

ИСЛАМ В БЕЛЬГИИ: НЫНЕШНЕЕ СОСТОЯНИЕ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Миграция в Бельгию в 1960-х годах ознаменовала начало социальных преобразований, которые превратили традиционно католическую страну в мультикультурную реальность, в которой ислам приобрел большее значение. Государству пришлось адаптировать различные институты к новой реальности, а людям — учиться жить вместе. Мусульманской общине потребовалась своя часть общественного пространства для проведения культурных и религиозных мероприятий. Второе и третье поколения бельгийских мусульман сохраняют свои семейные корни и нуждаются в пространстве для ислама в Бельгии. В результате, государство постепенно интегрирует некоторые элементы шариата в национальное и местное законодательство, чтобы соответствовать требованиям мусульман. Это вызывает дискуссии и порождает разногласия. В данной статье анализируются процессы и последствия применения законов шариата в Бельгии.

Ключевые слова: *ислам, законы шариата, Бельгия, религия, культура.*

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THE RELEVANCE OF ISLAM IN BELGIUM AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

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Migration in Belgium in the 1960s represented the beginning of a social transformation process that has turned the traditionally Catholic country into a multicultural reality where Islam has achieved more significance. Consequently, the government had to adapt different structures to the new reality, and people had to learn to live together. In this regard, the Muslim community demanded public spaces to develop cultural and religious events. Second and third generations of Belgian Muslims conserve their family roots and require space for Islam in Belgium. As a result, progressively, the state has incorporated soft elements of Sharia Law in national and local legislation to respond to Muslim requirements. This fact has opened a debate in Belgium and has created controversies in some environments. Thus, this article analyses the implementation of Sharia Law legislation in Belgium and its consequences.

Keywords: *Islam, sharia law, Belgium, religion, culture*

INTRODUCTION

Belgium's economic growth and the subsequent migration process in the 1960s represented the beginning of a social transformation. The intense industrial activity prompted people from different latitudes to come to work in Belgium, many of them from countries where Islam was the main religion.

Although the first generation of Muslims lived excluded from the rest of Belgian society, second and third generations have demanded more presence in public space and the recognition of their singularity as Belgian Muslims. As a result, the increasing presence of people of Muslim heritage in major cities resulted in a progressive acceptance of Islamic tradition by Belgian authorities, which have permitted a moderate integration of Sharia into national law.

Migration flows were similar in other neighboring countries. However, the Belgian case is singular due to two factors: 1) the high percentage of people of Muslim background living in the country today, 7 percent in Belgium as a whole (Office of International Religious Freedom 2019) and around 25 percent in the Region of Brussels, 2) the impact achieved by Muslims in social and political life.

The process of Islam's integration in Belgium and the impact of Islamic rules and traditions on the current Belgian legal text are issues that require study. In this regard, the term Sharia is often identified with political Islam and the ambitions of radical groups, but Sharia is the code that regulates Muslims' lives and has nothing to do with extremism. Most Muslims live following Sharia precepts, and the Muslim population requires the recognition of Islamic rules in Belgian law. Currently, Belgium is a multicultural country, far removed from its historical Catholic tradition, and must adapt its legislation to the present social context.

Thus, is Belgian legislation absorbing some aspects of Sharia Law? Is Sharia Law gaining importance in Belgium? Some evidence confirms that aspects of everyday life in Belgium have adapted to Muslim demands, and that Sharia has gained a social, natural recognition that is progressively also achieving legal acceptance.

Along with the introduction of Islamic rules into Belgian legislation, the social relevance of Muslims in Belgium in the future is another critical issue to review. In November 2010, the secular association "Thought and Men" organized a colloquium at the Free University of Brussels to discuss the region's future under the topic: "Brussels, Muslim in 2030?" (Lemaire, 2011). Professor Felice Dassetto participated in this seminar. He concluded that other aspects, besides merely the number of people of Muslim heritage, must be considered to answer this question. Therefore, ten years after, the present research analyzes the current context and the predicted future impact of Islam in Belgium by 2030 (Gutierrez, 2010). Consequently, and taking Felice Dassetto's approach as a reference, this review's central hypothesis posits that Brussels will be a multicultural region where Muslims will have relevance but will not be predominant by 2030.

