

Leading the Community of the Middle Way: A Study of the Muslim Field in France

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This article makes a first attempt to analyze structures of authority in French Islam by drawing on Bourdieu's field concept. After a short discussion of current research on Islamic authority in France, I will in the second section address the reorientation of French state policies and the intergenerational changes that have led to an external reconfiguration of the Muslim field in France. The third and fourth parts of this article will be devoted to studying responses by different, mainly Franco-Maghrebi, Muslim actors to this reconfiguration of the field. The focus will be on those Muslim groups that develop specifically French readings of Islam and aim to reshape the French Muslim community as the Qur'anic "community of the middle way," as opposed to variously defined groups with radical tendencies. The different types of relations between authorities and French-born Muslims and the mosque as a site of authority will be the particular focus.

Research on Authority in French Islam

An important number of studies on French Islam have over the years addressed the question of authority. In more recent studies,¹ a cluster of interrelated theses can be discerned, namely the transformation of religious authority due to intergenerational change; the emergence of new religious leaders, such as the paradigmatic Tariq Ramadan, who are sometimes seen as "secular"; and the decline of the authority of imams.² This article aims to continue this line of reflection by examining more closely how these new religious leaders relate to and attempt to assign specific positions to other religious actors notably to those born outside of France, and to believers. In this respect, I will emphasize the Islamic legitimacy to which these leaders make claims in their seemingly non-traditional discourses and will connect

this to reflections on how specific understandings of authority can give rise to a 'non-scholarly' Islamic discourse.

My analysis will also continue and rethink arguments made with regard to the aims and impact of French policies on the institutionalization of Islam and more specifically on authority.³ In order to understand how Muslim actors relate to the French state, it is necessary, I argue, to look beyond the debates concerning the headscarf and take into consideration the constraints and stimuli resulting from French policies regarding the institutionalization of Islam. In this respect, particular attention should be paid to state attempts since the early 1990s to reorganize the imamate in France⁴ as well as the perspective that was opened up for Muslim organizations through the foundation in 2003 of the *Conseil Français du Culte Musulman* (CFCM),⁵ the representative body of French Muslims, to build up dominant positions in to-be-institutionalized French Islam.⁶ Instead of analyzing state policies in terms of the "domestication of Islam,"⁷ that is, in terms of a basically one-sided process of adaptation of Islam to the French republican context, I will emphasize how changes in French understandings of *laïcité* have partly reoriented the fundamental objectives of Islam policies towards the authorization of Muslim power structures which are today to disseminate what I call "civil Islam" (see below for more on this term). While I recognize the importance of conflicts between certain Muslim federations and the state, my analysis will highlight a fundamental agreement that unites the major Islamic federations, both the 'moderate' *Mosquée de Paris* and the "Islamist" *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (UOIF), with the French state, an agreement which concerns the need to educate "young" Muslims and ensure their successful socialization into French society in order to prevent the spread of "radical" Islam. The competition in the Muslim field results to a large degree from conflicting claims by Muslims to positions of authority in this project of "civil Islam."

I will make two interrelated arguments. First, building on current research on religious authority in Islam, the article aims to study the "crisis of authority"⁸ from the perspective of the competition between religious authorities inside the Muslim field. "Muslim field" refers here to a relational structure of positions which are defined and in turn determine the agents occupying them as part of the broader distribution of capital, i.e. potential sources of power. In our case, these positions are occupied by Muslim authorities who are engaged in a competition for power, here religious authority, inside the field which derives its consistency precisely from this direct or indirect competition for a commonly shared goal.

More precisely, religious authority is defined here as the probability that specific adherences to Islam find acceptance among its followers.

While I use here “authorities” as a shorthand to designate persons or institutions engaged on a regular or professional basis in the authorization of Islam, this usage does not imply that these persons or institutions are permanently endowed with authority. Strictly speaking there are no authorities, but only positions of authority and the former have authority only to the degree that they succeed in occupying positions of authority. Importantly, the latter’s configurations vary over time, since authority is based on changing combinations of religious and other forms of capital, defined here in a general way as potential sources of power, whose value is subject to continual reassessment by a variety of processes and actors. The possibility of a fixed embodiment of authority, by a person or institution, is thus problematic, although it cannot be excluded outright. In principle, this holds true as well for actors charged with the exercise of a specific function, such as imams or muftis, since the conditions for successfully exercising this office are equally unstable. Pointedly said, this article analyzes how Muslim authorities attempt to occupy positions of authority in the context of ongoing broad processes of reassessing capitals in the Muslim field in France.

Religious authority will be defined here as the capacity to shape the beliefs and practices of believers. I start from the double premise that forms of capital constitutive of religious authority and their values cannot be circumscribed *a priori* and that the distinction between authority and believer is not clear-cut. In the absence of a strong centralized hierarchy, the relations between believers and would-be-authorizers are multiple and partly overlapping. In this framework, I will seek to understand the changing profile and power of religious authorities in France by relating it to the definition of Islam as religion in France and to the historically rooted structure of the Muslim field in its relationship to the believers.

Second, I will argue that these external influences on the Islamic field — more precisely on the assessment of religious capital and the convertibility of other forms of capital in the religious field — do not have an automatic impact, but are crucially mediated in specific ways and/or rejected by Muslims through the reference to certain Islamic principles and concepts.⁹ Focusing on one aspect of mediation, I will then attempt to show how the authorization of a specifically French understanding of Islam through reference to concepts such as *ijtihad* sets in motion an intense competition among religious actors concerning the profile of those authorized to conduct such an effort and concerning the hierarchical structure of the community. This competition, I argue, is partly structured by and connects to changes in Islamic understandings of authority that can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Emergence and Transformation of the Muslim field in France

Fundamentally, the use of Bourdieu's field concept shifts the emphasis away from the study of interaction between authorities and believers towards the structures and objective relations that make them possible. More specifically, the possible advantages of employing Bourdieu's field concept for an analysis of power structures in French Islam are the following:¹⁰ first, this concept allows us to analyze the continual process of defining Islam and Islamic authority through an analysis of the Muslim field's relative autonomy, its possible overlap with other fields and its relations to other fields in terms of convertible capital. Such an analysis can base itself to a certain degree on Bourdieu, who has studied, for the case of France, the emergence of a new religious field inside which traditional religious actors (i.e., priests) are competing with various other actors (i.e., psychologists, physicians, social workers, etc.) at a time when believers display a more holistic orientation and a shift from norms to techniques and from ethical to therapeutic questions.¹¹ This perspective on the recurrent (re)configuration of a field and its changing structure is particularly fruitful for our case. One of its advantages is that it will exempt us from the use of essentialist notions of Muslim religious discourse (i.e., which measure of scriptural knowledge needs to be demonstrated in this discourse)¹² and brings us one step closer to avoiding given notions of the 'religious' and the 'secular.' From a Bourdieuan perspective, the boundaries of the religious field and its relationship towards other fields are flexible and continuously being redrawn. While this thesis can be interpreted as a principled objection to theories of a religious decline specific to modernity,¹³ I will make use of it here simply to assess the relative power of Muslim actors in the French context in their attempts to authorize particular understandings of Islam. Secondly, I will try to highlight how the configuration of the religious field determines the relationships of competition between religious actors and the rates of convertibility between different types of capital, notably religious and cultural capital. For this discussion, two types of religious capital can be usefully distinguished: first, the embodied knowledge and mastery of Islamic practices, scriptures and sciences; second, institutionalized capital, i.e., the capacity of religious organizations to disseminate specific understandings of Islamic practices and beliefs. It is important to point out that Islamic capital does not refer here to the mastery of a particular "religious culture."¹⁴ While religion and culture are intertwined in multiple ways, their relationship in the post-migratory context of France is highly complex and for many Muslims, is far from being self-evident. In this analysis, I will try to conceptualize the intra-Muslim conflicts related to the shaping of this relationship by

distinguishing between different types of cultural capital, which refer to a cultural habitus and education, and religious capital. One of the aims of this article is to analyze the ongoing attempts by Muslim actors to redefine the valuation and the regime of convertibility of these different forms of capitals. The emphasis placed here upon the convertibility of capital, religious and cultural, and on the importance of interfield relations for the structure of the religious field is admittedly not characteristic of most of Bourdieu's own writings on religion. In this respect, my analysis takes a lead from Verter's reading of Bourdieu, which seeks to fructify the latter's study of the cultural field for an analytical approach to religion.¹⁵

The advantages of the field concept extend to our understanding of how developments in structures of authority in France are specifically Islamic. By looking at how the external influences mentioned above are discarded (with reference to the universality of Islam, notably) or validated (as an influence that legitimately needs to be responded to in the context of a specifically French reading of Islam), I will attempt to show not only how the Islamic tradition is re-actualized in specific ways through the social embeddedness of believers and Muslim institutions, but also how the external influences on the Muslim field are reshaped through the field's structure and how the impact of the above mentioned reconfiguration of the religious field varies strongly depending on the position inside the field. From this perspective, so-called new types of authority figures, such as Tariq Ramadan, can be understood as being both French *and* Islamic. Finally, the field concept allows us to move beyond analyzing the influence of French politics on Islam in the narrow sense. Looking at the contested valuation of various forms of capital in the religious field in its relationship to the field of power, it will be possible to understand how French attempts to 'domesticate' Islam crucially interconnect with mechanisms of competition inside the religious field or, put differently, how these attempts are made possible through the field's internal logic.

