslim plot opened only for Muslims residing in Vaud. It operates according to an agreement on paying concessions for burial plots for a duration of thirty years, which can be renewed. As UVAM's president mentioned: "The project has something innocuous, because the Municipality (of Lausanne) has granted us a confessional space of concessions, as the law requires it. But for us, it is very important. From birth to graveyard, Muslims are linked to this canton and will be able to be buried" (quoted in Zünd 2015).

Various Islamophobic acts of vandalism against the Lausanne Muslim plot took place. In 2015, thirteen Muslim graves were vandalised; later in October 2017, fifteen graves were damaged and sprayed with Islamophobic writings such as "Muslims out of Switzerland" or "No to communitarian cemeteries". These incidents were unanimously condemned by Vaud civil society (the authorities, political parties, other religious groupings, etc.), who stressed the social inclusion of local Muslims in Vaud and their efforts in interfaith dialogue and the promotion of religious peace. A demonstration organised by a Swiss left-wing political group, *solidaritéS*, joined by UVAM, various political parties, civil society associations, and individuals (500 people) denounced these Islamophobic acts and highlighted the local civil society's solidarity with Vaud Muslims. However, after the incidents, UVAM did not take the lead to denounce them. They joined the demonstration, on the invitation of *solidaritéS*. This demonstration was not only a platform against

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209 Despite of the heterogeneity within Muslim communities in Switzerland (ethnic, sociocultural, spiritual affiliation, etc.), there was a unitary discourse regarding the issue of Muslim cemeteries in Switzerland (Burkhalter 2001, 3). The Vaud case is a good example, as both contending Vaud Muslim associations (UVAM and the Mosque of Lausanne) sat together with the small Swiss-Muslim Association 1421 to negotiate with the town of Lausanne authorities.

210 See details in Chapter 4 for the Geneva case.

Islamophobia, since left-wing groups and associations denounced the far-right political agenda.<sup>211</sup>

### **Navigating between Social Exclusion and Inclusion: the Prélaz Mosque Issue**

Using a conceptualisation of social positions developed by Agamben (1998), I apply the dialectical concepts of “exclusive inclusion” and “inclusive exclusion” to a specific episode that recently involved a local Muslim centre in Lausanne, UVAM, and the Vaud public sphere (the local media, the authorities, etc.). The Muslim centre Al Bukhari, known as the Prélaz Mosque, created in 2002 and situated in the popular multicultural quarter of Prélaz in Lausanne, has been at the heart of several events that brought it to exclusion and then inclusion. This centre, a member of UVAM, had its membership put on hold by the Union because of a financial contribution backlog and bad management issues.

The centre also received negative media coverage for incidents. The first incident took place in 2015. It focused on a young Swiss Bosnian of Lausanne attending the Al Bukhari centre who supposedly became radicalised and travelled to Syria to join Daesh. UVAM also highlighted that the management of this centre was unclear and problematic because of a minority of Bosnians attending it. Another incident in 2016 followed a video shot by a neighbour of the centre, showing several people praying outside the mosque in the street. This incident was covered by an article in a local newspaper and triggered contrasting reactions among local political parties (Lugon 2016). However, the Lausanne authorities downplayed the incident, as there were no other security-related issues. UVAM reacted to these accusations by organising a working group to improve the management of the centre. It also organised a meeting with the Municipality of Lausanne on social and security concerns to improve the centre’s management. It came to light that the centre had limited relationships with its neighbourhood and the local church and that most people attending it were socially precarious (asylum seekers) and had limited knowledge of French. Therefore, in September 2016, a strategy to improve the centre’s management was devised between UVAM and local authorities (UVAM 2016).

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211 Even if the process of Vaud Muslims’ social inclusion may move in the right direction, however UVAM has still limited resources and room for manoeuvre to mobilise Vaud Muslims. It is also interesting to notice that after the end of the demonstration against Islamophobia, left-wing groups and activists continued to demonstrate, joined by a group of Turkish Kurds claiming the liberation of Abdullah Öcalan, the founder of the militant Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) (Haddou 2017).

The Union decided to follow up the centre's management by designating two UVAM delegates to the centre's committee. These delegates were given a right to veto any decisions made by the centre's committee. The umbrella organisation also demanded measures of financial adjustment. Meetings between the centre, UVAM, and local authorities were held twice a month to monitor the centre's management. The centre was also asked to open its doors to its neighbourhood and get involved in interfaith dialogue with the local church. An official imam was designated, surrounded by a renewed committee. Renovation work of the centre was also implemented. Furthermore, internal rules were displayed on the centre's walls and two surveillance cameras installed. The presence of people with an extremist discourse was banned. After almost one year, improvement and changes began to be noticed. Some weeks later, the centre, whose membership to UVAM had put on hold since 2015, reintegrated the ranks of the Vaud Muslims umbrella organisation under tight conditions.

So, this “inclusive exclusion” implemented by UVAM towards one of its members in close cooperation with local authorities demonstrates the eagerness of both actors to enable Vaud Muslims' social inclusion. However, even if the Al Bukhari centre was reintegrated into the ranks of the Union and socially included in the local environment, “exclusive inclusion” towards Vaud Muslims still remains. The issue of Vaud Muslims' social inclusion seems to move forwards, as suggested by the recent refusal of the vote ‘Against Religious Fundamentalism’ launched by the Vaud section of the Swiss People's Party, eight years after the acceptance of the minaret ban by Swiss citizens.

### **The initiative ‘Against Religious Fundamentalism’: Vaud SVP's failure to stigmatise Vaud Muslims**

The Vaud section of SVP launched a cantonal initiative in November 2016 to fight the cantonal law on the recognition of religious communities, especially UVAM's endeavours to gain the status of public interest. Its aim was to win thirty seats in the Vaud Great Council in 2017 and get a deputy to the State Council (Bournoud 2016).<sup>212</sup>

As the Vaud section of SVP wrote in its own terms in a 2016 justification document: “Our cantonal Constitution provides for the recognition of religious communities as institutions of public interest without precisely limiting the framework. The initiative ‘Against Religious Fundamentalism’ aims to introduce a legal framework to prevent potential excesses and to hinder fun-

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212 In the Swiss legal system, the cantonal popular initiative allows citizens to adopt, modify, or abrogate a cantonal law. To achieve this goal, the proposal needs to gather 12,000 valid signatures in a period of four months (my translation from French; [www.vd.ch/index.php?id=1019718](http://www.vd.ch/index.php?id=1019718)).

damentalist leaders from taking a community hostage” (*my translation*; UDC Vaud 2016, 4) The document further stated: “The pious Muslim who lives outside an Islamic land will naturally have the urge to make his environment consistent with the divine teachings” (*my translation*; UDC Vaud 2016, 7). The initiative was heavily criticised by local politicians and religious communities from the outset.<sup>213</sup> For UVAM’s president, it showed the anti-Muslim approach of SVP: “I have not seen any article talking about this initiative, nor mentioning another community other than Muslims. What bothers me is the discriminatory character of this perspective” (Pascal Gemperli, quoted by Albinfo 2017).

Alongside these criticisms from Vaud civil society, the launch of the SVP’s popular initiative quickly became a failure, since the initiative’s committee only gathered 3,000 signatures out of the 12,000 needed by the cantonal legal system. The reasons behind this failure were the lack of information about the initiative amongst the local population; the non-involvement of some Vaud SVP members who disagreed with the initiative; the opposition of political parties and religious communities against this initiative; and, eventually, the refusal of the Vaud population to stigmatise the Vaud Muslim community again.<sup>214</sup>

### **Vaud: a Pragmatic approach towards Vaud Muslims**

Vaud was one of the few cantons to refuse the vote banning the construction of new minarets in 2009. As already indicated, the town of Vevey supported its Muslim community by helping it to renovate the local Muslim centre. In the above episode, the local population refused to back up the SVP’s initiative ‘Against Religious Fundamentalism’. Through these various measures, Vaud has begun to promote the social inclusion of its Muslim community and intends to both normalise and favour religious diversity through the cantonal law on religious communities’ recognition. Furthermore, the cantonal political authorities have accepted that a local Muslim community (UVAM) may be legally recognised as a religious community of “public interest”, which shows

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213 As the president of the PLR Vaud (radical political trend) Frédéric Borloz said it: “Personally I feel concerned by such a project. Nobody wishes to wake a ‘war of religions’. One should be very cautious with this issue”. (*My translation from French*; quoted by Bournoud 2016).

214 An interesting point of view on this failure was made by the Vaud National Councilor Ada Marra (Socialist Party): “I am grateful to the Vaud population to not have let herself be deceived through this propropaganda.” For Marra, this law on religious communities of public interest is “well framed, precise and can prevent excesses” (quoted by Hallet 2017).

the state adopting a role of “selecting religious organisations and regulating religious diversity” (Campiche 2015, 15).

As Béatrice Métraux, the cantonal minister in charge of institutions and security issues, explained to a local newspaper:

The law handles the notion of community, not religion. Recognising a community does not allow this community to behave in a manner that the Vaud society calls for. Islam as such is not examined. It is a community as an institution that may be recognised if it complies to imposed rules. This recognition intends to ensure that religious communities are well grounded in society. (*my translation*; Métraux, quoted by Chuard 2016)

### 7.3 Conclusion: Still a Long Way towards the Social Inclusion of Vaud Muslims

As already discussed, if religious recognition is a cantonal matter, then it is up to the cantons to acknowledge the plurality of religious belongings and communities. The canton of Basel was the first in Switzerland to change its constitution to recognise other religious communities under strict conditions. Vaud followed this trend. Such “exclusive inclusion” means that the Vaud authorities outline the criteria, conditions, and mechanisms for granting cantonal recognition to religious communities.<sup>215</sup>

As this chapter has analysed it, since the 2009 vote, UVAM has conducted a strategy of social visibility to promote Vaud Muslims’ social inclusion into the local society. It rested on the following aspects: (a) an occupation of the local public space through regular sociocultural inclusive and citizenship-oriented events and regular appearances in the media; (b) setting up strong relationships with other religious communities (interfaith dialogue) and cantonal political authorities; and eventually (c) regular activities and active commitment to be a fully engaged Vaud Muslim social actor.

These endeavours led to UVAM submitting its recognition file to the cantonal authorities in February 2018. Furthermore, Pascal Gemperli who has been an active president of the Union since the post-2009 vote, left the presidency in March 2018 after two mandates and was replaced by Sandrine

215 The legal framework was laid out in 2003 by the Vaud cantonal Constitution, then later followed by the 2007 law on religious communities’ recognition and relations between the cantonal state (canton of Vaud) and religious communities of public interest and eventually concluding with the 2014 implementation regulations. This formal process may take up to ten years to get legal recognition for UVAM from the cantonal authorities.

Ruiz, formerly a vice-president since 2014, who became the first female president of a Swiss Muslim cantonal umbrella organisation in Switzerland.

Even if the future of UVAM seems promising, it needs to be placed in a larger picture: the development of Muslim communities in Switzerland. Since the 2009 vote banning the construction of minarets, Swiss Muslim communities had to move from regarding themselves as scapegoats to asserting themselves as fully grounded in Swiss society, defending themselves from being “othered” and regarded as “a threat”. However, the visibility of Muslims and Islam in Switzerland (and in Vaud) shows that they are *Swiss* Muslims and that Islam constitutes a religion belonging to Switzerland’s religious plurality. However, this new visibility is ambivalent, as on one hand it is a sign of social inclusion, on the other, however, it can be regarded as “aggressive”, because it may “challenge” dominant “anti-Islam” discourses within the Swiss public sphere.

Within the Swiss secular context, Swiss Muslims want to live their faith on a daily basis and find their place in a society that it is now “home” for most of them. In the specific case of Vaud, the trend is similar. For instance, most of the Muslim centres that are part of UVAM are not only religious, but are also linked with social, cultural, recreational, and social inclusion/citizenship-oriented activities. Imams are nowadays not only religious guides, they need to have multifaceted skills, acting as an advisor, psychologist, and social worker for local Muslims requesting their assistance and being an interlocutor with other religious community leaders and the local/cantonal authorities. As already shown, UVAM is a Swiss and Vaud-based organisation promoting the Muslim population’s social inclusion into the Vaud society on both individual and local bases. Indeed, it has become the main Muslim partner for local religious communities and local/cantonal authorities. As the former UVAM president Pascal Gemperli puts it on his personal blog: “Islam in the canton of Vaud has always respected constitutional freedom and the legal framework, adopting its values and democratic principles. It intends to follow a long process of political control to achieve a recognition of public interest, that would be indeed only the recognition of an old reality” (Gemperli 2018).

Therefore, the Vaud Muslim community is still in the making, since the opportunities for full institutional and social inclusion are real.

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**“Radicalisation”  
and Gender:  
Islamic Swiss  
Organisations in  
the Public Sphere**



## 8 Swiss Islamic Organisations and the Challenge of Radicalisation

*Miryam Eser Davolio and Elisa Banfi*

### 8.1 Introduction: Challenges in the Definition and Understanding of Radicalisation

When Islamic organisations in western countries, including Switzerland, confront the phenomenon of jihadist radicalisation, they face a biased set of interpretations and perspectives. The first problem is how to define the phenomenon, since religious concepts and the complex geopolitical context require prudent and deliberate consideration. In this chapter, we use the term *jihadist radicalisation* for pragmatic reasons to adopt the most well-known term. We are conscious of the different meanings of the word *jihad*: its misuse in the context of extremism<sup>216</sup> with its focus on “holy war”, and *jihad* in the religious sense in the Quran referring to internal as well as external efforts to be a good Muslim or believer.

In addition, the term *radical* can also concern various other types of political or social orientation, fundamentally meaning the contrary of “moderation”. Radicalisation indicates a relative position on a continuum of organised opinion (Sedgwick 2010), making it a vague term. *Radicalisation* can be defined as a process whereby an individual or group adopts increasingly extreme political or religious ideas and goals, becoming convinced that their achievement justifies extreme methods and even violence (Ongering 2007). For McCauley and Moskalenko (2011, 4), radicalisation is the “development of beliefs, feelings and actions in support of any group or cause in conflict”. In contrast to activism, radicalism is understood as a readiness to engage in illegal and violent political action (Sedgwick 2010). According to Vidino (2015), jihadist radicalisation is taken to mean the process of adopting an extreme belief system, which sees a partial interpretation of jihad and the

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216 The term *Islamist extremism* or *Islamist radicalisation* is also widespread, but less so than *jihadist radicalisation*.

associated violence against “infidels” as a method to effect the desired societal change (the establishment of an “Islamic state”).