Relevant specialists have studied the process of migration in Belgium. Scholars such as Andrea Rea (2012), Felice Dassetto (2011), Corinne Torrekens (2009, 2020), Brigitte Marechal (2012), and Therese Raedt (2004) have published various books and articles over recent years. They examine different aspects concerning the presence of Islam, most of them focusing on the process of integration and the consequent evolution of social structures in Belgium. Andrea Rea focused on sociological aspects while Felice Dassetto centered his research on how Muslims integrate in Belgium and the public response from authorities. Corinne Torrekens developed a similar social approach to integration issues. For their part, Brigitte Marechal has studied political Islam and the impact of Islamist organizations in Belgium and other European countries, while Therese Raedt highlights gender and cultural aspects.

This paper provides a new approach to Islam in Belgium, combining social and legal aspects to demonstrate how the increasing Muslim social relevance in Belgium is moving politicians to a progressive acceptance of the Islamic tradition, culture, and norms. Consequently, the present multicultural reality requires Belgian legislation to adapt.

THE ADVANCE OF ISLAM IN BELGIUM

Although the first Muslim communities settled in Belgium at the beginning of the twentieth century, the mass arrival of Muslims coincided with the Belgian economic growth in the 1960s and the workforce need for its industry (Cassiers, 1995). Initially, the Belgian government signed agreements with other European countries to attract the labor force. However, increasing necessities led to signing new deals with Morocco (Loriaux), and Turkey (Gailly, 1997) in 1964 and later with Tunisia and Algeria. The agreements with Morocco and Turkey attracted a larger workforce than those with Tunisia and Algeria. Consequently,

Turks and Moroccans became predominant among people of Muslim background in Belgium, and their influence has been decisive on the composition of the current Muslim community.

Most migrants who arrived in the 1960s were unskilled temporary workers looking for new opportunities (Bousetta, 2007). However, Belgium experienced a prolonged labor necessity, and most workers began a process of family reunification (Driss, 1994). Consequently, those workers who arrived from Muslim countries gained relevance in Belgian society until they became significant minorities in some areas of the country, especially in some quarters and municipalities in the Region of Brussels (Torrekens, 2009) or Antwerp.

Along with them, students and political refugees from different Arab countries arrived in Belgium. They represented a minority within the incipient Muslim community in Belgium. Moreover, their concerns were distinct from those of Muslim workers (Bastienier & Dassetto, 1985). Nevertheless, their high education level allowed them to appear as suitable interlocutors to open a dialogue with Belgian institutions to advance Islam's recognition as an official religion in Belgium (Landman, 2002).

The Muslim presence did not result in any social friction until the 1970s. The Petrol Crisis in 1973 prompted the first tensions (Meynen, 2009) and led the government to close borders, preventing the arrival of new migrants in 1974 (Dassetto, 1990). At the same time, crashes (Ramberg, 2004) resulted in the approval of several reforms to improve legal conditions for Muslims already living in Belgium. The new policies contained measures that assisted family reunification, causing a significant increase in the Muslim population. Consequently, many migrant workers began to see their presence in Belgium from a different perspective. They began to consider themselves part of Belgian society (Dassetto, 1996), giving rise to notable changes in traditional social parameters (Al-Azmeh & Fokas).

High birth rates among the Turkish and Moroccan communities (Minorités ethniques, 2004) provided growing weight to the Muslim population (Kanmaz & Manço, 2004). The government tried to implement several policies to favor integration (Leman & Renaertr, 1996) and establish a suitable framework for coexistence (Dassetto, 1990). At first, these policies focused on linguistic and cultural programs to encourage migrants to participate in Belgium's social life. Those programs included counseling on the employment market and other advice to improve their living conditions (Zemni, 2011). After the Belgian Immigration Act, new rules established in 1974 that restricted the arrival of workers from different countries of origin permitted family reunification.

Consequently, former temporary workers from Morocco and Turkey initiated a new life with their families in Belgium. Today, integration programs are focused not only on Muslim integration but also on the recognition by non-Muslims of Islam as a part of the present multicultural Belgian reality. In this regard, education in schools is decisive in creating the right pluralist conscience.