Delimiting the boundaries of the field and its inner structure is both the starting and end points of this paper. Following Bourdieu,¹⁶ the existence and boundaries of a field need to be established by asking whether the objective relations between a group of actors generate effects that impact the functioning of each of them. In a first step, we can say that it is justified and useful to speak of a French Muslim field since the late 1980s, because significant efforts by an important number of Muslims in France aim precisely at defining this field and their position in it as actors making claims to the correct understanding of Islam. This happens both through attempts to include oneself and exclude others and attempts to set oneself apart from other groups. The attempts by organizations such as the "radical" UOIF to become an accepted mainstream organization and a partner to the government,¹⁷ the

attempts by the “moderate” *Mosquée de Paris*¹⁸ to exclude the UOIF because of its radical outlook, the attempts by yet other Muslims to discredit the entire CFCM as not representing the true *Islam de France*¹⁹ — all these attempts to distinguish oneself and/or to exclude others with regard to the correct understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices *in France* are constitutive of the French Muslim field. It needs to be emphasized that the field’s existence is, to a certain degree, also based on the rejection of its existence by some Muslims, notably those belonging to Salafi groups. By directly attacking the above groups and trying to subvert the field with reference to the universal Muslim field, Salafi Muslims leave no doubt about their interest in the French Muslim field and ultimately contribute, *malgré eux*, to its maintenance.²⁰ Clearly, these debates structure the field only at one of its levels and are not conclusive arguments against the existence of a transnational Muslim field. It is beyond doubt that many religious actors in France are situated simultaneously in two national contexts where different hierarchies of capital and interfield relations prevail. However, the important point is simply that the relative importance of the French religious field has increased for many Muslims and that the structure of transnational links, and relatedly, that of varieties of cultural capital, thus changes in relation to it (and does not simply decline). The fact that more than 1,200 out of approximately 1,600 mosques and prayer rooms in France participate today in the CFCM can be used as an indicator for roughly evaluating the importance of this trend.

Synthesizing the literature, the shifting importance of national and transnational factors in the determination of the structure boundaries of the Muslim field in France ultimately can be traced back to the intergenerational change in French Muslim communities²¹ and the state’s reaction to it. Briefly said, the coming-of-age of French-born Muslims, a phenomenon whose importance increased rapidly since the 1980s, has pluralized the *habitus* among the believers and brought forth different ways of seeing France, understanding Islam and evaluating those competent to lead the community of believers. The coexistence of sometimes highly divergent *habitus* has fundamentally disturbed the balance of the field. Arguably, by partly disrupting relations between believers and religious leaders and enabling particularly French-born Muslims to durably restructure the field, this development has contributed to the field’s nationalization.

Recognition of this rupture lies beneath the ambivalent view, in public and political debates, of so-called second-generation Muslims. French-born Muslims are seen to distinguish themselves *vis-à-vis* their parents, because of their education and, more generally, their socialization in France. In public and scientific debates, this has been regularly pointed out and the intergenerational fissures have been interpreted as an indicator of the social integration of young

Muslims into French society.²² More generally, one can note that the vague belief in the correlation of a French socialization with a “moderate” Islam continues to inform political statements, for example, concerning the desirable profile of imams working in France. However, it was also recognized that the process of socialization of “young Muslims” was a partial failure in terms of assimilation. Indeed, the increasing gap between the parents’ religiosity and that of their children, which was considered to result from the breakdown of authority, was and is seen as an indicator of a possible threat to France in the form of Muslim dissent and/or the radicalization of young Muslims. This viewpoint, which partly reflects the refusal by French majority society to acknowledge the reality of a reciprocal process of integration that has pluralized the ways in which one can be ‘French,’ is disseminated today by a broad spectrum of Muslim actors, numerous social scientists and politicians. The importance for French politics of this recognition of a breakdown of parental and religious authority and of the partial failure of state institutions, notably the school, to successfully socialize second-generation immigrants cannot be overestimated, I would argue. The drastic reorientation of French politics since the late 1980s towards a religious policy favoring the incorporation of Islam into national structures and the creation of authority structures is to a large degree a direct reaction to this threat.²³ Its impulse lies in fact in a concern for “young Muslims” and their insufficient “integration” and, since the mid-1990s in particular, with the possibility that the so-called “re-islamisation” leads to their radicalization.²⁴ This was the starting point for French Islam policies whose disregard for the principle of *laïcité*, often pointed out, springs forth precisely from the multiple threats accruing from failed socialization. This is expressed paradigmatically in the 1995 report by the *Haut Conseil à l’Intégration*, which comments on the phenomenon of “reislamisation” by asserting that “it is indispensable that the state be able to respond and satisfy this demand for Islam.”²⁵

Looking more closely at the impact of French state policies,²⁶ we can say that these have contributed to shape the religious field in three ways. First, administrative measures, laws and legal decisions have partly defined the boundaries of the legitimately ‘Islamic’ in France. On the one hand, legal and administrative obstacles regarding religious obligations (dress code, prayer, sacrifice, cemeteries, etc . . .) need to be mentioned here²⁷ as well as the heightened surveillance of mosques and imams and the expulsion of imams from French territory.²⁸ On the other, the administrative incorporation and/or creation of Islamic institutions (mosque associations, chaplaincies, institutes of higher Islamic studies, CFCM and CRCM) has *de facto* recognized Islamic actors and consolidated and structured the Muslim field. Second, and more importantly for this discussion, state policies on the national or local

levels have contributed to redefine the assessment of capital in the religious field. The knowledge of French, the capacity to interact with authorities and the media and the ability to engage in interreligious dialogue have become more highly valued since the early 1990s.²⁹ Briefly said, this is notably due to the constraints and stimuli resulting from the above mentioned process of institutionalization, which itself results from the often-noted need by the state for Muslim interlocutors, French surveillance policies concerning Islam, and the promotion by local authorities of interreligious dialogue.

Finally, the state also has played a preponderant role in relating the Muslim field to that of integration policies. As pointed out above, French policies have been increasingly concerned with the failed “integration” of “second-generation” immigrants of Islamic background, a failure leading presumably to a variety of social problems and possibly to a radicalization of “young Muslims”. For a long time, until approximately 1995, the state’s reaction was restricted to its support for what was considered the “moderate” or “secular” Islam of the *Mosquée de Paris* and the exclusion of Islamic groups considered to be radical, notably the UOIF. However, this policy aiming fundamentally at the reestablishment of a separation between issues of integration and religion was partly abandoned in the late 1990s. Responding to the weakness of the *Mosquée de Paris*,³⁰ the state opted for a more inclusive policy towards groups such as the UOIF. While this has been often noted, the precise aim of this reorientation and its embeddedness in broader changes regarding the practice of *laïcité* has been less well examined. Much in fact indicates that this change of policy aims not simply at the transformation of “radical” groups through inclusion into the state apparatus, but is partly based on a new political approach towards Islam that consecrates the local practice of such an approach.³¹ Generally speaking, it reflects a broader change in French politics, away from an Islam policy approach that reasons in terms of strict *legality*, i.e., *laïcité*, to an approach that is based on a prospective analysis of Islam in France and that argues its aims with reference to what is *feasible* politically and to what is *acceptable* in terms of manifestations of Islamic religiosity. This change in Islam policies is underlying the more recent tendency in French politics to perceive Islamic organizations, including those suspected of lacking commitment to the Republic, as possible partners in the civil education of “second-generation” immigrants of Islamic background, a tendency which has led notably to increased interest from politicians in mosques and imams. This development should not in any way be seen as excluding the recourse of the state to repressive means in the fight against radicalization, such as the surveillance and/or closure of mosques and the expulsion of imams. It is precisely through the case-specific application of this latter policy, institutionalized in 2004 with the nation-wide creation of “units for the fight

against radical Islam” (i.e., Salafis and Tablighi Jama‘at),³² that the boundaries within which Islamic organizations can cooperate with the state are now defined, whereas the reference to variously defined Republican principles has receded.