Kundnani (2012) argues for a focus on radical jihadism as a political movement, thus shifting attention away from individuals and their deficits towards groups and their interpretation of political and social problems. In this sense, it is crucial to understand what stimulates the processes that drive young people towards jihadist radicalisation and what worldviews, experiences, needs, and problems act as push and pull factors on the path to radicalisation.

As has been shown in other studies, jihadists do not fit a “typical profile” (Steinberg 2015; Heinke and Person 2015) but are instead highly heterogeneous in terms of their social background, education, socioeconomic status, and so on. This is documented for the Swiss context, too (Eser Davolio et al. 2015). Although some of the persons involved can be unstable (Roy 2015), it would nevertheless be false to see jihadist radicalisation as a problem of personal deficits – nor of social or cultural problems (Schiffauer 2000). Wiktorowicz (2004) notes the importance of social influence in leading a person to join a radicalised group; he describes the process of radicalisation, moving from cognitive opening (receptivity to new ideas and world views) via a frame alignment, and socialisation in the extremist group that facilitates indoctrination, identity-construction, and value changes.

As far as security studies are concerned, their attention is focused above all on the factors that cause Muslims to support a radical interpretation of Islam that leads to violence – leaving aside questions of the context in which this violence occurs. One of the many consequences of this approach is the lack of reference to the role played by western governments in stoking conflicts in the Middle East (Kundnani 2012). The process of radicalisation is complex (Villiger 2017), we need to not only examine the historical conditions of each conflict in its totality but also the circumstances particular to each territory, and how an individual relates to those circumstances.

According to Al-Lami (2009), a clear distinction must be drawn between religious fundamentalism and religious conservatism, including Salafism, which rejects militant jihad on the one hand, and violent, militant radicalisation on the other. In this context we also have to consider the instrumentalisation of Islam by various stakeholders in the Middle East and elsewhere, who promote Islamism<sup>217</sup> and mobilise fighters and resources for wars and social influences to gain religious-political power. The phenomenon of jihadist radicalisation extends beyond the problem of jihad tourists or foreign fighters, since a growing number of sympathisers tend to advocate

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217 Islamism advocates that public and political life should be guided by Islamic principles; it is interchangeable with the terms *Islamic fundamentalism* and *political Islam* (Poljarevic 2014).

violence as a mean of achieving their goals (Frindre et al. 2011). Often, the individuals attracted by such ideologies are illiterate religious believers: since their knowledge of the Koran is limited, it is easy to influence and radicalise them (Dantschke 2015). They confront society with issues similar to those of other forms of extremism and are considered a threat to security and its shared values.

*Extremist* generally refers to movements and parties, ideas and attitudes or patterns of behaviour that reject the democratic constitutional state, the division of power, the multi-party system, and the right to opposition. Extremists replace political opposition with the distinction between friend and foe. As a result, they firmly reject other opinions and interests and believe in certain, allegedly irrefutable politico-social ideas. Here an interlinking of interpretations with paradox effects can be observed: on the one hand, the societies in western countries tend to stigmatise Muslim minorities as “suspect communities” (Kundnani 2012, 96), and on the other hand, radical preachers and IS-propaganda accuses western societies of Islamophobia and racism, convincing Muslim immigrants of the perception that they are not desired, refused, and excluded, in order to mobilise them against western countries. Furthermore, western societies confronted by IS-terrorism try to fix and localise the danger, often pointing their finger to mosques as only place they can find that looks suspicious to them (Müller et al. 2018). The phenomena of jihadist radicalisation in social networks and the worldwide web is fluid and not easy to fix.

The topography of jihadist radicalisation thus makes it difficult for Muslim organisations to find a common understanding of and a position towards this phenomenon inside their own organism and towards the outside (local society, media, politicians etc.).

## **8.2 Islamic Organisations Facing the Susceptibility of the Second Generation and the Phenomena of (Re-)Conversion**

Given that Islam in Switzerland is quite a “new religion”, Islamic organisations generally provide the first immigration generation, the second and sometimes even the third generation with religious services, creating spaces for the religious and social activities of the community. They educate children and adolescents to prepare them for a religious life, so must be able to confront and discuss radical ideas and influences – often transmitted from the outside (the internet, radical preachers, etc.).

Since jihadist radicalisation especially regards the second generation and converted Muslims (Eser Davolio et al. 2015), special attention is paid to the context of adolescence and young adulthood (15–25 years). During this transitional period, young people begin to develop their own life plans during adolescence and start defining themselves in a professional, social, and political context. In migration societies such as Switzerland, gaining a sense of social belonging – not to mention national allegiance – is a key aspect of adolescent (self-) positioning. This is framed by the *dominant societal perception of belonging and non-belonging* (Mecheril and Hoffarth 2006). Puberty is a phase of heightened susceptibility to extreme positions and lifestyles as well as errors in judgement that may cause harm to others (Heinke and Person 2015), since it combines immature cognitive control and forward planning with a greater willingness to take risks. Therefore, adolescence can pose the danger of young people being drawn towards extremist positions, regardless of whether or not they come from a migrant background.

Within this general framework of theories on youth, King (2006) and King and Koller (2006) postulate that adolescents with a migration history find themselves in a special situation in the sense that they additionally have to reconsider their relationship with “family issues” related to migration, e.g. how the family interprets the reasons for migration or reacts to the experience of social marginalisation in western countries, including Switzerland.

Another reason why redefining the relationships between young people and their families – a constitutive part of the transition to adulthood – is so challenging for those from a migrant background is that the process takes place in the context of social marginalisation and devaluation (Mecheril and Hoffarth 2006; Mey and Rorato 2010). Social abasement not only affects the individual in question but the family as a whole, thus making the adolescent process of detachment from close family ties complicated and ambivalent. On the one hand, it implies the individual distancing themselves from the stigma of where they come from, while on the other it means abandoning the very context they had previously relied on to protect them from painful experiences of social rejection.

The highly politicised, exclusionary debate regarding national identity in Switzerland is probably of greater relevance to the perception of a lack of social acceptance than inequalities in education and work, since it particularly affects the children of immigrants. The introduction of simplified naturalisation for second-generation immigrants has been rejected in three separate referendums (1984, 1992, 2004). But even naturalisation is no guarantee of inclusion as individuals often continue to encounter marginalisation and discrimination because of their name, for example for job applications, despite their Swiss passport. As a result, the denial of belonging (“we Muslims are

also part of this society”) despite a person’s best efforts can lead to frustration and resignation – or, in some cases, embracing radical positions.

The anti-minaret initiative, which was put to the vote in 2009, and the debates associated with it, can be seen as an expression of the “Islamisation” of non-belonging, where Islam as a faith becomes the focal characteristic of non-belonging, transcending all issues of foreign origin. “I am a product of the anti-minaret initiative,” says one young man who converted to Islam but only decided to take up organised action following the anti-minaret initiative (Sheikhzadegan 2013, 62).

This is where Salafism can capture the attention of young people with its ideology of victimisation (Glaser 2015) and its promise of identity and greater recognition, appealing to a sense of justice and conveying the message that proponents will become part of a large community which claims to follow nothing but the truth (Dantschke 2015). Salafism must be seen as a movement that shares common breeding ground with jihadism – they both attract young Muslims of the second generation and converts – although Salafism should not be seen as the roots or origin of jihadism (Roy 2017). The process by which young people are drawn to fundamentalist Islam can also constitute an expression of protest, an attempt to distance themselves as far as possible from their parents’ world-view. In such cases, the wearing of Salafist dress should likewise be seen as an attempt to provoke (Roy 2017).

The majority have not experienced any serious form of religious socialisation or education that would enable them to take a critical view of religious content (Dantschke 2015). In the case of young women attracted to Salafism, the following push factors must also be taken into consideration: first, wearing a hijab or niqab makes them stand out, as a result of which they get into daily microconflicts in school and so on and are more frequently exposed to hostility and discrimination. Second, humanitarian motives and frustration at international inaction over the suffering of the Syrian population are often important (Dantschke 2015).

The pathway to joining such sect-like Salafist groups or jihadist groups is linked to typical marginalisation processes, such as the creation of alternative worlds of meaning and belief and the propagation of a black-and-white world view, which can lead to a loss of reality and an undifferentiated perception of differing opinions, not to mention opposition within the group (Waldmann 2011). Black-and-white thinking is also transposed to the assessment of international conflicts and ultimately leads to a victim ideology that is linked to both virulent anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism (such as the Israel-Palestine conflict) (Steinberg 2014). Consequently, young people radicalised in this way see themselves as the avant-garde of a religious revolution with strict social and moral controls (Hamed 2014), who follow

a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, reject all social and political modernisation and aspire to de-westernise the world (Wichmann 2013).

Such a reinterpretation of social and political connections culminates in the jihadist ideology in the disdain of so-called unbelievers, but also the worth of the believers' own lives, due to an apocalyptic view of the future (Roy 2017).

### **8.3 Methodology**

The empirical analysis of this chapter is based on the analysis of qualitative interviews conducted across the whole country Switzerland between April 2015 and June 2015 (see Annexe A for details on the ten interviews realised in Italian- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland). Through the interviews, we mainly explored two analytical axes: (1) the impact of the radicalisation issue on the perception and experiences of discrimination; and (2) the forms of activism in Islamic associations in western Switzerland and Ticino that counter the radicalisation of young Muslims.

The interviews were completed with additional information gathered from concerned cantonal services (Cantonal Office for Child Protection, La Chaux-de-Fonds (interview realised by Elisa Banfi 05.06.2015); the 'Contact Group-Muslims'/Office of Multicultural Cohesion, canton of Neuchâtel (interview realised by Elisa Banfi 02.06.2015); and Office for the Integration of Foreigners, canton of Geneva (interview realised by Elisa Banfi 22.06.2015).

### **8.4 Radicalisation as well as the Perceptions and Experiences of Discrimination across the Islamic Associations**

More than half of the associations interviewed agreed that the radicalisation phenomenon has an impact on the discrimination against the Muslim community in manifold ways. Confirming what the academic literature has shown in other national contexts (Fetzer and Soper 2005; Helbling 2010, 2014; Duderija and Rane 2019), the interviewed Swiss Islamic associations assert that, following the terrorist attacks in Europe between 2003 and 2015 and the departure of young European people to engage in the jihadist groups abroad, the stigmatisation of the Muslim community has increased. The perception of the interlinkage between discrimination, stigmatisation, and radicalisation takes different forms according to cantons and the types of associations.

In the canton of Geneva, two associations – Meyrin’s Muslim Cultural Association / Association Culturelle Musulmane Meyrinoise (ACMM) and the Geneva Islamic Cultural Foundation / Fondation Culturelle Islamique de Genève (FIC) – pointed out how stigmatisation stemming from the radicalisation phenomenon results in difficulties for religious women and young people in improving their professional integration. The two associations reveal different organisational structures. In fact, the ACMM is a municipal local association, structured to promote citizen values and democratic forms of participation (Fetzer and Soper 2005; Helbling 2010, 2014; Duderija and Rane 2019); however, the Geneva Islamic Cultural Foundation is managed by the state of Saudi Arabia, which also finances the organisation’s fees and staff salaries. Its executive board comprises representatives of the Muslim World League and the state of Saudi Arabia (Bennani-Chraïbi et al. 2011; Khan 2011; Banfi 2018). Both associations played a divergent role in the history of the Islamic associations in the canton of Geneva<sup>218</sup>, but they converge in observing similar impacts of the debate on radicalisation and increasing barriers in the access to employment opportunities for young Muslims.

In the canton of Vaud, the president of the cantonal umbrella association, the Union of Muslim Associations of Vaud / Union des Associations Musulmanes de Vaud (UVAM) observed that the stigmatisation of the Swiss Muslim community encourages people to take refuge in Islamism. In his interview, he stated that jihad is a noble concept in Islam and that radical Islamists are misusing it and talking fraudulently about jihad to attract people. For him, the problem relates to the interpretation of the basic principles of Islam and the definition of what Islam is or is not. Furthermore, he addresses two critiques: one to an out-group actor, the media, for the creation of a false link between radicalisation and Islam, and the other to in-group actors, Muslims who strengthen this link. A critique of in-group actors also came from the representative of the Integration Cultural and Religious Albanian Centre / Centre d’Intégration Culturel et Religieux Albanais (CICRA), who stressed that Muslims are sometimes responsible as the producers of a negative image of Islam, which has a deleterious impact on reality. The imam of the CICRA highlighted the proactive role that Muslims can play in countering forms of discrimination by changing the image and reality of Swiss Islam.

In the canton of Neuchâtel, the Cultural Association of Muslim Women of Switzerland / Association Culturelle des Femmes Musulmanes de Suisse

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218 The ACMM has paved the way to reduce the isolation of Islamic organisations from a network of non-Muslim associations and institutional actors. The Geneva Islamic Cultural Foundation’s membership has increased through different events and it has addressed the non-democratic nature of the Islamic leadership and the external interference of foreigner countries on the Swiss Islamic centres.

(ACFMS) described the influence of terrorist events on the stigmatisation of Muslims in the country. Those in the organisation fear negative consequences for young Muslims due to the negative and hostile environment. Especially after January 2015<sup>219</sup>, the association and its members were shocked in the face of public positioning against Islam in the region. For that association, their counteraction must take two main forms: on the one hand, more careful religious teaching inside the Muslim community and, on the other hand, a social engagement to counter racism, Islamophobia, and unemployment outside the borders of the religious community.