Nevertheless, some media and the extreme-right political parties have expressed concern about Muslim groups defending the Islamic tradition and have criticized their proposals as a threat (La Libre, 2012) not only for Belgium but also for Europe (Kern, 2013). They consider that the progressive introduction of Islamic elements in Belgium (Lefebvre, 2012) responds to more conservative Islamic trends to implement Sharia Law in Europe (Bastienier & Dassetto, 1985). However, even if that may be the ambition of some extremist Islamic groups, it is a mistake to suggest that the vast majority of Muslims in Belgium supports the imposition of Islamic law in place of present legislation. Only a minority of Muslims follow these conserva-

tive ideologies. Contrary to the opinion spread by Islam's detractors in Europe, most of them accept the pluralist society and the Belgian Constitution. Simultaneously, and without contradicting local laws, many Muslims defend their cultural identity and struggle to have their traditional values recognized in Belgium, including many Islamic practices and traditions (Khader & Roosens, 2004). These claims must be understood as part of a social and cultural evolution which intends to modify neither political structures nor the Belgian Constitution.

Nevertheless, Islamic tradition's increasing presence has caused some contradictions with the Belgian secular laws. A significant percentage of Muslims follow the Islamic precepts, and they wish for the recognition of Islamic values in Belgium. Most Muslims are Belgian citizens and have similar opinions to the broader Belgian community regarding social pluralism and freedom of expression. Still, they wish their religious values to be recognized in the legal texts (Bréabant, Schreiber & Vanderpelen-Diagre, 2013).

The negative perception of some terms related to Islam among various segments of Belgian society should be noted, especially those influenced by the Catholic tradition and secularism. Sometimes, the word Islamic is associated with the ideologies spread by marginal, radical groups. In other cases, groups inspired by a distorted interpretation of Islam are perceived negatively because of atrocities performed worldwide. Thus, considering this problem of negative preconceptions in present Belgium, could aspects of Sharia be integrated into the secular Belgian law?

Sharia Law regulates all aspects of life for Muslims, discerning *halal* (permitted) and *haram* (prohibited) in Islam. However, contrary to what most people think in Europe, Sharia Law is not an irrefutable dogma and can accommodate different interpretations. In this sense, despite the dominance of Islam in North Africa and the Middle East, most countries in this region only include a few Sharia Law elements in their constitutions. Consequently, Sharia Law is adapted to the contemporary context and combined with other legal systems. The flexibility of Sharia Law has led analysts such as Ali Khan to assert that "Constitutional orders founded on Sharia Law principles are fully compatible with democracy" (Khan, 2003).

According to the aforementioned analysis, Belgian legal texts may incorporate some aspects of Islamic law that do not conflict with the national Constitution. That does not mean a literal interpretation of the Islamic sacred books but an adaptation of the Islamic rules to the present Belgian social reality.

In contrast, the European Courts of Human Rights determined on July 31, 2001, that "the institution of Sharia Law and a theocratic regime were incompatible with the requirements of a democratic society" (European Courts of Human Rights, 2001). The decision took place after the Constitutional Court of Turkey banned the Turkish *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party). The representatives of the Islamic party appealed to the European Courts of Human Rights. Similarly, several European organizations have reported various dispositions in Sharia Law that, in many ways, are incompatible with European concepts of legal rights. The disagreement is particularly controversial in those aspects related to domestic violence, marriages, or children, and especially rape. In cases of rape, many Sharia Courts condemn the victim if she refuses to marry her rapist (Jackson, 2007). Sharia Law uses legislation sources inspired by a divine code that sometimes contradicts Belgium's secular rules that promote egalitarian treatment and defend freedom of expression.

The impact of Sharia Law in the current Belgian context primarily affects the private lives of Muslims. In this regard, some attempts to keep a lifestyle compatible with Sharia Law prin-

principles have created permanent confusion among Muslims in Belgium. In many instances, local rules prevent them from adopting behaviors required by Islamic Law or force them to act contrary to Sharia Law precepts. Examples of these include hygiene and purification obligations, economic restrictions, nutritional rules, theological requirements, marital jurisprudence, and dress code. In this regard, it is convenient to underline the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) role in providing answers to all these contradictions related to Sharia Law precepts in Europe (Kamp, 2008). The decisions proposed by the Council do not have legal validity; they are only recommendations to help manage the contradictory situations experienced by Muslims in European countries.

Apart from the fatwas issued by the ECFR, several Sharia Courts have emerged in Europe in the last decades. After the Second World War, the courts began to gain influence when the first Muslim communities settled in Europe. Initially, the activity of the Islamic courts was limited to internal conflicts. However, the increasing presence of Muslims in Europe (Baran, 2011) and the roles adopted by more recent generations have increased the broader social relevance of Islam, and Muslim communities are now pursuing official recognition (Malik, 2012).