While it is impossible to give a precise evaluation of the state of French prayer rooms and mosques, and particularly their financial situation, there can be no doubt judging from scattered evidence available that the vast majority of mosque associations face severe financial problems. While a recent study on the state of France’s approximately 1,600 mosques has pointed out that the age of “garage and basement Islam” has come to its end,³³ it is certain that very substantial problems remain today. This was in fact the starting point in 2004 for the political debate about the public funding of mosques. However, while this debate and in particular the propositions of former and current minister of the interior Sarkozy to modify certain legal arrangements related to the law of 1905 in order to facilitate public funding have attracted a lot of criticism, it needs to be pointed out that French public authorities have, for the last couple of years, given (direct or indirect) financial support to an estimated third of all mosques that are being constructed.³⁴ These practices are fundamentally based on the widely shared belief that the construction of “decent mosques” is an important element in the attempts to ward off extremism and/or disseminate a socially cohesive Islam.³⁵

While this support given to the building of “decent mosques” can be seen as part of a new citizenship policy of symbolic incorporation,³⁶ the scope and impact of this measure, as with the creation of the CFCM, go beyond this dimension. The support the creation of the CFCM garnered springs forth primarily from fears of Muslim radicalization, which was to be prevented *inter alia* through the institutionalization of a group of French-speaking imams and chaplains, precisely through the CFCM. In fact, in France, as in other countries,³⁷ the role of the imam is increasingly understood to transcend that of religion narrowly defined. While most politicians would avoid openly speaking about imams as civil educators and/or social workers,³⁸ the immense importance of the debate concerning the training of imams in France since the early 1990s results of course from the belief that these imams *de facto* have, for good or bad, this role as educator. The available evidence suggests that this belief is shared by a substantial number of local political actors.³⁹

In sum, it thus can be said that in certain respects, the Muslim field today overlaps with that in which integration policies are played out: in both fields, authority positions over young Muslims of immigrant background are fought over by partly the same persons and institutions. While this development is clearly contested, it finds important support both on the national⁴⁰ and local levels. Together with the pluralization of *habitus* through intergenerational

change, it has led to a contested redefinition of religious capital that is now seen by a significant number of actors in the Muslim field as distinct, though necessarily related to a particular cultural *habitus* and/or cultural knowledge. The cultural capital acquired through socialization and schooling in France and, more particularly, the acquaintance with the life-worlds of young Muslims, knowledge of French and knowledge of French society, can now be converted by some Muslims into religious capital on which to base their authority. Because of the overlap of the Muslim field with that of integration policies, this authority potentially extends both to the domain of religion and politics.⁴¹ Moreover, this converted cultural capital can now be weighed against religious competencies and be used openly in the competition against immigrated Muslim actors whose cultural capital is de-legitimated as a factor that impedes proper use of religious capital and which thus ultimately diminishes the latter's value. However, for immigrated Muslim actors, the relation between religious and cultural capital is not necessarily negative. Rather, the attempts of some Muslim organizations to institutionalize a bilingual Islam also aim to convert cultural into religious capital and at the same time fix a combination of these competencies that enables them to remain actors in the field.⁴²

Although this is not a primary concern of this study, it should be added that it is not only the cultural capital of a French-born Muslim, but also the scientific expertise of the life-worlds of young French Muslims that can legitimate Islamic discourses, which are then more of a second-order type. In fact, references to scientific knowledge on French Muslims are frequent in many Islamic discourses in France. This, I would argue, reflects not only the rising importance of an Islam policy based on a prospective analysis of Islamic religiosity in France with which Muslims need to engage, but is also part of a generation-specific Islamic discourse that reflects on its societal context and its addressees. The fact that an anthropologist such as Dounia Bouzar⁴³ justified her presence in the CFCM, which she considers to be charged with the elaboration of a French Islamic religiosity, with reference to her scientific expertise on “young Muslims” is thus not without logic, whatever the success of it might have been.

Islam de France and the Opening of the Muslim field

Fundamentally, Muslim actors are thus faced today with the challenge of defining and adapting their positions inside a field whose relative position and boundaries are redefined both by the state and the believers. The ways in which Muslim actors face this challenge is in at least two ways shaped by their diverging inscriptions in the Islamic tradition. It is Islamic in the sense that the response to this challenge — by those who choose to see it as a valid

challenge — is conceived, generally speaking, as a legitimate effort towards an interpretation of Islamic scripture which is partly specific to the French context. Likewise, the position that a specifically French understanding of Islam is not legitimate is argued with reference to Islamic principles. It is depending on these different Islamically argued positions that the influence of the external attempts by the state and the believers to reconfigure the field are of greatly varying importance to the power structures inside the field.

Secondly, it is Islamic in the sense that the internal structure of the field in France and the assessment of capital are shaped by historically grown understandings and structures of Islamic authority. Looking more closely at those who argue that a specifically French reading of Islam is necessary, I will try to argue that the ensuing reassessment of religious capital is structurally a reactualization of developments in the Reform movement of the 19th century and is played out by a configuration of actors who emerged in this period. More importantly, I will point to the strong emphasis placed by the Islamic movement on the individual's participation in the call to "true Islam" (*da'wa*) as a factor making the realization of a hierarchical community of believers, as it is envisioned by Muslim authorities, difficult today in France.

The Muslim presence in France can be conceptualized Islamically in very divergent ways and the widespread belief today that Islam needs to be understood with direct reference to the French context, understood as a specific space distinct from Islamic countries, is not automatic. The universality of Islam can in fact be understood to prohibit and/or limit the scope of such an endeavor.⁴⁴ With important variations, this position is defended by Salafi groups in France and notably also by a number of influential individual actors such as Dhaou Meskine, imam and founder and director of a Muslim school in the Paris region.⁴⁵ This viewpoint correlates with a specific position in the religious field that can be characterized by a strong embodied religious capital in the sense of knowledge of classical Islamic sciences and a weak or non-existing participation in French Islam politics, which in turn relates to a weak institutionalized religious capital. The universalist position, while its correlating views regarding participation in French society can be diverse, ultimately conflicts with the supremacy claim of the nation-state. While this opposition, which need not always be explicit, does not make cooperation with the state outright impossible, it gives rise to certain conflicts, for example, in the debates concerning religious authority and the representation of Muslims in France. Here, the universalist position, which ensures that this sub-field maintains a relatively high degree of autonomy and a hierarchical assessment of religious capital which is little influenced by the French context, directly conflicts with state-supported attempts to establish new types of authority emphasizing the necessary knowledge of French and French society. Meskine, a graduate of

Zaytuna University in Tunis and Imām Muhammad b. Sa‘ūd University in Riyadh, is in this respect a good example. While, as stated above, he is himself engaged in the training of Francophone students of Islamic sciences, he strongly asserts the higher valorization of Arabophone scholarly knowledge of Islamic sciences over that acquired by primarily Francophone students of Islamic sciences and repeatedly underlines the purely administrative (and not theological) function of the CFCM.⁴⁶ Also, his unstable and problematic cooperation with the state enables him to adopt much more critical views on state measures such as the banning of the hijab than do many of his colleagues.⁴⁷

Contrary to this position, a more important group of Muslims today holds that the definition of correct practices and beliefs can and/or needs to be partly specific to France and/or the West.⁴⁸ While this position does not abandon the tenet of the universality of Islam but rather sees the practice of *ijtibād* as a means to realize it, the substantive definition of universality with regard to Islamic norms is determined differently, sometimes radically so. This basic position, which can go from the advocacy of a new *ijtibād* or an Islamic reform to the more narrow defense of what is called a contextualized exegesis, has been defended with varying strength both by so-called moderate Muslims, such as the *Mosquée de Paris*, liberal intellectuals, such as Malek Chebel, Sufi shaykhs such as the leader of the Alawi brotherhood, Shaykh Bentounès, and Muslims considered close to the Muslim Brotherhood, such as the *UOIF* and, finally, independent actors such as Tariq Ramadan. The divergent self-identifications of Muslim actors obscure here a fundamental convergence of interests that relates to the combined impact of intergenerational change and state policies on the reconfiguration of the Muslim field. While some of the above actors, such as the *Mosquée de Paris*, act defensively and others are confident of gaining from this process of change, they all openly endorse the necessity of an “Islam of France” and seek to benefit as much as possible from the related restructuralization of the Muslim field. This basic convergence of interests finds expression in the fact that they make (competing) claims to define and represent *Islam de France* and, for most of them, busy themselves with elaborating a theology or jurisprudence (or *sharī‘a*) of Muslim minorities.⁴⁹ Underlying the support for a specific reading of Islam in France (or the West) are two beliefs. First, the belief that France is a relatively homogeneous society into which Islam, seen as a fundamentally exogenous entity in Europe, needs to be integrated via the elaboration of a new need. Second, that immigrants of Islamic background are primarily or exclusively Muslims, hence the importance of the project of *Islam de France*.

