

## **The making of Muslim chaplaincies in prisons - Comparative approaches**

### **International symposium**

**Date of symposium:** Thursday 24 and Friday 25 November, 2016 in Paris.

**Organisers:** Céline Béraud (EHESS, Centre d'études en sciences sociales du religieux) and Claire de Galember (CNRS, Institut des sciences sociales du politiques, ENS Cachan)

This symposium is organised as part of the 'post-terrorist attack' research financed by CNRS.

**Scientific committee:** Jim Beckford (University of Warwick), Sophie Gilliat-Ray (Cardiff University), Irène Becci (Université de Lausanne), Franck Frégosi (Institut d'études politiques d'Aix-en-Provence), Mar Griera (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), Solenne Jouanneau (Université de Strasbourg).

In France, prison chaplain activities are currently under hitherto unforeseen scrutiny in the scope of public action and academic fields. Pioneering research by Jim Beckford and Sophie Gilliat-Ray (1998) on managing religious diversity in English prisons paved the way for works in different national contexts: in particular, Germany (Becci, 2012; Harms, 2014); Canada (Gagnon, 2008; Beckford & Cairns, 2015); Spain (Martinez-Arino, Garcia-Romeral, Ubasart-Gonzalez, & Griera, 2015); France (Beckford, Joly and Khosrokhavar, 2005; Sarg & Lamine, 2011; Sarg, 2016; Béraud, Galember and Rostaing, 2013 and 2016); Italy (Rhazzali, 2010; Fabretti, 2015); Norway and Sweden (Furseth et Kühle 2011); Holland (Ajouaou et Berns 2015); Switzerland (Becci Bovay & Kuhn, 2007; Schneuwly-Purdy, 2011).

This renewed interest in an institution that seemed to be on the verge of falling into disuse little more than two decades ago in France, can be explained by the upheaval that the religious profile of inmates has undergone in the past three or four decades. This shift, in evidence in French, but also British, German, Dutch and Belgium prisons (Roy, 2015), has made the accommodation of religious diversity – particularly Islam – unavoidable. Moreover, Islamic chaplains have been seen as a policy tool for preventing radicalisation. It has resulted in particular from the interest shown by public authorities in this institution as a potential instrument for preventing prisoners giving over to religious extremism. In the aftermath of the killings perpetrated by Mohammed Merah and Mehdi Nemouche and the 2015 terrorist attacks, Muslim chaplains have benefited from major backing from the French State, to such an extent that it has become the most-financed religion in prisons in 2016.

In a context where there is widespread interest in the role chaplains could play in the fight against the swing to violent extremism, this symposium will seek to review the way in which Muslim actors in France and in other countries have made use of this institution even though it does not belong to their own religious tradition. How have public policies against prison radicalisation stimulated the institutionalisation of Muslim chaplaincy in prisons? And how are they also making it more complicated?

Several avenues of investigation could structure the collective debate:

(1) First of all, we will look, in a socio-genesis perspective, at the **social origins of Muslim prison chaplaincy** by looking at the different factors that led to its emergence and

institutionalisation. When did the figure of the Muslim chaplain arise? What differences do we see in this field according to the different national configurations? To what extent are Chaplains' positions different? How do we explain the fact that in certain countries and not others, their function is considered as a position? Why in some countries is spiritual care for Muslims still in the hands of "visitors" (which entails additional constraints, such as limited access to inmates)?

How does this emerging function fit in from a theological point of view? How has a sort of doctrinal discourse about this new function developed in Islam? Is there evidence of transfers of experiences, practices or know-how from other public institutions (army, hospital)? We will look at the mechanisms at play in this transfer from an institution invented for and by Christianity to Islam: is there any formatting process by the institutional normalisation of the dominant Christian model (Roy, 2008)? What kinds of 'adaptation' or 'contextualisation' (Ajouaou & Bernts, 2015) are in evidence? Which actors promote this transfer and have played the role of brokers? What is the share of inter-religious, inter-administrative and international modelling in the construction of this new institution? Our debate could focus on the place of the prison administration and public actors more broadly in this process. How does the emergence of Muslim chaplaincy articulate with a broader policy to institutionalise Islam? To what extent is it supported by a policy of recognition or indeed a policy against discrimination? What of the expected security implications? What are the factors promoting or, on the contrary, creating an obstacle to this institutionalisation?