PERCEPTION OF SHARIA AS RELIGIOUS DOGMA

In Belgium, the radical group Sharia4Belgium founded a Sharia Court in Antwerp in 2011. The movement Sharia4 was a fundamentalist group, close to the Hizbut-Tahrir, established by two preachers, Omar Bakri and Anjem Choudary, in the U.K. in 2008. The appearance of this group and its intention to create a parallel justice system to deal with issues according to the Islamic Law (RTL, 2011) gave rise to an uncertain official reaction. On the one hand, some politicians like Monica De Coninck, Alderman for Diversity in Antwerp, considered the presence of Islamic courts a good thing that would help religious groups mediate within their communities (Nieuwsblad, 2014). On the other hand, the right-wing political party "Vlaams Belang" opposed the De Coninck stand, and its leaders demanded the closure of the Centre for Islamic Services (Vlaams belang, 2014).

The reduced support for radical positions has not prevented claims carried out by the Salafist groups, together with the action performed by the Wahhabist Islamic Cultural Center (CICB), from keeping the debate about the presence of Sharia Law in Belgium alive. Foreign media (CNN, 2014; RT, 2014) and other institutions (Kern, 2013A) that depict Muslims' current impact in the Region of Brussels as the beginning of a global Islamization process in Europe open an ongoing debate. In most cases (Kern, 2013B), this alarmist information responds to a trend that asserts that the Region of Brussels will be predominantly Muslim in the future (Lemarie, 2011). It is a fact that Muslims' birth-rate is higher than the rest of society, and Muslims will probably increase their influence in Belgium in the future.

Does this situation mean that a majority presence of Muslims will bring Sharia Law to Europe and bring an end to traditional secular democracies? The increase in the percentage of Muslims in the country has led to the amendment of several elements of legislation to adapt them to Muslim requirements, but this cannot be considered a real menace to Belgium. Independently of religious beliefs, changing circumstances necessitate creating a proper atmosphere for integration in multicultural Belgian society.

However, there are some areas where the process of integration reflects some difficulties. Sectors opposed to accepting Islamic elements in the Belgian legal system have focused atten-

tion on the suburbs of the most populated cities where Muslims represent the primary social group. Clear example of these areas are Anderlecht and Molenbeek in the Region of Brussels. In these two zones and many other Belgian regions, it is possible to see graffiti and banners in favor of implementing Sharia Law: “welcome to sharia zone” or “welcome to Islamic Belgium” (Hurd, 2012). In the Kuregem district of Brussels, the police have many difficulties in patrolling the area, and in Molenbeek, the authorities have restricted drinking and eating in public during Ramadan (Kern, 2011).

Similarly, it is usual in other parts of the country to see all kinds of slogans in favor of various radical ideologies from the extreme right to the leftist groups. Nevertheless, do these banners accurately represent the feelings of a large segment of society? Or are these activities performed by small groups trying to attract public attention? Similarly, those Muslims supporting the implementation of Sharia Law in some areas of Belgium do not necessarily represent the whole Muslim community. In some cities, Islamic fundamentalism reveals clear evidence of creeping radicalization. However, they do not represent the sentiments of most Muslims, who wish to live according to Islamic mores without restrictions inside their own country.

On several occasions, the “Vlaams Belang” party has taken advantage of the controversies surrounding radical Islamist groups to reinforce its position against the presence of immigrants in Belgium. See, for instance, the statements of Sam van Rooy, member of the extreme right party and co-editor of the book *Islam, Critical Essays on a Political Religion* (Van Rooy & Van Rooy, 2010). Van Rooy defines Islam as a fascist ideology, asserting on the CBN News (Youtube, 2012) that “Islam is a fascist ideology, and it’s not a religion like Christianity and Judaism. ... The danger in it is that it has a religious side, not like Communism and Nazism, which are only ideologies, but Islam has a bit of both.”

These kinds of assertions or those made by the radical Islamic groups calling for Sharia Law in Belgium do not help to create an environment where various ideologies and religious beliefs can live together.

THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF SHARIA LAW IN BELGIUM

For many, Sharia Law also has a cultural dimension (Price, 1999). Some people follow it for religious reasons; others maintain the Islamic way of life out of respect for family tradition and practices. Thus, beyond faith, a large segment of Muslims adopt Sharia as a sign to emphasize their belonging to the Islamic culture (Dorzee, 2007). Even Muslims who fully accept the legitimacy of Belgian civil law may wish to comply with Sharia’s religious injunctions in their private spheres. Nowadays, several elements of Islamic culture are present in Belgian life. Issues such as wearing Islamic clothes, consuming halal products, calls to prayer, religious holidays, and restrictions during Ramadan have led to controversies across Europe. Moreover, access to bank loans and women’s rights have driven the Belgian government to modify legislation to fit the contemporary social reality and prevent the emergence of unfair situations.