Emphasizing this point is not meant to deny fundamental asymmetries of power between Muslims and majority society, which either way would have worked to ensure the perception of Islam as non-European/non-French and

that of immigrants as Muslims. Rather, it serves to underline that it is the power delegated by “Muslim” immigrants to these groups and the latter’s basic acceptance of the premises of integration that allow them to make claims to become a partner to the state in Islam politics and, more generally, to become political actors. More importantly, it serves to highlight the constraints that follow from this move. By empowering themselves through subscribing to the dominant view of a necessary reform of Islam as part of the integration of Islamic immigrants, these Muslims enter a discursive field and legitimate a political process that are beyond their control. This predicament is recognized without doubt by many of them. However, the reactions by those who do consider it a predicament vary as a function of their institutionalized capital: weak institutionalized capital and the unlikelihood of benefiting much from the state-controlled organization of Islam in France facilitate the articulation of a stronger critique of these policies. In this respect, the case of Tariq Ramadan, who has shown himself to be highly critical of French Islam policies, is exemplary. More generally, his case deserves mention since his more recent emphasis on the global challenges faced by Muslims and non-Muslims alike and his critique of the “Islamization” of the debate on immigrants can be seen as an attempt to mark a departure from the conceptual undergirding of Muslim — and state — discourses on the “Islam of France.”⁵⁰ If and to what degree such an attempt will be successful cannot be answered here. It is clear, however, that by undertaking it, Ramadan ultimately rejects the power that has enabled him to become the public intellectual he currently is.

Criticized by some French-born Muslim representatives, most Muslim federations have resolved to cooperate with the state and have actively tried to benefit from the state’s interest in the creation of centralized structures of authority in French Islam. It is in this context that the UOIF (as well as other Muslims) have elaborated their vision of an “authentic and civil Islam” (*un Islam authentique et citoyen*).⁵¹ This is an Islam that not only vigorously defends the legitimacy of Muslim life in France, but also presents itself as a bulwark against Islamist extremism. The constant proclamations by many Muslims of the French Muslim community as a “community of the middle way” (Qur’ān II: 143) and their reference to a centrist Islam more generally serve precisely to legitimate opposition to extremist groups.⁵² While ‘extremist’ is defined in a variety of different ways, and while these discourses differ sometimes fundamentally in their understanding of a broader defined civic engagement, these discourses share the attempt to legitimate civic duties with reference to Islamic.⁵³ Put briefly, these discourses can be usefully seen as an attempt to articulate a “civil Islam,” an understanding of Islam that aims to sacralize Muslim presence in France and, more generally, the living-together in France.⁵⁴ The UOIF’s former secretary-general’s assertion that “Muslim

associations are doing a better job than the DST [French internal security agency — F.P.] of M. Pasqua at preventing Islamist infiltration in France,”⁵⁵ are only one — early — example of this discourse, which is not limited to the top levels of Muslim federations but is disseminated today by a broad range of Muslim actors in France. Particularly in the case of the UOIF, this discourse is clearly not welcomed by everybody in France. However, at a time when the simple reasoning in terms of secular legality is partially abandoned in Islam policies and a new space is opened up for engineering the evolution of French Islam, the interest of the state in cooperating with the UOIF — in its role as a major Muslim force fighting against Salafi Islam — has without doubt risen considerably. Asked whether the state’s cooperation with the UOIF would not encourage its spread and radicalization, Sarkozy’s answer thus culminated not surprisingly in the assertion that “the reality is that the UOIF is doing, at the grass-roots level, useful work against the more dangerous enemies of the Republic, namely the Salafis.”⁵⁶ This assertion, it seems, expresses a reasoning that is of more general importance in recent French Islam policies.

The fact that those who advocate a specifically French reading of Islam refer notably to the principle of *ijtibād* in order to authorize it is also significant in that this authorizing principle mediates external influences in a specific way. By referring to *ijtibād*, Muslims submit in principle their individual or collective effort to Islamic criteria of authoritative exegesis. These Islamic criteria are obviously diversely defined and my point here is not so much that specific patterns in these endeavors at understanding Islam can be discerned (although they can to a certain degree).⁵⁷ In fact, the reference to *ijtibād* and other legal or exegetical procedures is important primarily, I would argue, in that the efforts to interpret Islam in France become thus intricately linked to the conflicted definition of these principles, of their application inside specific institutions and, importantly, the profile of those deemed authorized to apply them. The conflicts around these principles in turn relate to the competition inside the Muslim field which is now reconfigured and more permeable to other fields because of the recourse to *ijtibād*.

In this sense, the reassessment of capitals that can be observed today in the Muslim field in France is structurally a reactualization of developments that took place in 19th century Egypt and other Islamic societies in the context of the emergence of new public spheres. As in France today, the new valuation of different forms of capital that took place at that time in the religious field was legitimated through reference to specific Islamic principles, notably *ijtibād*, which opened up the religious to other fields. As Schulze⁵⁸ and others have shown, the reform movement in 19th century Egypt directly related to the emergence of a new type of religious specialist that can ideal-typically be termed the “intellectual.” The reform of Islam was based on a relative

devalorization of the Islamic tradition — in the sense of scholarly knowledge derived from the foundational texts — and the concomitant emphasis put on inductively derived principles underlying Islam. This intellectual move postulated a declining importance of the knowledge of tradition (*‘ilm*) and an increasing importance accorded to thought (*fikr*), a dichotomy which in turn can be related to that of *taqlid* (imitation) vs. *ijtihad*. The intellectual matrix that was thus established for the understanding of Islam incorporated a strong differentiation between the religious establishment and Muslim reformers,⁵⁹ the latter founding their authority primarily on their capacity for freethinking and their knowledge of the modern world. Historically, as many have pointed out, the reform movement has not brought forth a clearly definable new group of actors, but has triggered a process of transformation in the milieu of ulama whose profile has changed considerably in the 20th century⁶⁰ and has led to the diversification of authority structures through the increasing importance of religious actors working in the new public spheres, notably through the media. The field inside which Islamic discourses are produced has thus been restructured through this development. The field’s relative autonomy has been weakened through the devalorization of the scholarly tradition and the field’s boundaries in relation to other fields have become more permeable. For this reason, the convertibility of capitals originating in other fields (such as in cultural and scientific fields) in the religious field has become easier and increased, enabling a more heterogeneous group of people to speak in the name of Islam.

While the 19th century Reform movement mainly led to the pluralization of capital constitutive of religious leadership, later groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Tablighi Jama‘at, both created in the late 1920s, significantly changed the relationship between believers and authorities. This followed from the importance accorded to spreading the message of “true Islam” outside the mosque and the resulting institutionalization of individual *da‘wa* activism for a broad group of believers.⁶¹ In the context of mass education, the emergence of new media and the multiplication of Islamic would-be-authorizers, these two developments gave rise to a weak conceptualization of authority; both the profile of religious authorities and the boundaries between believers and would-be-authorizers became blurred.⁶² The institutionalization of these understandings of authority in the above mentioned Islamic movements and their dissemination of them in European countries has, as I will try to show in the following case studies, an important impact on the Muslim field in France.

Authority and “Young Muslims”

The preceding remarks have emphasized the importance of the coming-of-age of French-born Muslims for the restructuring of the Muslim field. In

the following analysis, different attempts to define and revalue religious and cultural capital with reference to “young Muslims” will be considered. The first case I would like to discuss, as an example of an actor building directly on the new audience of second-generation Muslims, is the Swiss intellectual Tariq Ramadan. The case of Tariq Ramadan is in this respect interesting, notwithstanding the fact that he is much ‘more’ than a second-generation preacher, in the sense that he is the first Muslim intellectual to debate on an equal footing with today’s leading French intellectuals. Ramadan, who himself holds a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies, regularly thematizes the question of religious authority. In general, Ramadan, with different accents in his writings and talks, strongly emphasizes the necessary connection between ‘French’ cultural capital and religious capital and oscillates between the relative depreciation of scholarly knowledge and an exhortation to believers to respect certain prerogatives of scholars. His basic position is that knowledge of Islamic sciences needs to be paired with an understanding of the societal context, i.e., with a particular cultural capital.⁶³ This theme takes on considerable importance in his discourse and builds up to a serious and sometimes open challenge to the current structures of religious authority and particularly to the authority of Muslim leaders born outside of France.

In a talk given before members of Ramadan’s network *Présence Musulmane* about the topic of Islamic education,⁶⁴ Ramadan addresses these questions in more detail. While acknowledging the services rendered to Muslims by first-generation immigrants and by the notorious foreign students, Ramadan, insisting strongly on the specificity of France, is emphatic that the necessary reform of the Islamic education cannot be undertaken by someone “who comes from a place other than this.” Apart from the language deficiencies of these persons, this is so because education, defined as the fostering of the ability to relate scripture to the context, must be radically different in Europe. Pushing the principle of the necessary contextualization of exegesis, Ramadan demands a thorough contextualization of Islamic education and, more precisely, the strengthening of the individual believer’s access and understanding of the scriptures. In fact, according to Ramadan, French Muslims are living in “a society where you are not reminded [of God] (*un espace où il n’y a pas de rappel*),” be it through the ethical behavior of people around them or through institutions such as the call to prayer; thus, in order to compensate for this absence, a deeper intellectual understanding of the Islamic sources is more necessary in European countries than it is in Muslim-majority countries. Such a reform, following Ramadan’s thought, would be realized only with the participation of every member of the community. Ramadan insists on the shared responsibility to assure Islamic education, and in his discourse this point is directly linked to a relative degradation of scholarly knowledge.