(2) A **second avenue** of analysis could concern more directly the **sociology of the actors embodying this institution today**. Who are these Muslim chaplains? How many of them are there and how have their numbers changed over time? What are their social characteristics and profiles? What practices do they bring to the inmates? How are they organised? What are the collective rationales at work in the emergence of prison chaplaincy, whether they support the process or represent an obstacle to it? In this perspective, our analysis can also look at the way in which these actors appropriate and socialise into their role whilst inventing is as they go forward. How do these apprenticeships operate? How do the hard and soft skills settle? Are they formalised? What about training within Muslim and academic organisations?

(3) A **third theme** could be to use **Muslim chaplaincy as a way of analysing public management of religion**, in other words, as a mirror of the way the State deals with religious diversity. In this perspective, national comparisons could be used to analyse the way in which different institutional designs in the relationship between the public authorities and religion have an impact on the forms taken by the institutionalisation of Muslim chaplaincy. How is the way of dealing with Islam being framed in the relationship with the former majority religions (Christianity)? How does this legacy continue to exercise an influence over the way we think administratively of the institutionalisation of the newcomer, Islam? In other terms, to what extent is a "path dependency" analysis relevant? Our attention could also be drawn to the way in which the administration screens candidates, what the more or less formalised conceptions of what is a 'good' or 'bad' candidate might be, beyond the legitimate requirements as regards the religion itself. Of course, descriptions and analyses on the uses made of chaplaincy as an anti-radicalisation tool both in political communication and in the context and practices of the prison world (by management but also by agents and personnel) would be welcome. How can these uses detrimentally affect the trust that prisoners have in Muslim chaplains?

(4) **We will also look at the rationale behind the appropriation or rejection of or indifference to this new figure in the prison world**, often presented by the administration as

a tool to challenge ‘self-proclaimed imams’ and to face up to the unofficial forms of religious leadership observed in the prison environment. How are they expressed? To what extent do prisoners participate through their needs and expectations in the co-construction of this figure, whose legitimacy remains limited? Here again, attention can be paid to the reasons behind the mimicry that feeds expectations of the chaplain based on the chaplains of historic religions. What of the authority (when it is expressed) of chaplains? It is also important to examine the extent to which the involvement of Muslim chaplains in the fight against radicalisation can disrupt their relationship with prisoners.

### **Conditions of submission:**

Presentation proposals of 200 words (English and French) to be sent to the following addresses: [celine.beraud@ehess.fr](mailto:celine.beraud@ehess.fr) and [galembert@isp.ens-cachan.fr](mailto:galembert@isp.ens-cachan.fr) before September 10, 2016.

Communications can be in French or in English.

### **Schedule:**

Proposals expected for September 10, 2016 at the latest.

Confirmation of proposals on September 15, 2016.

The texts of presentations (30,000 signets maximum) expected for November 1.

Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered.

### **Some references:**

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- Martinez-Arino, J., Garcia-Romeral, G. & Griera, M. (2016), « Demonopolisation and Dislocation: (Re-) Negotiating the Place and Role of Religion in Spanish Prisons », *Social Compass*, 62 (1), p. 3-21.
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- Roy, O. (2008), *La Sainte Ignorance. Le temps de la religion sans culture*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil.
- Roy, O. (2015), « The Diversification of Chaplaincy in European Jails: Providing Spiritual Support for New Inmates or Countering Radicalism », dans I. Becci & O. Roy (dir.), *Religious Diversity in European Prisons*, Londres, Springer, p. 187-190.
- Sarg, R. (2016), *La Foi malgré tout. Croire en prison*, Paris, PUF.
- Sarg, R. & Lamine, A.-S. (2011), « La religion en prison. Norme structurante, réhabilitation de soi, stratégie de résistance », *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 153, p. 85-104.
- Schneuwly-Purdie, M. (2011), « Silence... Nous sommes en direct avec Allah. L'émergence d'intervenants musulmans en contexte carcéral », *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 153, p. 105-121.