1. The use of the Islamic veil

One of the issues that has opened an ongoing debate across Europe in the last thirty years is veil use (Bousetta & Jacobs, 2006). Indeed, recently the wearing of Islamic clothes has been adopted by some Muslims to express their Islamic identity in Europe (Cesari, 2007).

The first debates about the foulard¹ (Vermeersch, 2010) coincided with tensions in France, following the prohibition on veil-wearing in the Gabriel-Havez School in Creil in 1989. A similar incident occurred at the Technical Institute Edmond Machtens in Molenbeek, a few months later (Brion, 2005). However, in this case, in contrast to the French government's stance, the Belgian authorities invoked the state's neutrality on religion. They decided not to regulate the wearing of veils in schools. A Decree of March 31, 1994, confirmed this stance, which granted total freedom to schools to establish their own rules regarding the use of religious clothing, making the head of each educational center the only authority to allow or prohibit the use of the foulard (Dassetto, 2011).

Following the Decree of March 31, 1994, veil-wearing in Belgium became less controversial. However, twenty-five years later, the debate was re-ignited when the Athenaeum of Antwerp in 2009 forbade the use of the veil for the academic year (Dassetto, 2011). That decision resulted in discussions in both the Flemish and the Walloon parliaments. At the same time, Muslim communities began to demand the right to wear the hijab in public spaces, and several Muslim women who worked as public servants or as teachers demanded the right to wear the veil in their workplaces. That year, various situations fueled the public debate on the foulard (Ghamidi, 2011). Demonstrations for and against the hijab took place through the streets of the main cities. Furthermore, the election of Mahimur Özdemir as MP in the Region of Brussels, who became the first woman to wear the headscarf in Parliament (Gillioz, 2014), represented another facet of the debate.

While the use of the hijab did not cause significant social and political reactions, the response to other female garments that fully cover the face created an ongoing controversy. As a result, some more conservative Muslim voices took it all a step further, calling to include the niqab and the burqa as elements representing religious freedoms.

For their part, non-Muslims in Belgium might observe the hijab as a symbol linked to Islamic culture; nonetheless, many consider the niqab and the burqa as discriminatory clothes for women. Different sectors in Belgium condemned the permissiveness shown in allowing people to wear these two garments that completely hide the face, especially the extreme right-wing Flemish political parties. Pressure exerted by political groups and the debate across Europe about wearing these two garments led the Belgian Parliament to discuss it. The parliamentary discussion resulted in a new law known as anti-burqa (Law 1 June), approved by a vast majority and implemented on July 23, 2011.

Although the law does not refer directly to the niqab or the burqa, the prohibition of wearing any clothing covering the face in public was motivated by these controversial Islamic forms of dress. The ban included other garments that hide the face, such as helmets or balaclavas. Failure to comply with the ordinance will result in a fine of €137.50 and up to seven days in jail (The Independent, 2010).

The effect of this law impacted all over the world (BBC, 2020). The strongest criticisms came from the U.S. government (Liberation, 2011), Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2021), and other national associations. Some local groups opposed to the law decided to initiate legal proceedings seeking to condemn this disposition as discriminatory. However, none of these appeals were successful, and the Constitutional Court confirmed on December 6 of 2012 that the law complies with the Belgian Constitution (Levif, 2020). According to the State's Security (La Libre, 2012 A), fewer than 200 women wear a burqa or

1. Foulard is the term used in France and the Belgian francophone region to referring to hijab.

niqab in Belgium, so their use does not represent a significant social problem. Nevertheless, this law has caused social confrontations in neighborhoods where Muslims are in the majority (La Libre, 2012 B).

In contrast to the blanket banning of veils that completely cover the face, the Council of State adopted a more positive stance regarding the wearing of headscarves by teachers of religion. The Council stated that: “bear[ing] signs of religious affiliation, including clothing, is inherent in the teaching of recognized religions and is not limited to hours of lectures and places which they are assigned” (Dupont, 2013). This decision confirms the perception among non-Muslims that the veil is a symbol representing belonging to the religion of Islam. The Belgian state’s position confirmed the general opinion that accepts the headscarf as a symbol of religion that women may choose to wear freely. In contrast, most Belgians consider the burqa and the niqab to be oppressive.