Describing a crucial encounter with a youth after giving a talk in a mosque, he says: "I had left the conference, satisfied with theory, he brought me back to reality to tell me: 'Listen, Brother, you are floating.' I tell you: these words have been much more [important — F.P.] than hours spent with the *shuyukb*."

While thus making a strong case for the intellectual arming and partial autonomization of young Muslims, Ramadan, as pointed out, maintains certain prerogatives for Muslim scholars. However, judging from his own statements, he does not seem to be very successful in this respect. In fact, one is tempted to say that his attempt to heighten the feeling of responsibility of Muslims has ultimately contributed to the erosion of certain boundaries between believers and religious specialists, which are highly important in his thinking. His understanding of Islamic normativity, based on the belief in God as sole lawmaker and consequently a reluctance to declare prohibitions not found in the scripture, is apparently far from being shared by all of his coreligionists. The community he describes is characterized by its obsession with minute details of Islamic normativity, thus blocking the way to action, and by the appearance of what he calls "local muftis," i.e., Muslims denouncing specific practices without having the necessary knowledge in Islamic sciences. To this, one might add, situated on the other spectrum of disrespect for God's law, those whom he calls "fatwa tourists" (*touristes de la fatwa*), believers who continue seeking legal advice until they have found a fatwa supporting their view.⁶⁵ These complaints are expressed also by a number of other preachers in France, such as the convert Malika Dif, for example.⁶⁶ At the Annual Meeting of Muslims in 2004, Dif criticized those Muslims who after memorizing "three verses of the Qur'an and two Hadith" considered themselves "scholars" and went out "to do da'wa." Her critique clearly aimed at a more general phenomenon and it is also clear that the structural problems described here produce effects going beyond the emergence of "local muftis." Ramadan himself has spoken of the "crisis of authority" of Islam that has led people to identify authenticity with radicalism as a cause of Islamic extremism and the negative public image of Islam.⁶⁷ The rise of a Muslim actor such as Ramadan is thus not unproblematic. His understanding of contextualizing Islam allows him to make a strong argument against the legitimacy of immigrated scholars and a bid for the audience of "young Muslims." However, this revaluation of 'French' cultural capital itself and the diffusion of religious authority through individual activism, which he reactualizes in his talks, also devalues his religious capital. Ultimately, his discourse thus contributes to the weakening of a religious division of labor that places him in opposition to self-declared muftis, in conflicts that are not all mere skirmishes.

The admonition of young Muslims by Ramadan and his colleagues reflects a perception of the Muslim field that is shared by other actors. While

Ramadan's response to these developments stops, not surprisingly, short of a consequent affirmation of religious capital, others are out to do precisely this. The most prominent and outspoken Muslim actor who is doing this today in France is the Bordeaux-based *recteur* Tareq Oubrou, of Moroccan birth.⁶⁸ Oubrou, a self-taught scholar who since the early 1990s has been head of the UOIF-affiliated mosque in Bordeaux, is one of France's most outstanding and productive Muslim scholars; he has co-authored a book, published various articles and audiocassettes and is a frequent public speaker. While the issue of how to define religious authority is only one element in his far more encompassing and ambitious intellectual project, it seems to be of considerable importance in his more recent public talks and indeed is part of a dialectical relation with general reflections on what Islam is — as “dogma” — and how the practice of Islam — in “ritual practice,” understood as communication with God, and “morality” — can be defined in France.

At a talk given before a mainly young audience at the annual meeting of Muslims in the southwest of France,⁶⁹ Oubrou laid out his vision on these issues before taking some questions from the audience, and offered some insights into his thought and his attempts to communicate these to parts of the community. In this talk, Oubrou argues the necessary hierarchalization of believers and the indispensable mediation in belief on the one hand while strongly insisting on the believer's individual responsibility on the other. This latter responsibility is, however, exercised inside a narrowly defined realm and is also being strictly disassociated from properly Islamic thinking, as Oubrou sees it. According to him, it is the complexity, density and ambiguity of the Qurʾān and the Sunna that justify and make the existence of a group of specialists necessary and severely restrict the possibility of a proper understanding by believers of these texts. Directly addressing “the youth,” Oubrou asserts: “To believe that it is enough to read the Qurʾān in order to understand it, to read the tradition of the Prophet in order to practice it, is an aberration and constitutes a real threat [. . .] to Islamic religiosity.” The strict demands Oubrou places on how analysis of Qurʾān and Sunna should be conducted disqualifies as religious capital the religious competencies of any Muslim but those whom he calls “scholars, [. . .] learned persons [and] specialists.”⁷⁰ At the same time, the ‘French’ cultural capital of young Muslims is devalued through the emphasis placed on the complexity of interpreting the scriptures in the French context. Moreover, he not only rejects exegetical aspirations of ‘believers,’ but also reveals himself in an interview to be highly critical of some Muslim preachers in France whom he considers simply not qualified for the job.⁷¹ However, Oubrou is adamant that Islam is a simple religion, in fact “the most simple, the most universal and the most accessible

religion.” It is easy to be a Muslim — “*on croit [. . .] sans se prendre trop la tête*” — because a very basic knowledge of Islamic dogma and the observance of the fundamental religious obligations are sufficient to be “a very good Muslim.” Oubrou makes this last point in response to a question by a young man inquiring whether in order to assess the right conduct in “new situations” not dealt with in the texts, he is supposed to ask “imams” and “experts” or should “sometimes” also practice *ijtihad* himself. Oubrou’s answer, following a more general pattern of thought apparent in the talk, is based on the bracketing of certain issues and domains for believers: as there are “unresolvable theological questions,” so there are questions where the believer, so to say, has to step outside of Islam in his decision-making. While Oubrou points to the possibility of consulting religious experts about these questions, he above all insists on the believer’s own responsibility, who instead of “referring himself to the details of the Qur’ān and the Sunna,” is supposed to find a strictly individual solution unrelated in any way to textual exegesis. Here, the delegitimation of the believers’ religious competencies and the reassertion of scholarly privileges are thus related to a restriction of the domain of Islamic normativity,⁷² which ultimately will have a not insubstantial effect on the absolute power of scholars.

Oubrou’s discourse can be seen in part as yet another attempt to redress the diffusion of authority that resulted historically from the broadened access to scripture. However, Oubrou’s particularly high valuation and exclusivist definition of religious capital is also for him a necessary reaction against the proliferation of voices speaking for Islam in the current French context: “Everybody wants to be an Islam specialist, everybody wants to pronounce fatwas, everybody speaks about Islam and *laïcité*, about Sharia . . .” The success of his discourse hinges on the acceptance of an understanding of Islam that reduces Islam to a limited number of practices and excludes believers from vast domains of intellectual reflection. Whether this “reduction” of Islamic practice will be accepted by believers cannot be answered here. That its acceptance will in any case not be easy was suggested by a question asked by a listener who, after Oubrou’s talk, admitted to his feeling of “frustration” during the talk. Pointing out that a believer naturally wants to imitate the Prophet’s behavior, he asked Oubrou whether it would be an “error” to imitate for example the Prophet’s specific sleeping position after *fajr* prayer, even when limited knowledge of Arabic or other factors would make a thorough individual examination of the Hadith in question problematic. Such questions suggest that in the current situation and given the de facto ‘direct’ access to the foundational texts (in Arabic or French), the higher valuation of the scholar’s religious capital to which Oubrou aspires is not evident.

Imams and Mosques in the “Community of the Middle Way”

Next to “young Muslims,” state policies have been identified as a major external influence on the Muslim field. As pointed out, these policies are very much concerned with the possible radicalization of new generations of Muslims and have valorized mosques and imams. While the overall impact of this relatively recent development on the state of mosque associations has been so far very limited, it has led, in the context of the debate on Islam and integration, to the emergence of a new type of mosque leader. One example of this type of actor is Mohammad Benali in Gennevilliers. Residing in France since 1991, Benali, titular of a French degree in commercial studies and a degree in Islamic studies from Oujda (Morocco), is president of a mosque association in Gennevilliers which federates eight prayer rooms and mosques currently existing in this Parisian suburb. The association’s main aim is, since 1996, to construct a new mosque for Muslims in Gennevilliers, who number approximately 3,000. The mosque Benali has been associated with since 1991, situated in the suburb’s industrial zone, is an ensemble of several dilapidated pavilions, all of which are used simultaneously for Friday prayer in order to accommodate about 500–600 people.⁷³

In some respects, Benali is representative of a group of actors — presidents of mosque committees who have “risen” in some cases to the position of *recteur*; a title often understood as designating the highest religious authority in a mosque — who have had an important influence on the institutionalization of Islam in many Western European countries. Their position inside Muslim associations depends largely on a specific combination of two types of cultural capital, namely that of an immigrant, with a religious knowledge of varying importance, and that acquired through studies in France. The latter enables them to communicate efficiently with public authorities and the majority society in general. In the current situation, the relative weight of this ‘French’ cultural capital has increased considerably. This is one factor that today enables Benali, who himself also acts as Islam instructor in his mosque, to pursue his ambitious mosque project with the help of public authorities. The fact that Benali has only limited French cultural capital clearly can turn out to be a disadvantage in certain situations. However, this disadvantage is relative, since his entire position depends in fact on a specific valuation of ‘French’ cultural capital as profoundly ambivalent and, as the radicalization of “young Muslims” shows, a perhaps necessary but certainly insufficient condition for the correct understanding of Islam. This valuation of ‘French’ cultural capital is, albeit indirectly, conveyed in his public discourse, which is based on the standard account of the so-called re-islamization and

possible radicalization of the “second generation” and that develops a specific vision of the mosque as locus of the integration of Muslims into French society in relation to these fears.