However, not all associations associated the discourse on radicalisation with the more unfavourable collective feeling against Muslims. Four associations expressed the conviction that other factors led to the rise in the hostilities against Muslims in Switzerland. In the canton of Fribourg, the Muslims' Association of Fribourg / Associations des Musulmans de Fribourg, also described a climate of increasing discrimination against Muslims (insults, threats, and forms of discrimination in the labour market). However, the organisation identified the voting on the 9<sup>th</sup> February<sup>220</sup> as a pivotal moment in terms of more than the problem of radicalisation. The ban on minarets distressed the association and the general assembly (formed by 80 percent of Swiss citizen members). In fact, they perceived the ban and the political campaign related to it as an act against the religious rights of Swiss citizens practising Islam. In the canton of Ticino, the two interviewed associations the Islamic Association without Frontiers / Associazione Islam senza Frontiere and the Iranian cultural association / Associazione Culturale Iranica denounced the climate of intimidation and discrimination that would be produced by the Italian policies and especially the discourse of the Lega Nord. For these associations, people's ignorance of the Islamic reality in Ticino also contributes to increased fears and hateful speech.

Active in the cantons of Vaud and Valais, Aigle's Muslim Association / Association Musulmane d'Aigle (ASCMC) mainly associated the discrimination with the precarious conditions of Islamic places of worship in

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- 219 On 7 January 2015, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi killed twelve people and injured eleven others in the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris.
- 220 Beginning in 2007, the Committee Against the Construction of Minarets in Switzerland proposed amending Article 72 of the Swiss Constitution by adding a paragraph on the ban of minarets by an initiative. Article 138 of the Swiss Constitution states that 100,000 citizens can, within eighteen months of the official publication of their initiative, propose a complete revision of the Constitution. By 28 July 2008, 113,540 signatures had been validated. Once validated by the Federal Assembly, the proposal was submitted to the vote of the people. On 29 November 2009, the initiative was accepted by 57.5 percent of the votes and by twenty-four cantons with a participation rate of 53.76 percent.

Switzerland. For members of the ASCMC, Islam in Switzerland must come out of the “cellars” and have visible and enjoyable places of worship in order to positively influence the Swiss Islamic community. However, since January 2015, according to the president of the association, the media’s amplification of the Charlie Hebdo massacre has had major negative consequences for the situations of Swiss Muslims.

Summing up, a conspicuous number of associations have specified that the discourses and events concerning radicalisation are a relevant cause of the worsening conditions of the Muslims in Switzerland. However, some associations qualify other explanatory factors, such as the influence of foreign policies and the initiative campaign of 9<sup>th</sup> February.

## 8.5 Counteracting Jihadism and the Radicalisation of Youth within Islamic Associations

The majority of associations display an interest in and commitment to discussing topics related to jihadism and radicalisation with their members, especially the youngest ones.

In the canton of Vaud, the interviews showed how the umbrella cantonal association and its affiliated associations take different positions on anti-radicalisation activities. For instance, some associations, such as CICRA, prefer avoiding any risk by expelling from the centre any members, young or adult, who manifest any radical thinking and preventing people with radical ideas from attending the centre.<sup>221</sup>

The president of the UVAM stated that Swiss Muslim associations do not have any responsibility for departures to Syria because these departures do not involve their members and that they should also fight the “digital Islamic populism” that uses social networks and the internet to recruit young Muslims. However, he added that the UVAM does not have the economic resources and technical capacity to fight against jihadist discourse in the blogosphere.

By assuming an intermediate position, the ASCMC, after the events of the January 2015, has met more often with its Muslim members in order to reinforce a peaceful view of Islam through Koranic courses and the dismantlement of the negative and violent interpretations of Islam that blogs and websites on the internet broadcast. The president of the ASCMC emphasised that Muslims in Switzerland are mainly learning how to practise Islam

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221 In Ticino, many members of the Iranian Cultural Association fear that the attendance to the centre could harm their public reputation. For that reason, speeches about radicalisation or jihadism are avoided in order to not create panic among members of the association.

through the intermediation of Swiss Muslim associations. In his opinion, associations and mosques are therefore crucial, especially today, in combatting and counteracting the incorrect information about Islam produced by virtual and digital actors. In Aigle, after moving the Islamic centre to downtown, the members of ASCMC have felt more committed than before to the territory. Members of the ASCMC observed that people, Muslims and non-Muslims, who have questions or fears stemming from the internet sources of information can inform themselves more properly through the courses on Islam proposed in the mosque. The moving of the Islamic centre to downtown, in the view of the president and some executive committee members, creates more opportunities to organise courses for youths and adults to unmask jihadist information about Islam. This way, the trust among members can counterbalance the influence of digital actors and internet information.

This position is similar to that of the Muslim Associations of Fribourg in the canton of Fribourg, which is that organised public debates on ethical issues through proposed courses on Islam promote the religious practices compatible with Swiss customs and laws. Also, in Ticino, the Iranian Cultural Association organises religious classes for children and would like to organise conferences for a young public to denounce the crimes of ISIS using an Islamic perspective.

In the canton of Geneva, between 2014 and 2015, the Islamic Cultural Foundation of Geneva observed a breakdown of the traditional methods of transmitting religious knowledge to young people. Increasingly, young people attending their mosques use YouTube, Facebook, and other social networks to learn Islamic norms. According to the imams of the foundation, digital learning is dangerous and must be countered by the relationships with the imams in the mosque. The imams and the directors of the mosque in 2015 aimed to counteract the radical thought concerning Islam by organising many debates with young members to enable them to speak about fears and doubts with imams.

However, between 2015 and 2017, several people attending the prayer at the mosque of the Islamic Cultural Foundation of Geneva were accused of being in contact with jihadists. Two of them, young adults, departed to join Daesh.

As a consequence, the media and some political parties accused the space that was created by the foundation to counteract the Daesh propaganda of being, on the contrary, a space of radicalisation that played a role in the departure of the young foreigner fighters. Furthermore, the *Tribune de Genève*

accused two imams of the foundation of being *fichés S* in France – and finally they were fired in December 2017.<sup>222</sup>

Another case of direct intervention against radicalisation has been occurring in the canton of Neuchâtel. In La Chaux-de-Fonds, the ACFMS has been trying to communicate with other civil society actors to identify cases of radicalisation. However, since the first departures to Syria from Europe, all associations have been more attentive to the needs of their young members in their discussions of cases of extremism. According to the ACFMS, young people react more instinctively to discrimination than adults do.

Moreover, the association of La Chaux-de-Fonds was involved in a process of deradicalisation with a girl that the Cantonal Office of Child Protection had assigned to it. The girl was not a member of the association. The association agreed to host her by answering the request of state services to explain to the girl that her approach to the Koran was not “correct”.

In this exemplar case, the involvement of the Islamic associations in deradicalisation projects was very problematic for the association and the teenager. The teenager had been placed in different state youth residences since her childhood. Her parents were of immigrant origin and of the Christian tradition. In 2010, the social assistance in charge of the young girl proposed to the family a new placement in a state residence, but the family refused and broke the link with the Office of Child Protection. In 2012, the tension with the parents violently escalated and the girl renewed contact with the assistant. At this moment, in the middle of a violent adolescent crisis, the young girl began to wear the headscarf and niqab, she was assessed as having converted to Islam. This appearance of a religious symbol created a double reaction both by the state actors and her family. The tension with family concerning the conversion became very violent and the social assistant in charge of her lost the emotional contact with the girl. In fact, the girl accused state civil officers of being racist and anti-Muslim.

Since the appearance of the religious symbol (the headscarf but especially the niqab), the state actors have not dealt with her as a minor individual (as she was) but as an adult allegedly converted to a not-compatible religion. The minor was not seen as a young minor girl with social rights but as a problematic Muslim convert. In 2013, the situation worsened and the girl started to travel in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille to join radical mosques. The risk of her departing to Syria was estimated to be plausible. In November 2013, the situation exploded when the state residence in which social assistance had placed her expelled her. The Director of the residence required that she take off the niqab in order to be accepted into the state foyer, but the girl refused.

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222 *Fiché S* is an individual considered to threaten the national security by state authorities (Marzouki 2010; Gautron and Monniaux 2016).

Meanwhile, the relationships with her family became so violent that she had to be placed, for her safety. Thus, the Director of the residence called social services and suggested that it send the girl to an Islamic association such as the ACFMS. Seeing the emergency situation, social services contacted the Director of the ACFMS and asked her to accept the girl for a process of deradicalisation. At the end of November, the young girl was officially placed in the ACFMS by the judge in charge of her case. The ACFMS accepted her but wrote a letter to the judge, explaining that the association was not a professional service for deradicalisation projects and that the members were volunteers. The ACFMS suggested to the judge that, to help the girl, the best solution would be a host family and not the centre but that the centre would accept the girl. After a meeting with some leaders of the ACFMS, the girl accepted the placement in the association, to the relief of her parents. Her placement in ACFMS was officialised in December 2013. During her stay in the ACFMS, she temporarily reconciled with her parents. The leadership of the ACFMS helped her to write a letter to the Director of the former residence to excuse her for the previous aggressive behaviour. However, in January 2014, the situation again worsened and the girl left the ACFMS placement without the authorisation of the social assistance and the judge and returned to her family. The girl again started to travel to Paris and Lyon to visit Islamic centres. After returning to Switzerland, the niqab was the reason for the failure of her project of professional integration in a nursery in which the Office of Child Protection inserted her.

For the ACFMS, this involvement in a “deradicalisation process” was difficult because the Islamic symbols were only a way to express relational difficulties. Furthermore, the ACFMS leadership had to deal simultaneously with state actors, the family of the girl, and the minor herself. Some members of the ACFMS were in possession of a master’s degree in education and helped in the relation with the minor. The centre answered the emergency request of state actors, even if it estimated that another solution would have been preferable. This case showed the inability and the stress of social assistance services in dealing with the eruption of religious symbols in care relations with minors. They do not have procedures for dealing with this religious symbol and other state actors’ reactions to this symbol.

On the side of the social assistants, they would have needed more analytical tools and to have had cantonal or federal cooperation to assess the real risk of departure for the girl. They would also have needed precise information on the Islamic centres that the girl attended and on the ACFMS. In fact, state actors placed her in ACFMS without previously assessing the orientation of the Islamic centre.

On the side of the ACFMS, the Islamic association tried to explain that the Koran and Islam are not excuses to insult people or to hide psychological problems but the task was complex, the conditions for the socioeducative intervention uncomfortable. The organisation had to deal with the family, the social assistants, and the judge, without this process of deradicalisation being officially set-up and evaluated. The ACFMS was dealing with a “converted” girl who used some Islamic symbols without knowing anything about the Koran or even practising the Five Pillars.

The literature analysing “conversion” in case of radicalisation takes *conversion* to mean both conversion from another religion or from an atheist position to Islam as well as reversion (Wensierski and Lübcke 2012), which describes the turning of a Muslim from a secularised position to a strict or fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. In the case of conversion for spiritual, social, or political reasons (token conversion, e.g. following marriage to a Muslim, is not included here), this step will appear irrational if the processes of alienation and frustration experienced prior to the actual conversion are not taken into account. Most of the biographies analysed clearly show that the decision to convert was preceded by a crisis situation (Wohlrab-Sahr 2001). Conversion thus offers an orderly and simplified world view and gives meaning to an individual’s way of life; it enables previous role expectations to be thrown overboard and radical new roles to be adopted (Gooren 2007). The new social networks, which are able to establish stronger ties than any previous relationships, also play an important role in this process, but generally only once the individual has already turned in a religious direction (Gooren 2007).

Conversion to Islam can cause young people with previously aimless and unstructured lives to lead a more methodical lifestyle, if they find orientation and structure through a way of life dedicated to Islam (Sheikhzadegan 2013) linked with remoralisation. Given the stigmatisation of Islam in Switzerland, conversion to Islam may constitute identification with those who are marginalised (Sheikhzadegan 2013, 64) and can provocatively be understood to mean dropping out of the dominant order as a means of “symbolising within society maximum distance from that society” (Wohlrab-Sahr 2001, 797). The embracing of (political) Islam coupled with the wearing of obviously Islamic clothing is described by Schiffauer (2000, 294) as *outing* ... “the highlighting of differences as a means of demanding recognition for your own way of life”. He claims that by converting to Islam, individuals find themselves in the middle of a debate that has had a polarising effect for centuries (Schiffauer 2000, 294). The interplay between individual factors of this kind must be looked at separately in each conversion process (Gooren 2007).

Some people refer to Salafism as a sect-like movement when discussing conversion to this extreme view of Islam. There are indeed parallels to

be found with certain features that characterise sects in terms of Salafism's world view and image of man (the division of the world into good and evil), its claim to absoluteness, the promise of salvation and healing with universal recipes for all problems, its unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved and feeling of community allied with the requirement of unconditional loyalty that includes the suppression of criticism from within its own ranks. Its manipulative methods of attracting, indoctrinating, and misleading supporters are also similar to those used by sects. However, it would be mistaken to reduce this fundamentalist interpretation of Islam with an affinity to violence to the status of a sect (meaning an offshoot of a religious belief system with negative connotations). It is more appropriate to speak about a religious movement that takes over every aspect of people's lives.

## **8.6 The Influence of Digital Islam on Radicalisation and the Politicisation of Young Muslims**

The experience of the ACFMS confirms the same assessments of the other interviewed associations. They agreed that young and extremely radicalised Muslims did not attend the Swiss Muslim associations in the main. According to UVAM and CICRA in Lausanne, young people who become radicalised are mostly not integrated into the Swiss community and do not frequent the Swiss Muslim communities. The president of the association [albinform.ch](http://albinform.ch) suggested that the religion of young people is being politicised mostly via digital connections. A minority of young people discover a new relationship to religion that no longer passes through the mosques but rather goes through the internet. This politicisation of religion could have a relevant consequence on the Islamic organisations across cantons.

In fact, according to the President of [albinform.ch](http://albinform.ch), in recent years, the participation of young people in Muslim cultural centres and mosques has been increasing. Indeed, mosques and associations' centres have multiplied and diversified sociocultural and religious activities for the youth. At the same time, all the interviewed associations underlined the lack of economic and personnel resources for meeting the needs of the juvenile Muslim population in Switzerland. For instance, in Neuchâtel, the association proposed internship positions for young people within their own association. This helps parents to support young people in order to avoid them being radicalised. The ASCMC and the Muslim Association of Fribourg observed that, if young people do not want to ask their parents sensitive questions, they can speak instead with other members in the association and with imams. Spiritual

guides therefore allow young people to express their doubts and fears and avoid forms of radicalisation.