Currently, the veil has become an accessory worn by thousands of women of Islamic faith and/or Muslim heritage in Belgium. Although it has created some controversies in specific environments such as schools and workplaces, general social acceptance and legal decisions have integrated the veil as an everyday garment.

2. The halal market

Another aspect that reveals the increasing influence of Sharia Law in Belgium is the growing presence of products made according to Islam prescriptions and applied to various facets of Muslim life. At first, only the food industry required halal certification, but today, many other products such as medicines, cosmetics, personal care products, and clothing demand that certification. The permanent demand for services that comply with the requirements of Islamic Law has expanded the range to include financial services, hotels, restaurants, and logistics (Beci).

Initially, small butcheries, or ethnic shops, directly imported halal products from Muslim countries. They guaranteed the origin of the items. However, the increasing demand for goods led to significant distribution chains (RTBF, 2013) to understand halal products as a profitable market with huge potential (Trends, 2012). The distribution of halal products in small shops did not need an elaborate certification process; trust in the shop owner was enough to guarantee the halal origin. On the contrary, the sale of halal goods in hypermarkets presents some difficulties in labeling these products. The absence of hierarchy in Islam can make it complicated to certify a product as halal.

In some cases, the imams or representatives of local mosques like the Cultural Islamic Centre of Brussels supported the owners of butcheries and ethnic shops to confirm the products’ halal certification. However, this system was not sufficient for the emerging halal industry. Nowadays, it is estimated that more than twenty million people consume halal products in Europe.

Consequently, European countries like Belgium, France, the UK, Netherlands, and Spain have paid more attention to this market (Zemmour, 2006). In Belgium, according to an estimation done by the Département Flamand de l’Agriculture et de la Pêche, the market turnover was around €1.7 billion (Trends, 2012) in 2014 and €2.2 billion in 2020. As Felice Dassetto asserts, the halal market is an institutional, technoscientific, and economic issue (Dassetto, 2011). Last year, regional governments in Flanders and Wallonia confirmed the prohibition on halal and kosher slaughter. That decision could affect the halal industry, especially for small butcheries, while certification entities should seek alternatives to maintain their business (Parrock, 2019).

This situation has led to competition among several organizations to monopolize halal certification and influence the halal market. Currently, the Belgian government has not specified any legal framework or requirements for the halal market. Consequently, various entities grant halal certificates in Belgium. The absence of an official institution drove the Executive of Muslims in Belgium to create its own certification body and establish the ASBL Gestion Halal in 2002 (Bernard & Bergeaud, 2010). Many denounced the Executive's involvement in halal certification and criticized its intention of monopolizing the process (Dorzee, 2007). Thus, in the competition to lead Halal product certification, the Belgian CICB has managed to consolidate its accreditation as the most valuable among Muslims in Belgium.

Since 2005 several groups have launched diverse initiatives to create a powerful body recognized across Europe as the halal certifier (Dassetto, 2011). Even Belgian entities far removed from Islamic organizations, like the Agence Wallone à l'exportation (AWEX) or the Chambre de commerce et industrie de Bruxelles (Brussels Enterprises Commerce and Industry – BECI), have developed their halal certification. They aim to exceed the Belgian borders, extending certification to other European countries. BECI wants to expand halal certificates for products such as beverages, cosmetics, or medicines, to help Belgian and European companies to position themselves in a growing halal market (L'avenir, 2020). Nevertheless, the Muslim community understands the BECI goal as a business strategy that does not respond to Belgian Muslims' real needs (Belghiti, 2010).

Coming back to the the effect of the halal market on Muslims' daily lives, it is necessary to differentiate between halal availability in private and public life. Halal consumption is an option in personal life, though it causes more conflict in public places like canteens in prisons, schools, or hospitals. In these institutions, authorities must tailor the menus to the Islamic requirements. The situation is noteworthy in prisons where the pressure exerted by radical groups drove to adapt meals, and today, 70 percent of the food served in Belgian prisons are halal (Ben, 2012).

In the case of educational centers, each school is entirely free to set their menus. Some schools with a significant presence of Muslim students have introduced halal food in their daily menus (Torrekens, 2012). Marie Arena, the former Minister for Social Integration, observed this issue as a natural adaptation. Arena compared halal food in schools to the fish restrictions for Catholics on Fridays or the limitations in vegetarian diets. The former minister declares that the main goal was “promoting healthy eating and defend cultural diversity without compromising the fundamental principles of equality and universality” (Dorzee, 2007). The lack of a federal code regulating the canteens at the schools has often led to controversial situations, especially in those where Muslims have a notable presence (Torrekens, 2012).

