

Received: 3 July 2019 Accepted: 9 September 2019

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v16i4.818>

BOOK REVIEW

Call for reconciliation: Muslim faith and French Republic's values by Tareq Oubrou. [**Appel à la réconciliation: foi musulmane et valeurs de la République française**], Tribune Libre, Plon, 2019, 360p. ISBN-13: 978-2259268431.

Reviewed by Hélène Syed Zwick¹

France and most European countries have a complex relationship with migration. A lot has been written on that. Contemporaneous contributions shifted the focus from economic benefits to social challenges. The recent political crisis due to refugees and terrorist attacks invigorated and reshaped the discussions on the complex interconnections between migration, religion, secularization and living together, thus revealing societal tensions on the process of identity changes.

In his *Call for reconciliation* organized within twelve chapters, Tareq Oubrou offers a critical, constructive and optimistic analysis on the necessity to socially adapt the religious practices of French Muslims in order to ensure a peaceful cohabitation in France and ultimately, democracy. Unlike other numerous contributions on this topic, the fact that the author himself is a French Islamic leader, theologian and well-known national figure engaged in a theology of acculturation makes this contribution unique and relevant to the current debate. Born in 1959 in Morocco, the author migrated to France nineteen years later where he progressively developed liberal Islamic positions, often considered provocative within his own Islamic community.

In this book, Oubrou starts from the observation that Islam in France especially became a religion of ostentation and provocation, where its visible practices crispate *laïcité*, the French concept of secularism and disturb the relationship between Muslims and the rest. As the subtitle – Muslim faith and French Republic's values – would suggest, the author favours a preventive, theological and ethical reconciliation between Muslims and the French society. Such reconciliation would be based on a change in perceptions and elements of ignorance (13) and be characterized by discretion of its religious practices (243).

The argument has three main elements. Firstly, Oubrou presents the two main reasons that would justify such adaptation by making extensive references to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The first reason is the legitimacy given by the Qur'an itself, whilst the second is the reality principle. The author explains that Muslims have to follow the method and path of Qur'an, but recommends applying the reality principle when it comes to practices (27). The reality principle requires considering physical and psychological abilities, but also professional, social and societal contexts. In that sense, Muslims are expected to use their reason and doubt rather than being unconditional and submitted believers. He regrets the fact that too many Muslims misunderstand or ignore these theological elements.

¹ Hélène Syed Zwick, ESLSCA University, Cairo, Egypt. E-mail: helene@eslsc.org.



Secondly, the book challenges the common perceptions about Muslims as individuals by mainly discussing the difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, a practicing-Muslim and a non-practicing one. He denounces the fact that too many Muslim families neglect esoteric practices that relate to sincerity, truth, and compassion among others, and by definition are not visible, in favour of exoteric ones, more visible (70). Oubrou takes the sensitive but symbolic examples of the veil for girls and circumcision for boys. He deplores the obsession of these practices which are pretext to official ceremonies aiming to formalize the entrance into full participation in the ritual world of Islam. The author explains that, whilst being not mandatory to be Islamic, these practices are sources of irritation and reflect a shift towards an ostentatious Islam and identitarian Muslim movement.

The misunderstanding or ignorance of Muslims regarding these practices leads the author to highlight the critical role of his peers, Islamic representatives and imams, who need and have to promote Islam in conformity with the French law, but also for cultural integration (89). With the new technologies of information and communication, religious speeches became highly powerful and even if some of these are not fanatic, they still may inspire to fanaticism (153). Oubrou warns on their impact especially on vulnerable individuals, who rely heavily on them, and either believe in everything or doubt in everything, in both cases leading inexorably to radicalism (148).

His inquiry continues with a focus on the relationship between Islam and anti-Semitism. Perceptions towards Jews and Judaism are different between French Muslims and the rest of the French society: Muslims did not live or suffer from the World War II unlike the rest of the French society, but know Jews through the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's prism. The author, after reminding that France has the two biggest Muslim and Jewish communities in Europe, explains how the Middle East conflict was imported into Europe and associates finally religion and politics. However, Qur'an does not validate anti-Semitism but rather considers it as a blasphemous act (157).

This leads to the third element of his argument: Islam and the society. The author clears up his position through deconstruction. He aims to extract the spiritual dimension of Islam from the Arab-Muslim civilization in order to identify elements that would ease integration of Muslims in the contemporaneous history (200). The creation of a representative religious institution that could express Muslim positions at a national level would definitely contribute to this acculturation.

Overall, *Call for reconciliation* is a timely, rich and accessible work, touching on theology, identity and cohabitation. The book's most valuable contribution, from my point of view, is fixing of responsibility. The author believes that Muslims are the first responsible for reconciling themselves with religion and with the French society. His main argument may not persuade everyone, especially already radicalized individuals; however, it represents an essential ground for anyone with an interest in the evolution of identity and living together.