In a talk given at a function organized by an interfaith group where he is significantly introduced as “imam,” he defines his role as that of the foreign intermediary necessary to solve the conflicts associated with intergenerational change in Muslim communities. Benali sees the new generation’s turn to Islam as a return to the “sources” and away from the popular Islam practiced by their “ignorant” parents. While he speaks favorably of this return to Islam, he also believes that this reform aspiration contains a “danger” to French society in the form of the Salafi movement. Part of the mission of the mosque in Gennevilliers, which is also used by Salafis, is thus an attempt to maintain dialogue with these groups.⁷⁴ More generally, as he specifies in an interview, the role of the mosque is to serve as a place of encounter of Muslims with “non-Muslims,” a place where Muslims can enter into contact with other members of society. The civic mission of the mosque is also at the center of its educational activities: considering that “something is missing” in the education dispensed by public schools, Benali is convinced that it is incumbent upon the mosque to inculcate respect for the law in young children, a position which is, as he acknowledges, contested. The integration of Muslims into French society and the severing of ties to foreign countries is what Benali claims to work for. In return, he expects the support of public authorities for his mosque project: “either they let us get the money from foreign countries, or they [public authorities — F.P.] find another solution [for the funding of the mosque — F.P.]” Although he claims to have very good contacts in the Muslim World League, in negotiations with local authorities he has agreed not to solicit money from foreign institutions.⁷⁵ His bet has paid off so far, since the municipality (headed by a Communist mayor) has provided him with a plot of land, backs the association’s demands for further public funding and guarantees the loan it is planning to contract.⁷⁶

Benali’s case illustrates a development that will in all likelihood considerably strengthen the role of mosques in French Islam. However, his case also points to a relative continuity in the profile of mosque leaders. This makes the question of whether French-born Muslim generations can benefit from the increasing importance of mosque structures and the new valuation of a ‘French’ cultural capital all the more relevant. One major possibility for French-born Muslims to integrate into the leadership of mosques has been provided by the various attempts to set up institutes for the training of imams in France. Since the early 1990s, the French state has actively encouraged the creation of training institutes for imams.⁷⁷ Today, five Islamic institutes for higher education exist in the Paris region, three of which also include courses

in their program for imams and/or chaplains; various other institutes of Islamic higher education are functioning or in the process of being created outside Paris. The possibility of participating in a state-recognized training of imams in France is of particular interest to the big federations, and they continue emphasizing their willingness to engage in the training of imams in spite of the so far mitigated results. The creation of a state-recognized French curriculum for imams would constitute in fact a means to fix the conversion rates of cultural into religious capital for imams, a question which is of crucial importance to the power of the federations and their leaders, all of whom are immigrants themselves. Today, next to the two institutes set up by the UOIF in Château-Chinon (1990/92) and Saint-Denis (2001), there are two other institutes that are active in imam training: the *Institut de théologie de la mosquée de Paris*, created in 1994 and reactivated in 2001 by the *Mosquée de Paris*, and the *Institut supérieur des sciences islamiques* (ISSI, created in 1999) in Saint-Ouen. With the exception of the ISSI, which offers an identical 4-year program in Islamic sciences in both French and Arabic, instruction in the core program is in Arabic only, which reflects first and foremost the fact that the institutes are run by immigrated Muslim scholars. However, the contribution of these institutes to the emergence of a group of French-born imams and, more generally, to the revaluation of the different types of cultural capital of imams has been very limited until today.

There are various reasons for this, only some of which can be outlined here. There is, for various reasons, a clear lack of demand by French Muslims to pursue careers as imams. This reflects the difficulty for them of attaining sufficient 'Arabic' cultural capital and the undervaluation of 'French' cultural capital in mosques, which in turn relates to an understanding of the role of imams that is not always theirs. The *Centre d'études et de recherches sur l'Islam* (CERSI) in Saint Denis, created in 1993 with the explicit aim of training French imams, thus soon abandoned this idea; from its inception, the demand for Francophone instruction dominated and, in the words of its current director, Hicham el-Arafa, the idea of educating imams "seemed a bit utopian" to the initiators of the project, partly because of the high linguistic demands, partly because the training was doomed to lead to unemployment in many cases.⁷⁸ Today, the CERSI offers a 3 year-program in Islamic Studies and Arabic that can be extended to a fourth year dedicated to an independent research project. Also, while there is today a high demand for bilingual imams, it is highly questionable that the working conditions offered by mosques are up to the expectations of the new imams. According to government figures, only 23% of prayer rooms and mosques in France have employed an imam; 12% of mosque associations are provided with an imam employed by foreign countries, mainly by Turkey (approximately 60) and Algeria (80), and 65% of

imams working in France are not remunerated or are paid only from irregular donations.⁷⁹ The limited financial means of mosque associations to which these figures point have very direct repercussions on the salary and working conditions of imams. After graduating from the 4-year-program, a student of the IESH Château-Chinon was paid a salary far below the minimum wage. While this salary was obviously meant to be upgraded through various donations, the student didn't want to accept these. It is also doubtful whether the visions of the function of an imam held by mosque associations, many of which are still dominated by first-generation immigrants, and French-trained imams themselves coincide. The above-mentioned graduate of Château-Chinon described the provisional or ultimate abandonment of this path due to intergenerational divergences. Not everyone in the mosque welcomed his defining his role primarily as that of a guide for young Muslims, the increased presence of young Muslims inside the mosque, his contacts to the municipality and, more generally, the emphasis he put on "social activities," including his constant attempts to seek contact with people outside of the mosque.⁸⁰ While other graduates, notably those with a stronger grounding in Arabic, might fare better in some respects, it is likely that their valuation of a 'French' cultural capital and the related understanding of their work are not always shared by their employers. Another graduate from Château-Chinon who is currently working on a volunteer basis complained that in case of employment, the stipulations of the contract would keep him inside the mosque most of the time; this would leave him sufficient time to neither pursue his scientific interests nor to develop a significant presence outside of the mosque.⁸¹

Attempts by Muslim federations in France and the policies of the French government have done little so far to change the structure of the religious field with respect to imams. In Château-Chinon, out of an average of 20 students who start the full 4-year program annually, only nine completed it in 2005.⁸² Furthermore, it needs to be pointed out that not all institutes of higher Islamic studies aspire to train Francophone religious leaders. In this respect, the advocates of *Islam de France* need to compete with Muslims rejecting the institutionalization of authority. Ahmed Abidi, a former teacher of the CERSI who is today successfully running an institute in the Paris region that provides weekend classes in Islamic Studies in French, in fact sees his work primarily as a contribution to the autonomization of French Muslims *vis-à-vis* religious hierarchies. Starting from the viewpoint that it is knowledge that qualifies an imam and rejecting attempts to set up a religious division of labor, the demanding program at his institute, directly inspired by faculties of Islamic study in Arabic countries and Turkey, is above all supposed to enable students to be their own guides; as he repeatedly puts it himself, he does not see himself as a "guru." While he shares in the strong criticism of the imams

currently working in France — like other interviewees, he considers 90% of them to be not sufficiently equipped for the job and advises them to study instead of preach — he believes that the only solution is the dissemination of knowledge: “Give people knowledge and then, let them take care of themselves. They are not minors who need someone to guide them.”⁸³ Like the CERSI, Abidi’s institute is in the process of defining a Francophone curriculum of Islamic studies and — even more so than the CERSI, which uses a mix of what in El Arafá’s words is “drinkable” French literature on Islam — stresses the necessity of producing its own teaching material. By providing high-quality education to a group of primarily French-speaking Muslims, they directly contribute to the diffusion of religious authority and to the strengthening of Muslims outside the positions of (potential) formal leadership, such as imams. More generally, they willingly or not make a contribution to the dissociation and autonomization of the field of Francophone studies of Islamic sciences from Arabophone institutions and media.