Hospitals are another potential point of argument. The canteens usually offer several options according to illness, but these menus do not follow religious prescriptions. Within the menus, it is generally possible to find vegetarian options or meals without pork. Still, the availability of these choices depends on the hospital: the provision of such options does not constitute an obligation, and only a few hospitals include a halal alternative (Dorzee, 2007). An additional problem in hospitals is that many Muslims refuse medicines that may contain illicit substances (Vassart, 2005), giving rise to situations that can contradict the medical prescription.

Halal certification is a growing demand in Belgium. What was an informal process guaranteed by the shop owner became a big industry. Halal product distribution by large distribution channels requires regulation and sanitary control of products. That obligates Belgian authorities to amend the legislation and adapt it to the requirements of Sharia Law. Furthermore, halal food provision in public institutions such as hospitals, public schools, and prisons obligates the government to establish a proper legal framework.

3. Halal services

Halal certification affects other services regulated by Sharia Law, which has resulted in new business opportunities for several companies, notably, attempts by banks in Belgium to offer Sharia-compatible products. For a long time, Muslims encountered difficulties acquiring properties in Belgium because banks' financial products were contrary to Islamic Law principles. The European Council for Fatwa and Research issued a fatwa allowing access to regular mortgages to Muslims living in Europe to get around Sharia Law restrictions (Onislam, 2013). Nevertheless, the fatwa could not solve the problem, and many Muslims continued to reject conventional Belgian financial services. Some Islamic banks operated in neighboring countries like the UK or Luxembourg, but Islamic financial products had more difficulties in gaining acceptance in Belgium. The desire to attract investors from the Arab countries motivated the Belgian government to reduce restrictions and allow national banks to offer Sharia-compliant services.

The effect of the 2008 economic crisis and the need for foreign investors was one of the main factors that moved Belgian authorities to accept Islamic financial products. However, the Belgian banking system does not comply with Sharia requirements (orgaz, 2013). As a result, some Muslim depositors imposed restrictions on banks to keep their money protected from activities deemed illicit according to Islam (Clement, 2004). First, the banks cannot charge interest in operations. Moreover, they must offer high transparency levels to avoid investing deposits in the armaments industry, tobacco, gambling, bankrupt companies, or prohibited products such as alcoholic drinks or food made from pork. According to Mohamed Boulif, "there is nothing sacred in there; they are financial arrangements that are universal values" (Meulders, 2012).

This situation led the government to tolerate certain Islamic financial products in Belgium. In this regard, the Chaabi Bank was the first financial institution to prepare a Sharia-compatible product.² Nevertheless, Belgium has lagged behind other European countries such as France and the UK in adapting legislation to accommodate halal financial products. Consequently, there are still some troubles in creating a suitable framework for Islamic financial products in Belgium (Orgaz, 2013).

The issues surrounding Sharia Law have led to discrepancies among Belgian policymakers. On the one hand, federal authorities have generally obstructed the banking system's adaptation to the requirements of Sharia Law. For its part, the Region of Brussels has promoted various campaigns to attract Arab banks to open offices in Brussels. Benoît Cerexhe, the former Minister of Economy and Employment in Brussels, stated that: "Brussels cannot stand idly while seeing what France, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom are doing to attract Muslim economy ... we must have our share of these investments" (Chardon, 2012). The Brussels goal is to exploit its position as the home of the EU institutions and pressure the federal government and the EU rulers to amend the European financial legislation (Chardon, 2012).

2. Chaabi bank belongs to the Moroccan Groupe Banque Populaire and has been present in Belgium since 1972.

The federal authorities resisted this project, as reflected by the MP Marion Lemesre, who considered that such an approach could shake the foundations of secularism (la Libre, 2012 C). Even inside the Brussels Parliament, voices have emerged challenging the project proposed by Cerexhe. For example, the MP Alain Destexhe argued that the presence and activities of Qatari investors aligned on many occasions with Islamic fundamentalist trends. They could use the investments for evangelism and to reinforce a political agenda or spread religious propaganda. In his opinion, it would be interesting to promote ad hoc legislation at the European or federal level in this matter (La Libre, 2012 D), but only while protecting traditional financial structures. The project set up to achieve the halal banks' presence in Belgium peaked when Didier Reynders was the Finances minister. However, the appointment of Steve Vanackere stopped the progress at the end of 2011 (Meulders, 2012).