The two associations have recently observed the formation of very active youth groups among their members. According to both associations, in both cases, young Muslims are well integrated at the socioprofessional level; only young people who have just arrived in Switzerland, refugees, and asylum seekers have problems concerning economic and cultural integration. Also, according to the UVAM, there has been a reinforced commitment from Muslim young people since the minaret initiative. For instance, the Cantonal Office for Integration of Lausanne with the UVAM organised a coaching programme for Muslims who have employment problems. The CICRA Lausanne organises billiards tournaments in the mosque in order to attract the most marginalised young people and implement anti-alcohol and anti-drug prevention programmes through the teaching of Islamic values.

Summing up, the digital propaganda of foreigner Islamist groups has manifold impacts on the real life of the Islamic organisations across cantons. On one hand, it can lead non-Muslim young people or non-practising Muslim young people towards violent interpretations of Islamic principles. On the other, it can increase the politicisation and practices of young Muslims by which Islamic organisations have to cope by multiplying qualified activities for young members.

## **8.7 Internal and External Pressures on Islamic Organisations**

Islamic organisations can easily become blamed for supporting extremism but the underlying circumstances are often specific: for example, the media bring up information that a former steering committee member of a Muslim organisation is involved in extremist activities. Even if this member no longer has ties with the organisation, it places the entire organisation in a bad light. Alternately, consider a mosque which has volunteers translating the services in German where one volunteer is accused of translating in a way to radicalise young Muslims with his fervour. Since it is not easy to find volunteers with such skills, the mosque may continue to rely on this person due to the lack of alternatives but risk being blamed with naivety or even complicity.

These two cases show the need for Muslim organisations to take a clear position. There are external and internal pressures to make statements and communicate their position both inside their communities and to the public and media. Since reproach or charges are levelled especially by the media in often quite an accusatory way, Islamic organisations tend to be pushed into

a defensive position. They must decide whether to reject the accusations or remain passive. Both options can create further mistrust, which is why it is important to analyse any criticism seriously and deal with the public need for information. In turn, this requires competencies in public relations and networking to establish trusting relationships in the local community respectively for each municipality. To see problematic tendencies or dangerous radicalisation processes within their Muslim communities, the organisation and their steering committee need background knowledge about such phenomena and its prevention.

## 8.8 Conclusions

Our data analysis shows that, to face radicalisation problems, Swiss-Islamic organisations mostly need to develop their networks and to exchange ideas with other civil society actors and institutions. Administration and civil actors are becoming increasingly active in cooperating with Islamic organisations to address the phenomenon of radicalisation. However, institutions especially do not always seem to be conscious of the sensitive positioning of Swiss Islamic organisations. In fact, the majority of the Islamic leadership in Switzerland is still dealing with external, foreign actors who are trying to influence Muslims residing in the country. Furthermore, the radicalising processes often spreads to individuals who do not have any religious background. Hence, Islamic organisations can organise prevention activities, counselling, and monitoring of young people without being completely effective against digital propaganda. Moreover, their actions are weakened by foreign states' influence, structural fragilities, and the lack of legitimacy behind part of the Muslim and non-Muslim population. Building mutual confidence between institutions and Islamic organisations is required before allowing the development of common projects that fight radicalisation processes. Qualitative data show a conflict between the urgent institutional needs to find solutions and the lengthy process required to build such solutions in cooperation with local Islamic organisations.

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## Annex A: Islamic Associations Interviewed

Associations	Date	Address
Associazione Islam senza Frontiere Biblioteca, Moschea e Centro Islamico	07.04.2015	Via Bossi 2 6830 Chiasso
Associazione Culturale Iranica	07.04.2015	Via Monte Boglia 6 6900 Lugano
Iseni Bashkim Director of albinfo.ch	08.05.2015	Avenue de la Gare 33 1001 Lausanne
ACFMS Cultural Association of Muslim Women of Switzerland / Association Culturelle des Femmes Musulmanes de Suisse	09.05.2015	Avenue Léopold Robert 109 2300 La Chaux-de-Fonds
UVAM Vaud Union of Muslim Associations / Union Vaudoise des Associations Musulmanes	14.05.2015	UVAM 1000 Lausanne
CICRA Integration Cultural and Religious Albanian Centre / Centre d'Intégration Culturel et Religieux Albanais	18.05.2015	Chemin de la Colline 7 1007 Lausanne
ACMM Meyrin Muslim Cultural Association / Association Culturelle Musulmane Meyrinoise	26.05.2015 02.06.2015	26 Promenade des Champs Fréchets Case postale 240 1217 Meyrin 1
Association Socio-Culturelle des Musulmans du Chablais	06.06.2015	Rue de la Gare 7 1860 Aigle
Association of the Muslims of Fribourg / Association des musulmans de Fribourg	18.06.2015	Route de la Glâne 9 Case Postal 108 1701 Fribourg





# 9 Women, Islamic Associations, and Public Debates in Switzerland from a Gender Perspective

*Çağla Aykaç and Elisa Banfi*

## 9.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to contribute to studies on women and Islamic organisations in Switzerland, focusing on women's relation to the media and their role in public debate. While gender issues have been central to public debates about Islam in Switzerland since the 1990s, it is only since 2009 that women have increasingly been present in local and regional media as proactive actors addressing issues linked to Islam. We focus here on four women – Muslim and non-Muslim – who are involved in local associations and claim to represent gender perspectives on Islam. These women are from different generations and have different relations to religiosity and senses of belonging, as well as different approaches to the management of Islam in Switzerland. There are spaces in which they are invited to intervene and some spaces from which they are excluded, illustrating the multi-layered character of the “public debate” on Islam in Switzerland today. Their interventions allow us to trace certain key terms in these debates and to draw a spatial and temporal cartography of public representation of Islam in Switzerland. We also discuss what it means for a woman – positioning herself for or against different ways of managing Islam in Switzerland – to speak in public on those issues. Our analysis of an empirical corpus of media items in the three national languages (French, German, Italian) illustrates how the women's public interventions focus on delimiting the conceptual borders and practices related to Swiss citizenship. Finally, the chapter situates the discourses of these women in a more general framework on women and minority issues in public debates in the country.

## 9.2 Women and Islam in Switzerland

In Switzerland, for a long time research addressing the experiences of Muslim women tended to be framed through the lens of migration studies. Women's issues were thus treated within larger studies on particular minority groups that settled in the country through various waves of migration, mostly from the Balkans and in particular Kosovo and Bosnia, as well as Turkey (Riaño and Baghdadi 2007). Scientific studies that focus on women are quite recent and touch on issues of visibility, relations to authority, bodily practices, and relations to the wider community and citizenship (Setta 1999; Bleisch Bouzar 2009; Baghdadi 2010; Beyeler 2012; Parini et al. 2012; Bleisch Bouzar 2012; Marzi 2013; Sarrasin 2016; Eskandari and Banfi 2017; Sayed 2018). A number of sources focus on Islamic women's associations and women's positions and relations to authority within the wider associative structures in Switzerland (Bleisch Bouzar 2009; Marzi 2013; Bleisch Bouzar 2012; Beyeler 2012). The question of the invisibility/visibility of women has also been treated in several studies (Monnot 2016; Salzbrunn 2019). As can be seen from this brief literature review, scientific studies on the women in Islam in Switzerland emerge quite late in comparison to other European countries, since it is only in 2010 that a corpus starts to emerge. In this chapter, we aim to highlight this temporality while adding a focus on media, thus reflecting on the representations and contributions of women to public debates and opinion-building in Switzerland.

In Switzerland, it is after 2009 and with the debate around the Minarets' Initiative<sup>223</sup> (Haenni and Lathion 2009; Mayer 2011; Pratt 2013; Cheng 2015; Eskandari and Banfi 2017) that women – both Muslim and non-Muslim – start addressing issues linked to Islam in the media and acquire a more visible and active role within public debates concerning Islam.<sup>224</sup> This said, women were already quite active for two decades in Islamic organisations,

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223 In 2009, a federal popular initiative amended the Swiss Constitution by forbidding the construction of minarets across the Helvetic territory. Beginning in 2007, a group of sixteen politicians from the Swiss People's Party created the 'Committee against the construction of minarets in Switzerland', also called the 'Egerkingen Committee'. They proposed to amend Article 72 of the Swiss Constitution by adding a paragraph on the ban of minarets; this article states that the Confederation and the cantons may, within the scope of their powers, take measures to preserve public peace between the members of different religious communities (Eskandari and Banfi 2017).

224 We analysed the print media's datasets of the DELMUSNET project 'Public Deliberation, Network Analysis and the Political Inclusion of Muslims Living in Switzerland, France and Britain' funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the EURISLAM project 'Finding a Place for Islam in Europe' funded by the European Commission Research DG, Seventh Framework Programme.

networks, and support groups linked to their countries of origin, as well as local civil society associations. It is from this perspective that we explore the public interventions of four women – Saïda Keller-Messahli, Nadia Karmous, Mireille Vallette, and Sabine Tiguemounine – as all are involved in associations that have the ambition to intervene on women and citizenship issues in Switzerland. They all hold leadership functions in local and regional associative structures and thus have claims to represent certain collectivities that are not always organised around religious issues and can be linked to political parties. All these women are present in the media sphere with their associative functions but also with their individual positioning, their private life stories, political affiliations, professional skills and competences, and experiences or perspectives of Islam. Following these four women through their public performances allows us to form a perspective of Islam in Switzerland from a position situated in the experience of women who work in civil society.

### 9.3 Methodological Considerations

These women share certain characteristics and many differences. Saïda Keller-Messahli, Nadia Karmous, Mireille Vallette, and Sabine Tiguemounine identify as women, and all are leading figures in associations that were founded in relation to the management and/or mismanagement of Islam in Switzerland. We selected them with reference to their rate of public appearances in the Swiss media in all three regions and languages, and with a focus on Swiss Romandie. In other words, it is their public visibility and their attempts to influence public opinion rather than their religious or political representativity/legitimacy (which we will discuss below) that has led us to select them. Although they do not share a common ethnic or religious identity, they all are Swiss citizens: one is an “autochthonous” Swiss citizen, while others are bi-nationals with origins in majority Muslim countries or other European countries. They all have different approaches and practices in terms of religiosity, as Mireille Vallette is known as a “*pasionaria* anti-Islam” while the other three identify as Muslim: Saïda Keller-Messahli identifies as a “secular Muslim”, Sabine Tiguemounine as a convert to Islam, and Nadia Karmous identifies as a believer. All have similar levels of education, and all are active in the public sphere through book publications, interventions into the mainstream media, television and radio, personal blogs or social media pages, and participation in institutional consultations at local and federal levels.

We use a mix of quantitative data collection techniques combined with a qualitative assessment of media content.<sup>225</sup> We constituted a corpus based on newspaper articles and radio interviews; our sample includes articles from both mainstream newspapers and more popular press in all three linguistic regions in order to ensure a representative sample.<sup>226</sup> We analyse titles and content in order to highlight common themes and discursive forms. We have little space here to discuss the visual material that accompanies these texts although the images that are mobilised in these public interventions are quite central in stimulating the affects that surround questions linked to Islam. Our methodology is thus based on the media interventions of these four women. Here, we start by individual presentations of each of these women which allows us to introduce and situate them subjectively while posing major turning points and moments of ruptures on public debates on Islam in Switzerland. We try to situate each woman in the local and regional political contexts in which they become public, and in relations with local actors and themes that motivate the content and the shape of their public interventions. We ask whether their identities as women influence the nature of public debates in which they participate or if they merely reinforce existing trends and discursive forms. We are interested in the negotiations and ruptures that they go through as they get involved in these media platforms while focusing on their senses of community and belonging in Switzerland.

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225 Via the electronic database LexiNexis, the following newspapers have been used as sources: 24 heures (02.09.2006 – 08.11.2018), Appenzeller Zeitung (17.06.2010 – 08.11.2018), Blick (19.03.2018 – 08.11.2018), Blick am Abend (19.03.2018 – 08.11.2018), HandelsZeitung (11.08.2018 – 08.11.2018), LeMatin (03.09.2006 – 21.07.2018), Ostschweiz am Sonntag (02.07.2017 – 08.11.2018), Rheintaler (14.12.2016 – 08.11.2018), Ostschweiz am Sonntag Thurgau (02.07.2017 – 29.10.2017), Sonntagsblick (25.03.2018 – 08.11.2018), SonntagsZeitung (07.09.1997 – 08.11.2018), St.Galler Tagblatt (Stammausgabe) (02.08.2010 – 08.11.2018), Tagblatt für den Kanton Thurgau (07.06.2010 – 08.11.2018), Tages-Anzeiger (09.09.1997 – 08.11.2018), Le Temps (01.01.1998 – 30.09.2015), Toggenburger Tagblatt (02.08.2010 – 08.11.2018), La Tribune de Genève (02.09.2006 – 08.11.2018), La Tribune de Genève, Werdenberger Obertoggenburger (13.12.2016 – 08.11.2018), Wiler Nachrichten (14.12.2016 – 04.07.2017), Wiler Zeitung (14.12.2016 – 08.11.2018). For the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, the website of the Corriere del popolo has been used for selecting the sample.

226 The sampling was based on the following keywords: [(Mireille Vallette) OR (Vallette Mireille)], [(Nadia Karmous OR Karmous Nadia)], [(Sa\*da Keller-Messahli) OR (Keller-Messahli Sa\*da)], [(Sabine Tiguemounine OR Tiguemounine Sabine)].