Concluding Remarks

Drawing on field theory, this article has aimed to study authority structures in their determination through the interaction of the French context with interrelated understandings of the Islamic tradition. The field concept has allowed us to conceptualize how external influences on the field are mediated by the field’s structure. Depending on different Islamically authorized positions assumed by Muslim actors, which relate to their specific stock of different forms of capital, the degree of autonomy of the Muslim field varies considerably. With reference to the varying permeability of the Muslim field, I have thus tried to conceptualize how both the ‘unscholarly’ discourse of Muslim preachers and that of self-identifying scholars inscribe into the Islamic tradition. The positioning of actors in the Muslim field has been analyzed as ways of redefining and relating in divergent ways religious and cultural capital in the context of the reorientation of French Islam policies and the generational change. It is the profoundly ambiguous value of cultural capital in the post-migratory Muslim field of France that has led to an intense competition between Muslim actors in their relation to the state and believers. This competition, I have suggested, is to a large degree about defining the profile of the legitimate leaders of the future French Islam, which both Muslims and politicians increasingly conceive of as a socially cohesive force. The picture that this restricted study presents of the French Muslim field is one in which the historical diffusion of authority and the external reconfiguration in France allow a broad variety of actors to claim authority. It is a field that attracts many actors, but where the possibility of building up a strong position seems to be restricted.

Endnotes

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1. Michel Reeber has published abundantly on imams in France since the early 1990s, see e.g. Michel Reeber, "Islamic Preaching in France. Admonitory Addresses or a Political Platform?", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 4, 2 (December 1993): 210–222.

2. See notably Franck Frégosi, "L'imam, le conférencier et le juriste: retour sur trois figures contemporaines du champ religieux islamique en France", *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 125 (2004): 131–146 and Khadija Mohsen-Finan, "Promoting a Faith-based Citizenship: The Case of Tariq Ramadan", in *New European Identity and Citizenship*, eds. Rémy Leveau *et al.* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 133–139.

3. John R. Bowen, "Beyond Migration. Islam as a Transnational Public Space", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, 5 (2004): 879–894; *idem*, "Does French Islam Have Borders? Dilemmas of Domestication in a Global Religious Field", *American Anthropologist* 106, 1 (2004): 43–55.

4. On this question see notably Franck Frégosi, ed., *La formation des cadres religieux musulmans en France. Approches socio-juridiques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

5. On the CFCM see notably Alexandre Caeiro, "Religious Authorities or Political Actors? The Muslim Leaders of the French Representative Body of Islam", in *European Muslims and the Secular State*, eds. Jocelyne Cesari and Seán McLoughlin (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005), 71–84 and Hervé Terrel, "L'État et la création du Conseil français du culte musulman (CFCM)", *Cités* (2004): 67–92.

6. While the ongoing attempts to reorganize the imamat in France have been limited so far to the conflicted appointment in 2005/06 of national Muslim chaplains and the creation of regionally-based in-service training for imams, the concrete preparations undertaken since 2003 regarding imams in general have focused, not surprisingly, on the need to regulate the imamate by determining the imams' necessary qualifications. This could increase considerably the leverage of existing institutes of higher Islamic studies (and their supporting Islamic federations) who are indeed supportive of this process. See for example http://www.temoignagechretien.fr/journal/ar_article.php?num=3109&categ=Croire (accessed on 20 May 2004).

7. See Bowen, *ibid.* and cf. Claire de Galember, "La régulation étatique du religieux à l'épreuve de la globalisation", *La globalisation du religieux*, eds. Jean-Pierre Bastian *et al.* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 223–234.

8. Olivier Roy, *L'islam mondialisé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002).

9. Primarily, French Muslims emphasize today either the universality of Islam or argue with reference to legal concepts as *ijtihad* (individual reasoning), *maṣlaḥa* (public interest) and *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* (objectives of the sharī'a) in their attempt to position themselves towards these external changes. Obviously, references to one of these concepts are not exclusive of the other. Rather, a specific understanding of the universality of Islam leads to divergent uses of the mentioned legal concepts and different ways of relating to and, ultimately, perceiving France.

10. For a general discussion of Bourdieu's writings on religion see Erwan Dianteil, "Pierre Bourdieu et la religion. Synthèse critique d'une synthèse critique", *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 118 (April–June 2002): 5–19.

11. Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), 106–111.

12. Cf. Frégosi, *op. cit.*

13. See Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Die Wiederkehr der Götter. Religion in der modernen Kultur* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2004), 52.

14. Rodney Starke and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith. Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 120.

15. See Bradford Verter, "Spiritual Capital. Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu", *Sociological Theory* 21, 3 (2003): 150–174. Verter does not use the term "religious capital", but employs instead "spiritual capital" which is defined "as a more widely diffused commodity, governed by more complex patterns of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption" (p. 158). While the substantive distinctions which he makes here and subsequently are highly important for my understanding of capital in the Muslim field, as I outlined above, I prefer to retain the term "religious capital".

16. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *Réponses. Pour une anthropologie réflexive* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992), 76.

17. Since the beginning of the 1990's, the Union of Islamic Organizations of France, which changed the second preposition in its name from "in" to "of" in 1990, has pursued as one of its principal aims to be included in government attempts to set up a representative body of Islam in France. In 2003, with the creation of the CFCM, these efforts succeeded. For a fine analysis of the history of the UOIF see Oméro Marongiu, *L'islam au pluriel. Étude du rapport au religieux chez les jeunes musulmans* (thèse de doctorat) (Lille: Université des sciences et technologies/U.F.R. de sciences économiques et sociales, 2002).

18. The *Mosquée de Paris* is since 1957 controlled by the Algerian state. Usually considered to represent what is called a moderate Islam in France, its leaders have for many years criticized the UOIF as Islamist radicals. This critic has become less virulent in the last years due to the uneasy cooperation of the UOIF and the *Mosquée de Paris* inside the CFCM.

19. Dounia Bouzar, anthropologist and appointed member of the CFCM, resigned from this post in 2005 criticizing notably that the CFCM had failed, in its two-year existence, to "create a new Muslim religiosity adapted to French laïcité". This was, according to her, a result of the fact that the CFCM's members were not born in France. See *Le Parisien* 05 January 2005 and *Libération* 06 January 2005.

20. See for example the Francophone website www.darwa.com for the Salafi critic of members of the UOIF, Tariq Ramadan and Muslim Brothers in general. For a study on the French Salafis, see Samir Amghar, "Les Salafistes français. Une nouvelle aristocratie religieuse?", *Magrebb Machbrek* 183 (Spring 2005): 13–31. — Some informations on how Turkish Muslim organisations relate to the French Muslim field can be gleaned from Franck Frégosi, "Jeunes musulmans turcs en France: le milieu associatif et son rapport à la citoyenneté et aux identités", *L'islam en France et en Allemagne. Identités et citoyennetés*, eds. Rémy Leveau *et al.* (Paris: La documentation française, 2001), 99–112.

21. The emphasis put here on the intergenerational change is not meant to deny the reality of continuing immigration nor the fact that newly arriving immigrants frequently play a significant role in the communities because of their high educational level.

22. See e.g. Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L'islam des jeunes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).

23. French Islam policies have been studied notably by Franck Frégosi. A recent publication of his is "Les enjeux liés à la structuration de l'islam en France", in *Musulmans de France et d'Europe*, eds. Rémy Leveau *et al.* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2005), 99–114. See also Constanze von Krosigk, *Der Islam in Frankreich. Laizistische Religionspolitik von 1974 bis 1999* (Hamburg: Dr. Kovač, 2000) and Gilles Kepel, *Les banlieues de l'Islam. Naissance d'une religion en France* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991 second edition).

24. This possibility underlies also the strong concern of the state with Muslim prison inmates. See Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L'islam dans les prisons* (Paris: Éditions Balland, 2004).

25. Haut Conseil à l'intégration, *Liens culturels et intégration* (Paris: La documentation française, June 1995), 44. All translations are mine, unless indicated.

26. The following analysis of French state policies draws on Frank Peter, "Political Rationalities and the Incorporation of Islam: an Anglo-French Comparison", in *Religious Newcomers*, eds. Thijl Sunier and Siep Stuurman, forthcoming.

27. See Chams eddine Hafiz and Gilles Devers, *Droit et religion musulmane* (Paris: Éditions Dalloz, 2005) for a useful survey of legal rulings relating to Islam in France.

28. Since the early 1990s, a significant number of Muslim actors have been surveilled, expelled, lived under custody or temporarily prohibited from entering the territory. Sadek Sellam, *Être Musulman aujourd'hui* (Paris: Nouvelle cité, 1989), 135f. points to some precedents of this policy in the 1920s.

29. On the increasing importance of interreligious dialogue in France see notably Anne-Sophie Lamine, *La cobabitation des Dieux. Pluralité religieuse et laïcité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004).

30. This recognition is candidly expressed in the question of Sarkozy: "Is it my fault that the Mosquée de Paris has become but a pleasant *salon de thé*?" *L'Express*, 13 February 2003.

31. Local authorities have wielded considerable discretionary power in the funding of Islamic associations since the regionalisation of the *Fonds d'action sociale pour les travailleurs migrants* in 1984. See Krosigk, *op. cit.*, 173.

32. On this policy which directly relates to the institutionalization of Islam see *Le Parisien*, 07 December 2004.

33. *Libération*, 12 November 2004.