Tourism is another field that demands halal certification. In this field, the BECI has already established a process to certify hotels and other tourist services. Halal Hotels accredited must respect Sharia Law prescriptions. Thus, they cannot provide adult television channels or offer prohibited food. Besides, they have to include a Quran and a prayer mat in each room, indicating the direction of Mecca (Meulders, 2011). Similarly, many restaurants include only halal products in their menus in Belgium, and these have widespread acceptance (Turin, 2013). Following France's success, even a popular fast-food chain has opened various halal restaurants and has planned to expand in Belgium.

Regulation of Sharia-compatible services is another aspect that the Belgian legislation must attend to. Although private companies provide most of those services and could represent an option for consumers, some fields like financial services are closely interconnected with legal dispositions. Consequently, once again, the Belgian law must incorporate soft elements of the Sharia prescriptions.

4. Islamic law in professional environments

Belgian secularism aims to split religion from public life. Despite that, the Catholic tradition is still present in many aspects of everyday life. Although Belgian cities are multicultural, and different religions live together, the rhythm of life maintains Belgian practices inspired by Catholic values. For instance, calendars conserve Sunday as the official free day of the week, and most public holidays respond to Catholic festivities. This fact also interferes in professional environments where Muslim workers demand egalitarian treatment and recognition for their rights, such as free days for Islamic celebrations and time to comply with their prayer obligations. Some of these petitions have encountered obstacles in being accepted by companies. Although Sharia Law requires praying five times a day, the situation in many professional environments prevents Muslims from meeting this obligation.

Moreover, Muslims usually do not have a suitable place to pray in workplaces. In many cases, condemnation from colleagues provokes individuals' fear of losing their employment because of time spent praying (Jonlet, 2010). Only in those companies where Muslims are in the majority does anyone try to adapt the schedule to meet Sharia Law requirements, such as by establishing special conditions for praying or conceding free time on special religious days. For its part, wearing the Islamic veil in the workplace is rarely an issue except in positions that require direct contact with customers.

Other situations that may affect Muslims are corporate celebrations, company-sponsored and social activities. At these kinds of events in Belgium, it is usual to drink alcohol, which implicitly excludes Muslims. Tensions may also arise where Muslims refuse to greet women

with a kiss and do not accept shaking hands with them. These situations may be taken by non-Muslims as discriminatory and adversely affect the working environment. The month of Ramadan can be challenging, although in many cases nowadays, it is respected and accepted by non-Muslim members of staff who will avoid eating in front of a Muslim colleague.

The increased presence of aspects of Sharia in everyday and professional life will be natural and progressive. After centuries of Catholic tradition in Belgium, Belgian culture conserves many rituals inherited from its history. However, the present social context favors the inclusion of elements from other beliefs. In this sense, the acceptance of plurality in public, and especially in professional environments, initiates legal reforms to regulate the recognition of Muslim demands in workplaces.

CONCLUSIONS

The growing presence of people of Muslim heritage in Belgium has caused significant social transformations. Social changes, in many cases, have aimed to amend legislation to adapt it to current circumstances. A predominantly Catholic country rooted in the European tradition has become a multicultural nation where various cultures, ethnicities, and religions live together. Among the communities established in Belgium in recent decades, Muslims have achieved particular prominence and have claimed legal recognition of their singularity as Belgian-Muslims.

As a result, Belgian legal codes have needed to adapt to Muslim requirements. Although Sharia Law has certain negative connotations in Europe after the emergence of radical groups representing the imposition of a distorted interpretation of Islam, Sharia is followed by Muslims in living according to Islam. In this regard, the implementation of elements of Islamic law in Belgian legislation to regulate Muslims' lives means incorporating Sharia Law in its legal codes.

Responding to the question asked in 2010 about Brussels's future and the prominent presence of Muslims in 2030, demographic evolution confirms that births among Muslim backgrounds are higher than the rest of Belgians. However, accepting the progressive adaptation of the Belgian rules to Muslims' significant role in the present context does not mean a preponderance of the Islamic culture in 2030. Current Belgian society brings together people from different cultures, and the mixture of influences will compose the new Belgian reality. Future Belgian generations will integrate features of the traditional Belgian background along with elements from other cultures. Indeed, the weight of Islamic tradition in Belgium will increase in the future. Therefore, the pluralist Belgian society will adapt structures to its needs.

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