## 9.4 Mireille Vallette

Mireille Vallette participated in the feminist liberation movements of the 1970s and currently lives in Geneva. She is a relatively well-known journalist linked to the political left and a founding member of the magazine *Tout va Bien* (Fonds Jacques Siron [no date]). She worked for many years at the Hospice General, the principal state welfare institution in charge of the professional reinsertion of unemployed and marginalised peoples in Geneva. Her involvement with issues linked to Islam appears quite late in her career: she has multiplied public interventions on the subject since 2009 and became a self-proclaimed expert on Islam in Switzerland since then. In 2009, she published a short essay titled ‘Islamophobia or Legitimate Defiance?’ (Vallette 2009) and started a blog titled ‘Boulevard de l’Islamisme’ (Vallette [no date]) at the *Tribune de Genève*, one of most widely circulated newspapers in Geneva. In 2012, she published a book with the same title (Vallette 2017). Here, she suggests that Switzerland is under threat as it is already engaged in a process of transformation through the radicalisation and Islamisation of its population, she argues that Islam is incompatible with democracy. The same year, she publicly declared her rupture with the Socialist Party, specifically with regard to its position on Islam. In 2015, Mireille Vallette became President and founding member of the Swiss Association Vigilance Islam (ASVI [no date]) that aims to fight against the Islamisation of Switzerland. Her positioning on issues linked to Islam is central to her disengagement from the political left and the Socialist Party as she considers them to be responsible for tolerating radical and dangerous groups and individuals. In the mainstream media, she appears as a Geneva-based feminist, a leftist woman, and a determined democrat. She is also criticised by Muslim and non-Muslim actors for being xenophobic, racist, and Islamophobic (Schneiter 2017). Mireille writes mostly in French and is frequently translated into German and intervenes in the German press. She also intervenes at European levels, especially in France where she contributes to the site *Riposte Laïque* (Ripostelaique 2007). She argues that she has received death threats for her positions (Favre 2012).

## 9.5 Saïda Keller-Messahli

Saïda Keller-Messahli was born in 1957 and is a Swiss-Tunisian binational citizen. She was born in Tunisia and placed in a Swiss family in Grindelwald (Bern) by the association *Terre des Hommes* from 1964 to 1970. She finished her studies in Tunisia, and then came back to Switzerland in the late 1990s to study at the University of Zurich. In 2002, she signed a manifesto for peace

in the Middle East with 200 Jewish and Arab residents of Switzerland and became the President of the *Palestine Foundation* (Signataires du manifeste 2002). In 2004, she participated as a political activist of Tunisian descent in a roundtable organised by the *Tages-Anzeiger* on the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. In 2004, she founded the *Forum for Progressive Islam* (Forum for Progressive Islam 2007), which was set as a platform that aims to involve Muslims beyond linguistic or national affiliations and promote debate among critical Muslims. The forum addresses general issues of the relationship between democratic states, human rights, international law, and religion, while also taking positions on social, political, and cultural issues in Switzerland.<sup>227</sup> In 2006, she signed a petition titled ‘Sich integrieren heisst sich verändern’ [To integrate oneself means to change oneself], referring to the controversies that were sparked in Denmark on the Prophet’s caricatures. Between 2006 and 2016, she has regularly commented on events concerning Islam and Muslims in the country. In 2016, with thirteen other liberal Muslims, she signed the *Freiburger Deklaration*.<sup>228</sup> The same year, she was awarded the Swiss Human Rights Prize by the Swiss Section of the International Society for Human Rights. In 2018, she published a book titled *La Suisse, Plaque Tournante Islamiste* (Keller-Messahli 2018). She is regularly described as an “Arab Muslim woman engaged in actions against racism and xenophobia” or as a “representative of secularised Muslims of Switzerland” and defends the idea of the compatibility of Islam and human rights (Mäder 2006). She writes and intervenes mostly in the German language, yet she also intervenes in Romandie and is regularly translated in the French and Italian speaking press. She argues that she has received death threats (Blanc 2016).

## 9.6 Sabine Tiguemounine

Sabine Tiguemounine was born in 1970, she is a Swiss-French binational and worked as a nurse in a home for elderly people in Fribourg. She was the president of the Cultural Association of Muslim Women in Switzerland. She then moved to Meyrin in the canton of Geneva where she was elected in the municipal council in 2015 as a Green Party deputy. She is also one of the founding members of the Meyrin Muslim Cultural Association /

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227 She shared the executive board with a Catholic representative, Karl Gruber, the designer Bülent Öcal, the Palestinian sociologist Maha Bashir, the Swiss-Yemeni journalist Elham Manea, and Jasmina El-Sonbati, gymnasium teacher in Basel (Fournier 2004).

228 It is worth noting here that the text was inspired by the letter of twelve Catholic priests signed in June 2012 against the interdiction of the sacrament of communion to remarried catholic believers (Meier 2017).

Association Culturelle Musulmane Meyrinoise (ACMM). Her first appearances in the media focus on her conversion to Islam, and the way in which her religious identity leads her professional, social, and political involvement in public debates and her sense of civic duty (Iantorno 2012). For her, there is no question about the compatibility of Islam and human rights, quite the contrary, an Islamic identity is also an injunction to be a good citizen. She talks of her conversion in relationship to her marriage with an Algerian man, and argues that it is in the Koran and Islamic sources that she learned about her rights as a woman (Bloch 2002). The adoption of the law on laicity in the canton of Geneva in 2018 will potentially bear on her public functions and political engagements. In effect, the law prescribes that deputies cannot wear religious symbols when elected to an executive function (see details in Chapter 4). Sabine was involved in gathering signatures for a referendum against the law on laicity, in particular to defend the right of veiled women to be engaged in public institutions.

## 9.7 Nadia Karmous

Nadia Karmous was born in 1968 in Strasbourg in France and arrived in Switzerland in Le Locle in 1991. She is described as a French woman of Algerian origin with “Andalusian roots” and a Tunisian husband, born into a non-religious family and wearing Hijab for religious reasons. In 1992, she founded the Cultural Association of Muslim Women of Switzerland. She appeared in the media for the first time to comment on the terrorist attack of Luxor in 1997 where thirty Swiss people were killed violently. Nadia Karmous condemns the massacre while underlining that it should not be attributed to Islam (Schnieper 1997). In 1998, she stood in support of Hani Ramadan in the controversies over his statements on violence and women, and equality between men and women. In 2000, she was involved in the opening of Muslim Cultural Institute in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a space, according to her, for sharing information on Islam and fostering the integration of the Muslim population in the region. In 2002, she set out the emancipation of women as the first ambition of her association, while underlining the necessity of Muslims becoming active Swiss citizens (Bloch 2002). In 2007, she was among the twenty Muslim civil society actors invited to a private meeting to discuss Islam, integration, and security by Christoph Blocher, the head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police of the time. Since 2008, she has intervened in the media frequently concerning issues linked to Islam and women. In 2016, she became the Director of the newly created “Museum of Islamic civilisations” in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a space that is criticised for

being financed by foreign Islamic sources. Recently, Chesnot and Malbrunot in their book *Qatar papers* display evidence of the financial support of the Qatar Charity to the Nadia Karmous's associations (Chesnot and Malbrunot 2019). In 2017, she strongly supported Tariq Ramadan to discredit the women who were accusing him of sexual violence (Passer 2017). She argues that she has received death threats for these positions (Zuercher and Banerjee-Dinet 2017). She intervenes mostly in French.

These four women have very different claims to representativity and draw their legitimacy mostly from their Swiss citizenship rather than Islam (Bloch 2002). The fact that Saida Keller speaks Swiss-German from the region of Bern (Brandenberg 2016) is quite relevant as a proof of her being Swiss "enough". All try to show and embody marks of belonging to the community of Swiss citizens (Iantorno 2012; Keller-Messahli 2004; Favre 2012; Bloch 2002). Sabine was elected to represent of Muslim and non-Muslim residing in Meyrin through her position as a member of the Green Party. As president of the ACMM, she outlines the civic role of the association in providing sociocultural activities for Muslim and non-Muslim citizens at the local levels (Iantorno 2012). Nadia Karmous claims her association is representative of Muslim women in their interaction with local authorities through integration policies (Guisan 2001); while Saida Keller presents the Forum as a tool to give a voice to the Muslim silent majority to intervene on international and local affairs (Meier 2004). For her, imams are not necessary because Muslims can interpret Islam by themselves (Kuehner 2004).

There are also, conversely, many ways of de-legitimizing these women. Transparency is relevant for Nadia Karmous who was accused in 2018 with her husband to have accepted funds coming from foreigner countries (Chesnot and Malbrunot 2019; Krafft 2018). Professional capacity and professional competences is quite central, with for example the capacity of Sabine to work in the public function with her veil (Vallette 2018); or the ways in which public actors question the professional expertise of Keller as a researcher to speak about Islam and mosques (Berger 2017).

## 9.8 On the Temporality of Debating Gender and Islam in Switzerland

Since the end of the 1990s, the debates in the media on Islam in Switzerland have been quite local and focus on particular individuals or moments (Banfi 2010). As mentioned above, most of these interventions are framed around particular ethnic communities (particularly from the Balkans and Turkey). This said, in this early period, the media also focuses on controversies around

individuals, and particularly members of the Ramadan family. Controversies surrounding Tariq Ramadan, Hani Ramadan, their father Said Ramadan, and their grandfather Hassan al-Banna and thus more generally discussions of the Muslim Brotherhood have been fairly central in channelling debates on Islam in Switzerland (Banfi 2010).

Since the late 1990s, the controversies around these particular Muslim men always had a gendered dimension, with the main focus on violence against women. The thread goes back to Hani Ramadan being involved in a controversy in 1998 about domestic violence in Islam (Briel 1998), to the famous television program with Nicolas Sarkozy and Tariq Ramadan on the issue of veiling and the moratorium on lapidation in 2003, and more recently, to the accusation of sexual violence and rape by several women who filed complaints against Tariq Ramadan in 2017. In the 1990s, Tariq Ramadan was a well-known local public figure in Geneva on the way to becoming one of the most prominent public figures of Islam in Europe (Aykaç 2010). Media focused on words attributed to these men in relation to violence against women, and public debates were formulated around male/female equality and gender relations in Islamic practices and sources of knowledge, questioning the compatibility of Islam with human rights or democracy. In parallel, these controversial male actors' propositions for gender norms in Islam had a very large following in public gatherings among Muslim publics in the 1990s.

References to the centrality of the family and the respect of gender roles and duties in Islam thus appear in tension with the brutal and graphic descriptions of violations of women's bodily and personal integrity. Women are mostly absent from public debates or asked to confirm or condemn the opinions of men "qualified" to discuss these issues in public.

In the 1990s, at local levels – in parallel with these public debates that focused on women but were dominated by men – umbrella associations were formed in several cantons for the management of issues linked to Islam, along with various interest groups, including Muslim women's associations. Nadia Karmous was for example involved in the foundation in 1992 of the Cultural Association of Muslim Women of Switzerland.

Both in associations *for* and *against* Islam, since the 1990s women have been present and active in trying to trace the parameters of their relation to Islam and Swiss citizenship but rarely appear in the media sphere. Today, many more women – Muslim and non-Muslim – are involved in debating these questions in blogs, social media, and women's groups.

Since the 1990s also, issues linked to gender and Islam have crystallised around veiling and concern mostly its use in public functions and institutions. A first juridical controversy around the veil was sparked by Lucia Dahlab in 1996. Through discussions of Muslim women's dress codes, statements are

also made about Muslim women's spirit, their capacity for emancipation, and ultimately their capacity to become good Swiss citizens. While micro controversies on issues linked to the veil multiplied in the early years of 2000, they gained a new dimension with debates around the burqa ban throughout different cantons from 2010 to 2017. The bodily dimension of these public debates unfolds in specific and contested physical spaces (Eskandari and Banfi 2017; Göle 2015).

Nadia Karmous, Saida Keller-Messahli, Mireille Valette, and to a lesser extent Sabine Tigemnouine regularly intervene on micro-controversies and bodily issues with conflicting perspectives. In 2004, Nadia Karmous celebrated the choice of Migros Magazine to allow their employees to wear headscarves and to defend their employees against eventual aggressions of Islamophobic nature (Briel and Fournier 2004). Since then, she has been interviewed on the headscarf in schools (Signorell 2010), violence against veiled women (Favre 2015), the burqa, swimming pool issues and the burkini and affirmed that in ten or fifteen years, the non-mixing of women and men will be accepted in swimming pools and the headscarf will be accepted in public schools in Switzerland (Miéville 2006). Her positions stand in strong opposition to Saida Keller-Messahli or Mireille Vallette who argue that women are forced to veil and that this practice is an obstacle to their emancipation (Renz 2010).

The debates on the burqa and the initiative to ban its use in Switzerland sparked a new wave of public debates on the compatibility between Islam and Swiss values. Mireille Vallette clearly took a position against the niqab, outlining that many women with an Islamic background are fighting against these practices and that it is an obstacle to the equality between men and women (Vallette 2013). In 2010, Saida Keller-Messahli supported the initiative against the burqa in the canton of Aargau and the ordonnances to ban headscarves in some schools in the canton of Saint Gallen. In 2012, she declared being in favour of the Swiss parliamentary ban on the burqa and applauded the courage of Mireille Vallette for the fight against the burqa. In 2016, she supported the proposition that private enterprises can fire veiled women on the basis of their headscarf. The question of gender mixing and civility became a central topic with students refusing to shake hands with their female teachers in 2016. For Sabine Tiguemounine, wearing the burqa results from a literalist interpretation of Islamic sources of knowledge, she was critical of the association between lack of respect of women rights and Islamic laws in extra-European countries by condemning the authoritarian nature of some of these countries.

Up until 2009, the accommodation of the Islamic population was operationalised by creating local spaces of dialogue and interaction based on pragmatic solutions for the management of the public spaces. Since 2009, the

controversy of minarets and the parallel discussions on the veil and the burqa crystallise the multilayers of citizen participation in Switzerland. In effect, several tools and technologies for voicing citizen concerns are mobilised by Muslim and non-Muslim actors through the formation of associations, the right to petition, to propose laws, or the right to appeal popular votes. After 2009, the affairs or important moments become more visible and public, and the profiles of participants in public debates become more diverse. There is a new investment in public debates by women and we can see an increase in the public and media presence of the women we are following.

