

Op-ed: Islamization of French society or Salafization of Muslims? Which phenomenon? Which terminology?

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (04.11.2018) - The recent publication in France of the book « Inch'Allah, l'islamisation à visage découvert » by Gérard Davet and David Lhomme, two major journalists of the famous daily center-left paper "Le Monde", has sparked vivid and interesting debates in French media.

The book is based on a field investigation carried out by five journalism students under the guidance of two professors in the departement of Seine-St-Denis (north of Paris), which has a population of about 1.5 million inhabitants, including 700,000 Muslims. Around 200 people, including Muslims, were interviewed and about 20 testimonies were published after the facts were rigorously checked. The authors of this well documented book stress that the way of life in that departement now increasingly follows religious standards and is more and more imposed upon the diverse local population.

For several years, many media in Western Europe have been raising the prospect of the "Islamization" of France, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Germany... all countries with Christian majorities and a history shaped by Christianity.

But is the use of the word Islamization of our Western European societies appropriate? There are about 5 million Muslims in France out of a total population of around 67 million. There is no evidence that non-Muslims have been Islamized or are massively becoming Muslims. At the same time, it is a fact that a number of French and foreign Muslims are becoming Salafists.

What is Salafism? What is Islamization?

Salafists are compelled by their faith to promote it, and to impose their rigorist religious standards on other Muslims and beyond, and to seek political control in "territories of the (French) Republic", as well as in civil institutions.

'Historical' Muslims in France deplore and complain about the progress of the Salafist ideology, the standards and teachings of which are in breach of 'the laws of the Republic' and international human rights standards.

'Historical' Muslims in France have been abiding by the French rule of law since they first settled in the country of Clovis, the first king of the Franks, who through his conversion and his baptism in 496 introduced Christianity in his kingdom, and of the Enlightenment.

'Historical' Muslims in France disagree with Salafist/ Wahhabi forms of Islam that damage the image of their communities, tear families apart, alienate their children from the French way of life and from their parents, and 'steal' them to send them to theatres of war in Syria and Iraq. The testimonies of Muslims in the book of Gérard Davet and David Lhomme stress this dimension of this issue.

The same phenomenon affects Muslim majority countries such as Bosnia, Tunisia, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan... but the terminology "Islamization" would be totally inappropriate in this context.

Hence, for this global phenomenon, the necessity to find a common and non-stigmatizing term that is applicable to any country: the Salafization of Muslims. This is the choice of Human Rights Without Frontiers.