34. *Libération*, 8 December 2004. For a detailed analysis of the various means through which public authorities can contribute to the creation and maintenance of mosques see the ministry of the interior's journal *Al Istichara. Le Journal de la consultation des Musulmans de France* (2, May 2000): 7f. and Hafiz/Devers, *op. cit.*, 114–117. For case studies of changing policies towards mosques see Jocelyne Césari, "Mosques in French Cities. Towards the End of a Conflict?", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, 6 (November 2005): 1025–43.

35. See for example Haut Conseil à l'intégration, *op. cit.*, 33; Assemblée nationale, *La laïcité à l'école. Un principe républicain à réaffirmer (Rapport N° 1275)*, vol. 1, 131.

36. Matthias Koenig, *Staatsbürgerschaft und religiöse Pluralität in post-nationalen Konstellationen* (Ph.D. Philipps-Universität Marburg, 2003), 219.

37. See Arigita and Birt in this issue.

38. Bouzar, herself involved for years in social work with youth, had at one point of her career argued the case of Muslim "preachers" such as Tariq Ramadan and Hassan Iquioussan as "social workers". See Dounia Bouzar, *L'islam des banlieues. Les prédicateurs musulmans: nouveaux travailleurs sociaux?* (Paris: Syros/La Découverte, 2001).

39. See Khosrokhavar, *op. cit.*, passim and see below for a case-study.

40. On the national level, this position is notably defended by Sarkozy. See for example Nicolas Sarkozy, *La République, les religions, l'espérance. Entretiens avec Thibaud Collin et Philippe Verdin* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2004).

41. While the described development is in many ways specific, it needs to be pointed out that a certain reflection on the social conditions of communicating the Islamic message is of course not absent from the writings of 'classical' authors. A manual for preachers thus argues the importance of knowing the sermon's addressees and the situation in which they live with reference to al-Fārābī (d. 950). See Abī 'Abd Allāh Fayṣal b. Qāṣid al-Ḥāṣidī, *Tuhfat al-Kḥaṭīb* (The Gift of the Preacher) (Alexandria: Dar al-Īmān, 2003), 50.

42. While the UOIF practices a policy in favor of a restricted bilingual Islam, notably with regard to sermons, the *Mosquée de Paris* has openly rejected this.

43. See above note 19.

44. Cf. Bowen, "Dilemmas of Domestication".

45. Meskine is also secretary general of the *Conseil des Imams de France* and cooperated in the foundation of two institutes for higher Islamic education (CERSI and ISSI). Meskine does not deny the importance of taking into consideration the local context in interpreting scripture, but strives to do this by starting from the principle of the universality of Islam and its suitedness to human nature (*fitra*). For an interesting example of this approach in application see e.g. *Ajial/Génération*s 1,3 (March 2002): 14f.

46. Interviews with author, Aubervilliers, 2004.

47. Meskine has been arrested together with several dozens other persons, June 19 2006, on charges of financing of terrorism notably. After his release he was placed under judicial control, in spite of the fact that the financial investigations have not permitted to substantiate the alleged connections to terrorist networks. Representative of Muslims associations have decried an attempt to discredit a respected leader at a time when the Muslim school "Success" directed by Meskine is making a bid for state funding. See *Le Figaro* 4 July 2006.

48. This is not to say that, for example, Salafi Islam in France is not specific to France. Strictly speaking, Salafi Islam is as French as that of the adherents of *Islam de France*. The difference to the latter resides in the Salafis' conscious attempt to blend out the local context in their exegesis and practice.

49. On this point see Frank Peter, *op. cit.*

50. See for example Tariq Ramadan/Tarek Oubrou, *Islam d'Europe. Entre religion minoritaire et message universel*, audio-cassette (Lyon: Éditions Tawhid, n.d.).

51. This is the motto under which the UOIF has presented, in October 2001, its general programme for the period October 2001–June 2005.

52. The reference to the "Islam of the middle way" is ubiquitous in the milieu of the UOIF. Likewise, leaders of the *Mosquée de Paris* regularly claim to represent it and it is also referred to, among others, by Bentounès. See for example Boubakeur's speech from 5 October 2002 at http://www.mosquee-de-paris.net/cat_index_169.html and Cheikh Khaled Bentounès, *Vivre l'islam. Le soufisme aujourd'hui* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006, second revised edition), 187.

53. The different genealogies of this discourse, which is disseminated particularly by groups working in the tradition of the 19th century reform and the Islamic movement, necessitates a special enquiry and cannot be dealt with here.

54. Cf. Jean-Paul Willaime, "La religion civile à la française et ses métamorphoses", *Social Compass*, 40,4 (1993): 571–580. See also Werner Schiffauer, "Islam as Civil Religion: Political Culture and the Organisation of Diversity in Germany," *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe. Racism, Identity and Community*, eds. Tariq Modood and Prina Werbner (London: 2ed, 1997), 147–166.

55. *Le Monde*, 24 December 1994.

56. See Sarkozy, *op. cit.*, 84.

57. Pointing to patterns which can today be discerned in the understanding and application of a principle such as *ijtihad* would merely serve to evade the more fundamental question in which sense this mediation through the Muslim field is structurally specific.

58. The following remarks are based on Reinhard Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus im 20. Jahrhundert. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Islamischen Weltliga* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

59. This distinction is clearly expressed, for example, in Abduh's statement that the Islam to which the Western nations ultimately will seek refuge from their civilizational and political problems is the "Islam of the Qur'an and the Sunna and not that of scholastics (*mutakallimūn*) and jurists". See Rashīd Riḍā, *Tārīkh al-ustādh al-imām al-shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh* (the History of Master and Guide Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh), (Cairo: Dār al-faḍīla, 2003), p. I, vol. 2, 939.

60. This argument has been made more recently by Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam. Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

61. On this point see Torsten Janson, *Invitation to Islam. A History of Dā'wa* (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2002) and of Amir-Moazami/Jouili in this issue.

62. Cf. on this point Roy, *op. cit.*

63. "This is to say that such a procedure [of exegesis — F.P.] demands that the interpreter, [i.e.] the scholar (or in any case the specialist), is knowledgeable in religious sciences, but also that he has the capacity to translate these teachings into a new context, a new epoch . . ." See Tariq Ramadan, *Les Musulmans d'Occident et l'avenir de l'Islam* (Arles: Sindbad/Actes Sud, 2003), 45f.

64. Tariq Ramadan, *Pour une réforme de l'éducation islamique*, audio-cassette (Lyon: Édition Tawhid, n.d.).

65. Tariq Ramadan, *Halâl, barâm . . . Et l'action!* (Commentaire du Coran: 19), audio-cassette (Lyon: Édition Tawhid, n.d.).

66. Malika Dif at the "Annual Meeting of French Muslims", Le Bourget, April 11 2004.

67. Ramadan in *Le Courrier*, 13 November 2002.

68. On Oubrou cf. Caeiro in this issue and Frégosi, "L'imam, le conférencier et le jurisconsulte . . .".

69. Tareq Oubrou, "L'appartenance à l'islam entre les principes et la réalité", Bordeaux, 6 March 2004.

70. The affirmation of the special competencies of this group follows his acknowledgment that 'Islam', as is today often pointed out in France, does not know a "clergy".

71. Interview with author, Bordeaux, March 2004.

72. Elsewhere, Oubrou has spoken about the "ethicisation of the shari'a". See Ramadan/Oubrou, *op. cit.*

73. Apparently, these buildings were constructed and financed in the mid-1970s by the Haute Préfecture de Seine as part of a newly erected transitory city for immigrants. Although not officially declared as such, the multi-functional building was intended to serve as mosque in an attempt to attract Muslim inhabitants. The mosque continued to be used after the transitory city had been disestablished.

74. Benali, 5 December 2004, Prieuré Ste Bathilde, Vanves.

75. Interview with author, Gennevilliers, December 2004.

76. *Le Parisien*, 11 December 2003.

77. Franck Frégosi, "Les filières nationales de formation des imams en France", in *La formation des cadres religieux musulmans en France. Approches socio-juridiques*, ed. Franck Frégosi (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), 101–139.

78. Interview with author, Saint-Denis, April 2004.

79. Bernard Godard, "Formation des imams. État des lieux", at http://www.sezame.info/index.php?action=article&id_article=120635&preaction=nl&id=527880&idnl=5813&, accessed 11 August 2005.

80. Interview with author, Château-Chinon, December 2004.

81. Interview with author, Le Havre, December 2004.

82. Both Château-Chinon, since its inception, and the IESH in Saint-Denis since 2004, offer a shorter, 3-year training programme for future imams, basically consisting of the memorization of the Qurʾān and the basics of Islamic sciences. As the institute's director in Paris points out, this programme, aimed primarily at imams for the five daily prayers, is more comprehensive than that of other schools through its inclusion of courses in Islamic sciences. Interview by author with Ahmad Jaballah (IESH Saint-Denis), Saint-Denis, October 2004.

83. Interview with author, Boissy-Saint-Léger, April 2004.