The controversies surrounding the minarets and the 2009 referendum was a turning point in Switzerland. The debate is constructed around the visibility of the mosque with a minaret, but more generally about its function and how it will affect the essence of what it means to be Swiss. The discussion takes a similar form when microcontroversies happen about the management of other spaces: pools, mosques, cemeteries, museums (Göle 2015). The space of the mosque is also central in these debates, its physical position in cities but also the ways in which space is managed inside the mosque, and in particular the gender segregation. Again, while the mosque is presented by some women as a place of socialisation (Guisan 2001), it is presented by others as a space for breeding radicalism (H. 2014). Similar debates emerge around the foundation of the Museum of Islamic Culture (Sassoon 2016). Nadia Karmous defends it as a model and way for integration and cultural sharing and dialogue, while Mireille Vallette focused on its lack of transparency, its financial link with Arab countries, and describes it as a potential ground for radicalisation.

The question of visibility/invisibility is not particular to Muslims in Switzerland and has been addressed by studies on other minority group studies with reference to the Swiss social contract based on the politics of assimilation and integration (Mahnig 2005; Michel and Honegger 2010; Michel 2013; Michel and Scacchi 2014; Gianni et al. 2015; Monnot 2016; Akin and Banfi 2019; Salzbrunn 2019). The notion of invisibility has also been underlined in relation to other minorities (Honegger 2013; Michel 2013; Michel and Honegger 2010; Michel and Scacchi 2014). As in many other places, the veil that Muslim women wear has been central to the question of visibility/invisibility and has been extended to debates on access to education, professions, and the management of public spaces like swimming pools on public functions.

In their books, Mireille Vallette and Saida Keller-Messahli seem to argue in favour of more visibility, and more transparency in terms of what is happening inside mosques. They seem to argue that the “invisibilitisation” of Muslim activities is the source of great dangers, so that more visibility will help

counter the imminent threat posed by Islam. At the same time, they strongly stand against the visible markers of religious affiliation of Islam, as they both opposed women wearing the veil in public functions or stood in favour of the ban on minarets. This tension on issues of visibility shows many parallels with the Jewish question in Switzerland (Weill-Lévy et al. 1999; Banfi 2019).

## 9.9 Conclusion

Following Saïda Keller-Messahli, Nadia Karmous, Mireille Vallette, and Sabine Tiguemounine allows us to trace and map certain important moments and hotspots in terms of social and political tensions about Islam and the Muslim population of Switzerland. Since the 1990s, men – Muslim and non-Muslim – are present in the media space and dominate discussions on women and Islam. During this period, although the issue of violence on women is particularly used as a measure for the compatibility of Islam and Swiss values, women are absent from public debates. Women take their positions first at local levels and through associations, they rarely intervene in the media and in the deliberative space for the management of social tensions at local, regional, and federal levels.

These four women have access to public platforms in Switzerland and clearly defend ideas of how to articulate Islam with Swiss citizenship. These tensions between different forms of feminism and women could potentially be very fertile for the evolution and the complexification of the public debate on Islam. This said, there are asymmetries in the spaces allocated for women to speak in public about these issues, and the women who “dominate” the field are those critical of the presence of Muslims in Switzerland. They use a repertoire of danger and imminent threat that is quite often called on for its racist nature and for a lack of rigour in research. The denunciation of radical forces aimed at destroying Swiss society is made authoritative through the media, and the space that these women take in public discussions render other voices unintelligible.

Speaking in public about Islam opens up certain opportunities and also involves risks, death threats, and violent techniques of de-legitimation with references to professional competence, character, or ambitions. There are certain accusations that are central in the delegitimising process: particularly the accusation of racism (Schneiter 2017) and in parallel the accusation of radicalism (Monnat 2017) and defamation (Keller 2018). All these women go through processes of negotiations and ruptures with institutions, political parties, or transnational religious networks. The four women we have chosen to follow in this research are known in the Swiss media and public debate

sphere and all are, through their professions and legal status, strongly anchored and integrated in Swiss society. The fact that all have access to public functions and leadership in associative life illustrates that women have access to a number of channels for political participation in Switzerland.

Violence and the oppression of women seem to be central topics that are determining larger debates on the compatibility of Islam and Swiss values. As in many other contexts, interaction with women who are subject to violence is quasi-inexistent. Practising Muslim women enter the public field with their professional competences and personal experiences of Islam, yet seem to fall short of being able to position themselves critically on the issue of violence. Although there is an increasing presence and visibility of women since 2009, these women –Muslim and non-Muslim – rarely refer and draw on the knowledges produced in the past thirty years by women with gender perspectives on Islam. These studies are rarely used as sources of knowledge and this scholarship can be dismissed by European feminists, Muslim women, and also men who claim to be fighting for Muslim women's liberation.

In Switzerland, critical knowledge produced by Muslim women who also are eager to deconstruct civilisational discourses are emerging; the Collectif Faites des Vagues (<https://www.facebook.com/faitesdesvagues>) has been particularly active on social media and contributes a much needed intersectional perspective on recent public debates. Women who are accused of flirting with racist politics or alternatively with radical religious politics have a wider access to public platforms. Muslim women practising Islam and carrying their religious subjectivity on their body prefer to mobilise traditional repertoires such as social or cultural engagement or political party membership and promoting referendum and initiatives, while women who oppose initiatives on Islam seem to be more inclined to use mainstream media and personalised social media platforms. All these women use repertoires of political participation linked to direct democracy and claim to contribute to Swiss citizenship through their engagement.

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# 10 Conclusion: Associations, Political Agency, and Democratic Integration

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## 10.1 Introduction

Associations are organised groups of people that operate in the public sphere between state and private life – namely, in civil society. They are animated by individuals who unite in a collective body to use the associational form of organisation to advance their interests, in some cases independently from the state and in others as an interlocutor of state authorities, to determine public policies or find solutions to sometimes conflicting social issues. Associations<sup>229</sup> are traditionally conceived of as key and valuable actors of democratic dynamics. However, if we consider the case of Muslim associations and the negative representations that characterise them in the Swiss context, such a positive view is not very present in the public debate. Because of their religious denomination, negative representations and suspicions are still pervasive, nourished by public controversies that are often framed through crucial challenges with regards to democracy, freedom, secularism, equality, and social and political stability. In predominantly secular societies, religious associations – particularly those related to established religious communities and that have public activities – raise social and political resistance. In the case of Muslim associations, fears and suspicions arise.

However, the chapters presented in this book present some original elements to help apprehend the contemporary reality of Muslims' associations in western Switzerland. They propose data that shed a fresh light on these associations' composition, aims, repertoires of action, and values. Concisely, what results from the analysis presented in this book is that organisations play a role that goes beyond strict religious aims. They address welfare issues, participate in social work activities, and engage in social welfare provisions that cross the boundaries of the Muslim community and aim to support the

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229 In this chapter, I refer to associations as a kind of collective bodies. For the sake of the argument, I do not distinguish between associations, organisations, and foundations, using these concepts interchangeably.

needs of vulnerable individuals, whatever their faith (Banfi, Chapter 2; Brodard, Chapter 5; Grand, Chapter 6). New Islamic youth organisations with a substantial presence of women present specific activities and strategies in civil society and are only partially related to traditional associations of Muslims (see: Banfi and Sanchez-Mazas, Chapter 3). Contemporary associations are marked not only by the engagement of young Muslims but also by the presence and managing activity of women (Aykaç and Banfi, Chapter 9). In this sense, they perform citizenship practices that contribute to calling into question negative representations of and stereotypes about Muslims. Therefore, contrary to the past, Muslim organisations' activities are much more visible in the public domain and they increasingly interact with public institutions (Nour, Chapter 7). Although such interactions are not always void of tensions – particularly in a context marked by fears related to youth radicalisation of Muslims, which puts Islamic organisations under social and political pressure (see: Eser Davolio and Banfi, Chapter 8) – Muslim associations are becoming important actors in the Swiss social and political landscape.

Based on these results, this conclusion aims to suggest a broader perspective on the relation between associations and democratic dynamics, namely by discussion of the roles and democratic potential of associations' engagement in democratic societies. The idea is to provide a framework that situates associations in a broader political context and to emphasise their role in democratic processes, focusing on the democratic implications of the rising engagement of Muslim associations in the Swiss polity and society. I do this in three sections. The first presents a broad sketch of the social and political representations attached to Muslim associations in the Swiss debate. The second section is composed of two parts. In the first, I explain why associations and associations of immigrants are key actors in democratic systems. In the second, I argue that the increasing engagement of Muslim associations and the scope of their action repertoires – as in the case of the mobilisation against the law on *laïcité* in Geneva – indicate that Muslims and Muslim organisations are progressively acquiring a public and visible political agency. I argue that one reason that explains such a trend is that several associations are increasingly mobilising for the equal standing of Muslims, specifically against discrimination and social stigmatisation, and hence engaged in a struggle for recognition of Muslims' subjectivity, religious practices, and presence. Finally, in the third section, I broaden the analysis, addressing the issue of Muslims' integration and the role of associations in this process. Associations are made under tension between the interests of their members and the injunctions to integration and compliance with democratic values that come from authorities and other actors of civil society. It is the same logic that often affects practising Muslims, who are caught in a dilemma

of following their religious beliefs while at the same time being pushed to conform to secular practices in order to avoid social stigma. Both logics are inherently conflictual, both within the Muslim population and in its relations with non-Muslim society. To overcome such tensions democratically, it is necessary to provide a democratic space to affected individuals so they may have a voice in the debate. I suggest that participative and deliberative procedures can allow such conflicts to be accommodated in a democratic way and that associations play a central role in such a dynamic.

## **10.2 Muslim Associations: from Suspicion of Invisible Activities to Visible Engagement?**

The birth of Muslim associations is related to the historical characteristics of the Swiss policy towards immigrants. With the settlement of Muslim immigrants in the years since 1970 and given the lack of an integration policy that actively supported them, immigrant religious associations were created to take care of several fields of activities (such as cultural activities, the improvement of linguistic skills, social counselling, etc.). Therefore, the multi-task function of local immigrant associations partly depends on the closeness of the Swiss political opportunity structure to immigrants. The weak engagement of the public authorities by proactive means to foster social and cultural integration has contributed to pushing groups of immigrants to organise in local associations that provide them the resources and social capital needed either to preserve part of their cultural, social, and religious heritage or to help them on their integration trajectory in Switzerland. With the introduction of more proactive cantonal measures of integration since the beginning of the year 2000, more narrow connections between Muslim associations and public authorities have been established and in some cases have contributed to solving issues on which Muslim groups and local authorities have been opposed (see, for instance, Gianni and Varone 2007; Nour, Chapter 7).

Nevertheless, since the midpoint of the year 2000, social representations of Muslim associations in the public debate have been ambivalent. Muslim organisations do exist in Switzerland but on the one hand they are viewed with suspicion in the public debate, and on the other authorities often denounce – when a controversy arises – the lack of organisation in the Muslim population, particularly in a capacity to designate leaders that represent (and are accepted by) Swiss Muslims. In other words, they argue for the creation of a collective body that represents Muslims. For instance, during the campaign for the minaret ban, several commentators called on ordinary and moderate Muslims to take a position in the debate, precisely because the leaders who were

visible in the media were not considered representative of ordinary Muslims. In 2007, Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher – at that time the leader of the Swiss People Party, which is the party that most politicises the issue of Muslims’ presence in Switzerland – organised a meeting with a Swiss Muslim organisation to address integration and security issues. The initiative taken by Mr Blocher has been criticised by other members of the Federal Council, as Micheline Calmy-Rey argued that “addressing exclusively one religious community to deal with integration problems is an approach that isolates and stigmatizes it” (RTS Info 2010).<sup>230</sup> Such an example illustrates quite well the general framework of the relations between authorities and Muslim organisations – namely, the focus on integration and security issues. In the wake of terrorist attacks in Europe, the enrolment of young Swiss Muslims in Daesh troops in Syria, and fears about the radicalisation of Muslim youth, the focus on Muslim organisations as actors responsible simultaneously for such phenomena and for finding solutions to them has increased (see: Eser Davolio and Banfi, Chapter 5).

Related to the radicalisation issue, the question of the opaque funding of Muslim organisations has also been extensively discussed in public debates. Negative representations that frame organisations on the basis of real or suspected funding by some Muslim rigorist states to foster Islamisation activities in Europe have important implications, both for the repertoires of actions of organisations and for their social acceptance as well as activities. Clearly, such a debate goes far beyond the Swiss context. In Britain, for instance, voices have been raised against Saudi Arabia’s financing of mosques, considered as places of radicalisation and hence of mobilisation for terrorist attacks (Wintour 2017); in France, President Macron took a position in 2018 about the need to regulate the foreign funding of mosques (Gully 2018). Since the law against terrorism introduced in November 2017, authorities have shut down seven mosques (Jacob 2006). The situation is similar in other European countries.

The (supposed) relationship between who finances Muslim organisations and the political and religious agenda followed by the latter is a tricky issue that raises important concerns also in Switzerland. For instance, the case of two radicalised young individuals who joined the Islamic State and were involved in the activities of the Geneva Mosque has shed light on the role played by the latter in the promotion of Islamic radicalism and in the organisation of potential terrorist attacks (RTS Info 2020). The same debate occurred when four collaborators at the same mosque were fired because French security services filed them as related to radical organisations. Simi-

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230 Rts Info. 2010. Christoph Blocher rencontre les musulmans. <https://www.rts.ch/info/suisse/1136930-christoph-blocher-rencontre-les-musulmans.html> (accessed September 21, 2020); own translation.

lar concerns have been voiced about Turkish organisations, which are often financed by the Diyanet (the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs) and are seen by some observers as places of promotion for activities inspired by Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AKP (Siegenthaler 2018). Given the political relevance of the issue of funding, answering an interpellation of a deputy in 2016, the Federal Council stated:

The Confederation does not collect data on the financing of Muslim associations and mosques – it does not have the competence to do so – except in exceptional cases, when internal security is threatened. It is up to the cantons to regulate the relationship between religious communities and the State (art. 72 para. 1 of the Constitution). Muslim communities are often organized as private law associations. Associations are not required to communicate their sources of funding to the authorities. (Conseil Fédéral 2016, translated by Matteo Gianni)

Some cantons, such as Vaud, condition the public recognition of Muslim organisations on budgetary transparency (see Nour, Chapter 7). However, recent books have emphasised the lack of transparency of Muslim organisations and of an influx of foreign money from, for instance, states such as Qatar or Saudi Arabia (Chesnot and Malbrunot 2019; Keller-Messahli 2017). In January 2020, the general secretary of the Muslim World League announced that he intended to end financial support to the Islamic Cultural Foundation, which manages the mosque in Geneva. The plan is to pass control of the mosque to a representative committee of Muslims living in Switzerland (Allemand 2020). Indubitably, such a radical change in the organisation and financing of the mosque is an important challenge for both local Muslim associations and public authorities.

The recurrent claim implicit in the critique of the financial supporters of Muslim organisations or associations is the idea that they perform an *invisible* activity of promoting religious or ideological goals that contravene some relevant values of democratic societies, particularly in contributing to religious proselytism and Islamisation. According to this view, such organisations have a hidden agenda, are responsible for the radicalisation of some vulnerable members, and network directly or indirectly with states that finance terrorist organisations. Indeed, they pose a potential threat to Swiss society and its stability. Such representations are consistent with the overall debate that has been ongoing in Europe since the 2001. They call into question the compatibility between Muslims' religious beliefs and secular values. Religion – or rather a different view of the role of religion in social and political life – is seen as the main obstacle to the accommodation of Muslim immigrants in

democratic polities and, more broadly, as the main cause of an irreconcilable cleavage between immigrants and host societies.

Past and recent terrorist acts as well as the fear of new ones and the increasing public visibility of some rigorist groups (Klausen 2005) have brought to the fore the idea that democratic institutions are under the threat of political Islam and that Muslims are becoming a political force in Europe (Fukuyama 2006). In western societies, the underlying logic of the representation of Islam and Muslims is very much based on portraying them as possessing fixed cultural-religious attributes, as being deeply opposed to the ethos of democracy and gender equality, and as being against secularism. In Switzerland, the *public visibility of Islam* has been a recurrent topic of public debate since the beginning of the year 2000. The most commonly spread argument for limiting Muslims' visibility is the fight against the *Islamisation* trend in Switzerland. The wearing of headscarves, burkas, niqabs, and burkinis – seen as affirming the oppression of women –; claims for Islamic burial customs; criticisms against secular laws that hamper Muslim religious practices; and the willingness to build minarets are often represented as indicators of such a trend. What characterises these representations is indeed the essentialisation of Muslim religiosity, which is strictly linked to the “over-religionisation” of Muslims' agency. Such a social representation is indeed sociologically very reductive. As stated by Brubaker, the word Muslims “designates not a homogeneous and solidary group but a heterogeneous category” (Brubaker 2013, 6). In Switzerland, the heterogeneity of the Muslim population is clear empirical evidence of that designation (Gianni et al. 2015); hence, heterogeneity in practices, values, and activities is what characterises the Muslim population and Muslim organisations.

Therefore, without denying the social and political threat represented by organisations that extol clearly antidemocratic goals (such as restrictions of freedoms or denial of the legitimacy of cultural and religious pluralism), it is crucial to avoid an essentialised view of Muslim associations if we want to understand their functioning, impact on civil society, and potential to contribute to democratic dynamics. The chapters of this book show that the latter types of organisations engage in different spheres of activity and develop relevant citizenship practices. They indicate that in view of their *visible* activities, contrary to what is generally believed, Muslim associations are becoming important actors involved in social and political actions that go far beyond strictly religious activity. For instance, such associations engage in activities and projects that aim to reach needy people regardless of their religious belonging or convictions. As explained by Brodard (Chapter 5), their engagement is hence designed at the local social scale, beyond the “boundaries” of the Muslim communities themselves.

The exact number of Muslim associations in Switzerland is not known (Federal Council 2013). However, it seems that despite Muslims' presence, religious practices, and visibility having been objects of political debate in Switzerland for about fifteen years, the number and visibility of them are increasing. The debate raised by the popular initiative against minarets, which Swiss citizens accepted in November 2009, has triggered a seemingly paradoxical effect. On the one hand, the campaign instantiated the dominant discourse about the need to control and regulate Islamic groups in order to protect Swiss society from dogmatic religiosity, practices that call into question fundamental rights (such as gender equality), or Islamic radicalism and terrorist attacks. On the other, in reaction to the result of the vote and to the negative representations that led to it, there has been an increase of Islamic umbrella organisations (such as the UVAM), of religious associations formed in reaction to the vote on minarets (such as the Swiss Central Islamic Council), and of associations that endorse a wider range of activities besides religious ones (such as Frislam, see: Banfi and Sanchez-Mazas, Chapter 3). The heterogeneity of Muslim associations is given not only by their ethnic background (see: Gianni et al. 2015) but also by the diversity of repertoires of social engagement covered by their actions. The spreading use of digital devices by all the youth Islamic organisations analysed by Banfi and Sanchez-Mazas (Chapter 3) entails new forms of actions through presence on social media. Therefore, the constant politicisation of Muslims' presence – as well as decisions calling into question Muslims' visibility – instead of causing Muslims to refrain from being visible and carrying a political voice, seem to have triggered the opposite effect. Namely, they have pushed Muslims to find forms of collective action aimed at performing a counter-discourse and resisting negative social representations as well as a decision perceived as unfair or discriminatory. In other words, while most of the public debate and social representations have portrayed Muslim organisations as problematic actors for democracy, these organisations have been progressively mobilising in civil society to assert their presence and gain forms of social and political recognition (Monnot 2013). Indeed, what is striking is that one of the main societal injunctions towards Muslims – namely, their progressive integration through depoliticisation – has led to the opposite result, which has been the creation of groups asserting a more visible political subjectivity.

Do associations play a role in enhancing such a political subjectivity? In the next section, drawing on scientific literature, we approach this question by focusing on two elements: namely, the political effects of associational membership and the reasons for Muslims' mobilisation.

### 10.3 Associations, Social Capital, and Civic Engagement

Voluntary associations are generally described in the scientific literature as a powerful vehicle of social integration and cohesion. In particular, scholars have pointed to the important role of associations as a source of social capital (Maloney and Rossteuscher 2007). Although definitions of social capital vary, most agree in seeing it as a specific kind of resource linked to the structure of relations among groups or individuals: “social capital exists in social relations of all sorts, especially within the family or community social organisations, and takes on a variety of forms” (Stolle 2007, 656). Associations are important vectors of production of social capital. As Jacobs and Tillie (2004, 421) argue, “voluntary associations create social trust, which spills over into political trust and higher political participation.” In their study on Moroccans, Turks, and Surinamese immigrants in Amsterdam, they found a correlation between the density of networks of subjects’ ethnic organisations and the degree of political participation at the group level. This trend also holds at the individual level: the more voluntary associations an immigrant is a member of, the more she or he participates politically. From this perspective, this has something to do with the social capital generated by such an organisational affiliation (Eggert and Giugni 2010). In Switzerland, considering the data collected about a decade ago (Giugni et al. 2013), it appears that Muslim residents are more involved in ethnic organisations than Swiss non-Muslims (fewer than 10 percent of the latter are involved in such organisations). Among Muslims, Turks display the highest rate of involvement in this organisation type. Nevertheless, among Muslim groups, Turks tend to be more involved in cross-ethnic associations than Maghrebis and former Yugoslavians. With regards to involvement in organisations that promote people of the same national background, Turks tend to be twice as involved as Maghrebis and former Yugoslavians. When it comes to involvement in religious organisations, the three groups of Muslims tend to present similar rates of involvement (around 10 percent). Notably, Swiss nationals are more involved than Muslims in this organisation type (18 percent). This difference can be explained according to two lines of reasoning: at the macro-level, Muslim religious associations are confronted with a relatively closed political opportunity structure, as Islam is not recognised as an official religion at the national level. At the individual level, this finding illustrates Muslims’ highly individualistic way of practicing religion, which has been observed in other European countries (Cesari 2004). It is worth noting the case of the Turks, who tend to be more embedded in associational networks on an ethnic (national) than on a religious basis. This case shows the difficulty of clearly disentangling the religious and ethno-cultural mix of activities involved in associations. Turkish associations do not have an

exclusively religious vocation but also foster social and cultural activities (such as language learning, nurseries, etc.) (see: Haab et al. 2010, 105–106).

Previous research has also shown that among the different factors that explain political participation of Muslims in Switzerland is the feeling of discrimination (Giugni et al. 2013). The more one feels discriminated against, the more one tends to be politically active, although the effect is not very strong. This result can be interpreted according to two opposing views. On the one hand, one may expect the feeling of being discriminated against to have a negative impact on political participation. From this perspective, discrimination on the basis of colour or skin, nationality or origin, or religion could discourage Muslims to participate because they would feel excluded and therefore less legitimised to do so. On the other hand, some versions of the so-called group consciousness approach have stressed the importance of the construction of discrimination as a collective, social grievance that necessitates political action to redress it. From this perspective, a perception that a group is discriminated against has been used as a measure of group consciousness (McClain et al. 2009). Indeed, ethno-religious associations might also work through sociopsychological mechanisms by creating group consciousness and a sense of identity that empowers political participation (Calhoun-Brown 1996).

Therefore, reactions to what are perceived as discourses and practices of stigmatisation or misrecognition presumably play an important role in the increasing engagement of Muslim associations. The vote on the ban of minarets in 2009, as well as the negative representations of Islam and Muslims that marked the campaign, have certainly contributed to the decision of several Muslims to associate in order to speak for and represent themselves in society instead of being spoken for and represented by non-Muslims in a negative way in political and media discourses. During the campaign on minarets, several voices have denounced the negative representations attached to Islam and Muslims. For instance, Youssef Ibram, an imam at Geneva's main mosque and the Islamic Cultural Foundation, argued that "whatever the outcome of the vote, Muslims would lose out from a campaign that had played on fears of Islam and exposed deep-seated opposition to their community among many Swiss" (Cumming-Bruce and Erlanger 2009). This statement, and many others, clearly put an emphasis on the intrinsic quality of the campaign's process and implied that, irrespective of the vote's outcome, the campaign had already succeeded in calling the national belonging of Muslims in Switzerland into question and therefore misrecognising Muslims' visibility and recognition of equal status (Baycan and Gianni 2019). Recognition is indeed a central category to apprehend Muslims' mobilisation. Feelings of disrespect and misrecognition fuel struggles for recognition, namely the constitution of a

political subject and its empowerment through social and political struggles (Honneth 1995). Let us consider an example.

#### 10.4 The Case of the Referendum against the Law on *Laïcité* in Geneva

The referendum launched against the *law of laïcité*, adopted by the Grand Council of the Canton of Geneva on 26 April 2018, adequately illustrates such a dynamic of reaction to feelings of misrecognition through political engagement.

The law has emerged after a long process that, as shown by Sanchez-Mazas in his chapter, raises some doubts about public authorities' willingness to include some (supposedly controversial) Muslim public figures in it. However, the most relevant aspect of the controversy surrounding the adoption of this law relies on the mobilisation of some Muslim associations against the law through the launch of a referendum. Through an alliance between several forces of the centre-left, trade unions, and feminist associations, Muslim groups (such as UOMG and other associations) had the opportunity to publicly contest and actively contribute to the law's rejection. Indeed, the mobilisation for the referendum instantiated Muslim organisations as a political subject in the public debate, even though the referendum was defeated on 9 February 2019 by 55 percent of the voters. By political subject, I refer to the idea of an individual or a collective body who takes part in collective decisions, defends interests or values, argues for them, and has a political agency and voice in the public debate.

One of the main reasons for Muslims' mobilisation (Ramadan 2019) against the law was related to the obligation put on both representatives of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers and state agents (when in contact with the users of public services) to make their religious affiliations invisible – in particular, by avoiding religiously connoted dresses and signs. Although not stipulated in the wording of the law, several commentators have considered that such a requirement affected veiled Muslim women in particular. Unsurprisingly, some local Muslim leaders accused the law of being Islamophobic and discriminatory, precisely because of this unfair focus on veiled women. These arguments have also been voiced by left parties supporting the referendum and trade unions worried about the implications of such a law on employment opportunities, especially for veiled women hired by cantonal-founded companies (airport, nurseries, etc.).

What is relevant about the referendum on *laïcité* in the canton of Geneva is not the fact that issues related to the Muslims' presence in Switzerland have

been adjudicated by popular vote. This had already occurred, for instance, the national vote on minarets in 2009, as well as the cantonal votes on the burka in 2011 in Ticino and Saint Gall in 2018. Instead, contrary to the general trend of previous controversies where Muslims were mainly silent, because some Muslim groups were being spoken about by non-Muslims instead of having a political voice, they took a clear and visible political position during the campaign. Previously, such an attitude was mainly expressed by individuals (although often supported by associations), with several controversies adjudicated at the judicial level – for instance, the case of the headscarf affair that was debated in Geneva during the late nineties or controversies about swimming lessons ruled by the Federal Court. With the exception of some local Muslim leaders present in the media, the default position of Muslim and Muslim associations was mainly their silence or political invisibility. In the recent Geneva case, some Muslim associations have engaged publicly in a political alliance and have politically opposed a law that affects them directly. Indeed, in organising and taking part in the campaign, Muslims have become a collective political subject.

There has not yet been any scientific analysis of this vote, and it is therefore not possible to provide a precise empirical explanation of what happened. However, it is possible to extrapolate some interpretations based on the scientific literature. In particular, with regards to what is presented above, it is plausible to establish an analytical link between, on the one side, the negative framing representing Muslims' presence and their (supposed) lack of integration and, on the other, the emergence of new associations and an increase in their political engagement and visibility.

This interpretation is in line with that suggested by Bloemraad (2018, 4), referring to the concept of citizenship. According to her, citizenship “is a relational process of making membership claims on polities, people and institutions, claims recognized or rejected within particular normative understandings of citizenship. ... This framework requires a relational approach and attention to dynamics of recognition within contexts of structured agency.” The law on *laïcité* is considered discriminatory against Muslims, as it calls into question freedom of religion and hence misrecognises them into perpetuating the representation of Muslims as the main figure of alterity and a threat to secularism. Moreover, it has been produced by a political institution where Muslims are almost absent. The struggle against the law can be seen as a set of claims that directly concern citizenship and the legitimacy of the citizenship regime<sup>231</sup>, and it had been articulated in the name of citizen-

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231 Citizenship regimes are “institutionalized systems of formal and informal norms that define access to membership, as well as rights and duties associated with membership, within a polity” (Vink 2017, 222).

ship. These claims call for forms of recognition of Muslims' presence and cultural–religious particularities by reacting to misrecognition and claiming equal treatment and antidiscrimination measures.

What is particularly relevant is that associations are central vectors of such a political agency and empowerment. Certainly, their mobilisation and repertoire of actions also depend on the contextual characteristics of the social and political issues at stake. For instance, in order to counter what are considered gender stereotypes attached to women wearing Islamic headscarves, several collectives of Muslim women have been constituted. One among them, *Les Foulards violets*, is a very interesting case. It is a feminist group constituted in Geneva in 2019, composed of veiled and non-veiled Muslim women and non-Muslim women.<sup>232</sup> It mobilises in support of veiled women, and it attempts to re-signify the negative representation of the Islamic veil as a form of domination of women, as well as provide a positive representation of it, namely as the result of a choice taken freely by autonomous women. This group was active during the national Swiss women's strike, which took place in June 2019 to call for better gender equality. It publicly stands for a conception of egalitarian and free citizenship, and it would be very reductive to consider it only through religious affiliation.

What can we draw from these elements? In my view, we can draw at least two aspects: first, to understand the aims and values underlying Muslim associations' mobilisation in Switzerland, it is important to consider the connections between Muslims' feelings of misrecognition (whether they are objective or subjective), their associational involvement, and the associations' repertoires of actions. Second, and more generally, without considering the general frame through which the integration of minority groups, especially Muslims, is conceived in Switzerland, as well as the particular Swiss ethos of citizenship based on equality and freedom, the positive democratic aspects of the mobilisation of Muslim organisation are downplayed. These two aspects are developed in the final section.

## 10.5 Citizenship, Integration, and Recognition of Muslims in Switzerland

Switzerland and Europe have implemented several public policies to foster integration, such as civic integration tests, contracts, or agreements. Measures of control and the securitisation of some groups, particularly Muslim groups, are part of such a strategy so as to avoid illegal behaviours, terrorist

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232 For a more precise analysis of Islamic association from a gender perspective, see Aykaç and Banfi (Chapter 9).

attacks, or discourses supporting antidemocratic values. These policies have been justified as attempts to ensure immigrants and members of minority groups conform to the standards of what a democratic regime is supposed to require in terms of values, practices, and a sense of good citizenship. They form an assimilationist dimension aimed at preserving (supposedly) common values. The main idea informing this view is that once integration is attained, individuals will endorse democratic values, respect democratic procedures, behave in “normal” terms, and be functional and not dysfunctional towards the system. In this light, integration is ultimately viewed as an end state – that is, the acquisition of symbolic and material resources to be a good citizen.

More specifically, the dominant conception of integration taking place in European countries is integration seen as an *adaptation* to democratic norms and values, which, by the way, often depends on the (culturally) majoritarian understanding in a given context. What is problematic in such a view of integration is its depoliticising character, namely the fact that individuals are asked to comply with interpretations of democratic values and practices that are considered valid in a *pre-political* way and thus *outside* the realm of the political. This collides with the idea that citizens should be able to redefine and re-signify the terms of their common belonging or common values. This is precisely why a *processual* conception of integration is more fruitful in determining modalities of accommodation in multicultural settings (Gianni 2016). It is a conception according to which integration emerges from a process of intersubjective multilogues and social relations that produces shared meanings of common belonging and, being based on inclusion, can contribute to overcoming stigma and misrecognition (both at the collective and individual levels).

What animates such a process is ultimately the assumption that in order to be up to democratic standards, individuals – whatever their religious or cultural background – should, all things being equal, be treated fairly, as equal bearers of rights, and as autonomous subjects. Therefore, integration policy does not necessarily have to be assimilationist. Alternative modes of social and political integration that are respectful of cultural diversity, moral pluralism and citizenship in particular are conceivable. The assimilationist trend inherent to actual integration policies presumably explains why integration has become a highly controversial word in some activist and academic circles. It is criticised as being an ideological notion (re)instituting differentiations and hierarchies between “good citizens”, complying with majoritarian democratic values, and “bad citizens” who are resistant to them, unable to adapt, or willing to subvert democratic values and practices (Korteweg 2017).

Although it is not possible here to present a full-fledged justification, I maintain that, as a concept, integration does not entail a necessary intrin-

sic assimilationist meaning. It is possible to use the concept of integration without stipulating the justification of an arbitrary (moral) power inducing individuals to conform to given (national) values. For citizenship to be up to the standards of its minimal moral promises (namely moral equality, liberty, autonomy, power to contest, recognition of one's own political agency and status, or power to (co)decide), some forms of integration are necessary. This does not depend on national belonging or immigrant status; statutory (national) citizens are also concerned with the same needs. What if, in the name of citizenship, a society tolerates "second-class" citizens, structural discriminations, or the exit choices of some from the democratic game? In such contexts, none of the democratic institutions would be considered as producing legitimate outcomes. Therefore, integration *into* citizenship is a crucial part of democratic legitimacy, and this obviously not only concerns immigrants but every individual who, for several reasons, does not consider herself to belong, to be part of, or to have a say in society.

The logic of the adaptive conception of integration relies on some beliefs that are often taken for granted. For instance, first, it is often believed that procedurally just decisions will inevitably produce political stability, trust in institutions, and a lack of conflict due to the agreement of all individuals. Second, it is believed that acceptance of the rules of the democratic game, such as the majority rule, is necessary to produce just political outcomes and that criticisms against them are by definition anti-democratic. Finally, it is also believed that the intrinsic meaning of democratic values is fixed once and for all and that everybody should be able to understand and comply with them in order to live peacefully in a democratic society.

Against such assumptions, the notion of integration as a process embodies the idea that reasonable political conflicts, conflicts of interpretation of rights, decisions or political actions, and cultural-political misunderstandings are ineluctably part of a democratic society. They are not evidence of an unhealthy democratic society but of its normal functioning. On the basis of such an assumption, the question becomes: how can democratic institutions, although being open to conflict over the values of common belonging (basically what politics is about), procedurally structure such dynamics and, doing that, contribute in producing, if not social esteem, at least political respect among the members of minority groups and majority nationals? How can all citizens be considered as equals and treated respectfully as autonomous political agents, despite their cultural belongings or conceptions of good?

It is not possible here to extensively address such complex questions. Nonetheless, it appears that associations occupy an important function in such an emancipating democratic process. In representation of their members' interests, they can express issues that are not part of the political agenda.

Because of the size of their constituency and expertise, they can become a relevant actor in negotiations and conflict resolutions with public authorities. For tenants of associative democracy (see: Elstub 2008; Fung 2003), associations of civil society are (and should be) key players in democratic governance and participation. This concerns a broad range of secondary associations, such as trade unions, welfare and charity organisations, service clubs, recreational organisations, educational and cultural organisations (Elstub 2008, 102), and religious organisations. This book shows that, if we are to locate Muslim associations along these different types of organisations, we notice that several of them perform a multiplicity of activities. In many cases, their repertoire of actions is much richer than simply stating and defending a theological position. Indeed, focusing only on their religious dimension would be very reductive and would also consist of framing all of the associations' activities as motivated only by religious reasons. Such a view is problematic for empirical and political reasons. On the one hand, it takes associations' social, economic, welfare, cultural, and political actions mainly (if not only) as a modality of proselytism towards Muslims and non-Muslims. This only reinforces suspicion and mistrust. On the other hand, it entails that Muslims' religious associations are not suited to operate based on values other than religious ones. In other words, they would be incapable of "translating" their religious worldview in practices totally suited to secular values, such as those pursuing social justice, social and political recognition, equality of opportunity, or antidiscrimination.

As Habermas (2006) argues, a post-secular society functions in a morally and democratically legitimate way only if religious actors, as well as secular ones, are capable of translating their values and beliefs in terms compatible with public reason. He maintains that secular actors have a duty to help religious ones operate such a translation, and he therefore includes all perspectives in the public debate. In practice, this is not the case. The essentialised view of Muslims' subjectivity, as well as the lack of symbolic recognition of Muslims' equal standing in the nation (Baycan and Gianni 2019), do not allow such an open and public communicative process to take place. The framing of the over-religionisation of Muslim associations' agency and practices downplays the potential of such practices and discourses to contribute to the ongoing debate on the (re)definition of common values, common citizenship, or, for instance, the modalities to implement welfare (see: Banfi 2018). It does not provide adequate intersubjective conditions to promote alternative forms of what Habermas calls "post-conventional identities", namely different values and positive representations a collective body endorses through communicational exchanges with another group.

To make associations part of the democratic process and to ensure they contribute to social cohesion, some preconditions are needed, both at the internal and external levels. At the internal level, associations should be minimally democratically organised so that members can co-decide on the meanings, actions, and purposes of the association's engagement in civil society (see: Grand, Chapter 6). At the external level, associations, besides legal requirements, should be granted minimum recognition as a legitimate actor competent on specific issues and respected by partners of interaction. In addition, associations should be interconnected to promote common, although conflicting, goals. In contexts marked by social differentiations and power inequalities between majority and minority groups, only fair and open inclusion in the decision-making process can provide some legitimacy to its outcomes. As shown by Sanchez-Mazas (Chapter 4), what is considered by some as a lack of representation of various groups or actors, can lead them to deny the values of the overall process. However, inclusion and representation are not enough. It is also important that actors are capable of sharing a minimal set of values that allow a debate to take place on controversial issues. In other words, forms of internal and external deliberation can help associations and authorities revise or overcome their pre-deliberative preferences and therefore produce alternative views of the contents of common belonging – in other words, post-conventional identities. To be sure, deliberative theorists have already envisioned such forms of democratic practice and the empirical aspects hampering the possibilities to realise full inclusion or legitimate deliberation.

The point here is not to develop a full-fledged conception of deliberative democracy but to suggest that institutional opportunities and normative criteria exist to, at least, allow such discursive dynamics to take place and hence ascribe a more active meaning and political role to citizenship. The necessity of such a dynamic to take place is particularly compelling in social contexts where some actors do not feel recognised enough and where cultural and symbolic divides continuously perform trajectories of exclusion and subordination of some groups. In such contexts, associations play a central role. On the one hand, they should provide their members some social, economic, linguistic, and cultural resources needed to conduct their lives and function in society. On the other, it is important that they participate in struggles for recognition, namely in practices aiming to overcome misrecognition and a lack of equal standing and social esteem (Honneth 1995). By their actions and visibility in civil society, associations can re-signify values, provide new ideas about specific issues, and empower members' agency. In sum, they can contribute significantly to reinforce citizenship practices and rights when positively influencing the extension of the bundle of rights, protecting individuals, and providing them opportunities to live a decent life.

As shown through the variety of examples discussed in this book, I do not see any analytical reason a priori to deny such a democratic potential to Muslim associations. The existence of organisations intending to perform terrorist projects or acts, radicalise the youth, narrow Islamic values, or disrespect fundamental democratic rights should not overshadow the contribution of several associations to the fabric of social cohesion. Several associations perform important social, economic, and political activities that are consistent with legitimate democratic needs. To recognise such a fact means to acknowledge that such associations are part of the citizenship regime, not outside it, and that their practices directly or indirectly make claims about citizenship and its constitutive values and thus contribute to the overall quality of the democratic process. Obviously, citizenship and democracy are contested categories and projects. Individuals and groups disagree on values, conceptions of the good life, interpretations of rights and duties, the role of the state, and so on. Politics is about determining a procedure to accommodate political and moral pluralism, conflict over values, and political practices. However, this conflict cannot be reduced to a question of binary opposition between religious and secular values or between undemocratic Muslim associations and democratic non-Muslim ones (or associations of “good Muslims”). In Switzerland, as in any democratic polity, all political actors participate in such conflicts, producing and claiming divergent interpretations of values and norms. This is perfectly legitimate in democratic terms. Nevertheless, some non-Muslim associations are much more sectarian in their values than many of the Muslim ones. Therefore, to use the concepts of Mouffe (2010), Muslim associations are not (and should not be considered) the antagonist against which it is necessary to protect democracy. Muslim associations should be considered, like the others, actors of the democratic agonism and thus part of a process in which all actors recognise, despite their deep differences, the legitimacy of others’ claims. This would not avoid conflict, as conflict is inescapable in society. When structured by a clear procedural perimeter, defining legitimate modalities of inclusion and participation, political conflict can also produce new, more just, and shared types of living together, respectful of the moral, religious and cultural diversity that is constitutive of democratic societies. Ultimately, this is what citizenship is about, and associations are a key part of such a democratic project.

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This book shows how, over the past forty years, Islamic organisations in Western Switzerland have established and organised themselves at both the cantonal and national levels. Based on empirical observations, the chapters demonstrate that, contrary to what is often believed, Islamic organisations do not focus their activities only on religious activities. Instead, by improving their deliberative practices, they have facilitated cultural, social, and religious activities while promoting social justice, political recognition, and equality of opportunity, often with programs aiming at reaching beyond the Muslim audience. In particular, the book shows how these organisations have attempted to translate their religious worldview into practices that align also with secular values, allowing them to negotiate and build consensus with public institutions to provide welfare services to both Muslim and non-Muslim populations, as well as programs to prevent radicalisation within a secular and democratic framework. Through deliberative practices, including youth organisations and umbrella Islamic organisations, these groups have found ways to overcome their lack of representation and power in the political sphere. This book goes beyond specific cantonal cases to address broader issues related to the social and cultural engagement of Islamic organisations in Switzerland, bridging the gap between Islamic studies and organisational network studies.

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