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An Interview with Riva Kastoryano

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European conceptions of Islam vis-à-vis Turkey's candidacy within the European Union

By Jennifer Selby

On July 26, 2008 I had the opportunity to sit down with Riva Kastoryano in her office in Paris to discuss her work with Turkish migrants in France and Germany, and more broadly, her thoughts on recent debates on Islam, the "West" and secularism related to Turkey's European Union candidacy.

Dr. Kastoryano is the author of dozens of key publications on immigration, identity, and religion in Europe. Her book, La France, l'Allemagne et leurs immigrés. Négocier l'identité *(Paris, Armand Colin, 1997) was translated into English and published by Princeton UP. Her other book,* Etre Turc en France. Réflexions sur familles et communauté *(Paris, L'Harmatan, 1986) reflects her earlier work on Turks in France. Most recently, she has edited* Quelle identité pour l'Europe? Le multiculturalisme à l'épreuve *(Presses de SciencesPo, 1998 and 2005; Palgrave forthcoming), and* Les codes de la différence. Race, religion et origine en France, en Allemagne et aux Etats-Unis, *(Paris, Presses de SciencesPo, 2005).*

Dr. Kastoryano is now director of research at Sciences Politique in Paris, having begun her tenure in 1988. Prior to this affiliation, she taught at Harvard University, and since 1988 has worked as a fellow at Princeton, at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin and again at Harvard in 2003-2004. Since 2005, she has also acted as an invited professor at the New School for Social Research in New York.

Her research interests today fall broadly to the political sociology of Europe, nationalisms and identity.

JS - *Let's begin by looking at your own intellectual trajectory on this question. When did you begin thinking about and working on Turkish immigration and Europe?*

RK - The question of Turkey in Europe came much later for me than my initial work. First I worked on immigration. And immigration was just a coincidence. I was working in the area of sociology of the family and I was writing a Master's thesis on the production and reproduction of norms. Since I speak Turkish, I thought I could work on the production and reproduction of norms within immigrant families. From there, for my doctoral work (at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales) I examined Turkish families, their social organizations, and community formations and networks in the city . Then I went to Berlin, where I looked at France and Germany and I raised the question of how policies shape integration and collective identity of immigrants. I focused in this work on Turkish immigrants in France and Germany.

Negotiating Identities: States and Immigrants in France and Germany (Trans. Barbara Harshav, Princeton UP, 2002) took into consideration North African immigrants to France too, not just Turkish immigrants. My analysis in this work is based on interaction between states and communities, and questions how states negotiate their identities. I argue that these negotiations are the latest development in all democratic societies, no matter their definition of nation and their principles of citizenship. States are negotiating the modes and means of inclusion for immigrant populations in the political arena. Individuals or structured communities must then fight against all forms of exclusion, whether they are political, economic, social and/or cultural.

Once I had the question of how the policies or States shape the state, and how they share collective identities, I also considered other populations of immigrants. From there, I saw that they can be organized in the same way, they debate the same issues - in both countries, France and Germany - but when it comes to negotiations with the state, what becomes the core identity of the state comes out. Like laïcité to be negotiated in France, in the face of Islam. In comparison, citizenship is debated in Germany, facing the claims of dual citizenship by the Turks.

But, we are now a stage which is a step further from these negotiations: where Islam and secularism is being negotiated all over Europe. The citizenship issue is done. Today, laws have changed, particularly in Germany where citizenship laws have historically been the most restrictive. Moreover, today we are beyond simple juridical citizenship. It's not just legal citizenship that matters but also cultural, social and economic.... any kind of normative citizenship, like equality rights.

ISLAM AND SECULARISM IN EUROPE

JS - *Why have Islam and secularism become the foci of normative debates across Europe? Is this discourse framed by politics within the larger EU framework?*

RK -Religion - particularly Islam - has become a legitimate, the most legitimate identity to institutionally recognize each member state. It's not just any religion, it's Islam.

I remember one Turkish businessman, and association leader told me in Germany after the riots in Mölln and Solingen, "They will make of us Germans. But our Muslim identity will resist." And this becomes the permanent difference. And besides it's an identity which can be legitimate and is made legitimate by the state. Because states have religions, populations have religions, and religions have status in each state so all we need is to include Islam within the existing status for other religions. The CFCM is an example for France. We can criticize the way it is done and all the outcomes, but institutionally it is legitimate.

In Germany the issue is not an institutional representation like it is in France, but the instruction of Islam in schools, because other religions have instruction in public schools. And because in Germany, religion comes from the public law, and so now the negotiation is related to secularism all over Europe.

JS - *Would you say that in contemporary Europe, and in the "West" more broadly, secularism is being defined in its relationship with Islam?*

RK - Yes. I argue in my book and I still maintain this argument, that Islam brought the debate on secularism. Before that, *laïcité* or secularism was a given. No one would even question it in the modern West. We are all secular. We are all *laïque.* And people were proud to be *laïque.* Suddenly, Islam comes and people think it's impossible because of *laïcité.*

What do we mean by *laïcité*? In a public conference I overheard an imam assert that he was *laïque*, and he added: "but we don't understand what that means". In France 60-70% of the holidays in France are Catholic holidays although France is the most radical country for the importance of *laïcité*. So, the Muslim man is wondering, what should we do to be *laïque* like them? Then comes the problem of the definition of *laïcité.* The debate has become important after the first "scarf affair' in

1989.

JS - *Like Jean Baubérot's description of "catho-laïcité" in France during the debate on conspicuous religious signs in 2003-2004?*

RK - Exactly. *Laïcité* is institutional and political. Culture cannot be *laïque.* Turkey is a laïque state, like France. People are Muslim. Culturally, France is Catholic. The United States culturally is Protestant. Cultures are religious. States have cultures.

Once you have religion already in the public space, visible, we need to think about the distinction between private and public.

The state imposes differences between public and private, but at the same time, the state intervenes in private domains like the family. We need to see what kind of accommodation can be done across Europe with secularism and religion, that has become an important issue with or without Islam.

JS - *But don't you think, particularly in the French case, that the imposition of a strict separation of public and private was made very clear with the law on conspicuous religious signs? In this case that the school is "public"?*

RK - There are many public spheres, one of which is the school. This law (voted in France in 2004) targeted the school because it's the institution that embodies the country's national identity and assimilation. But the scarf itself is, a priori, a private issue. Its use in a public space made it a public issue. So the state intervenes in the family, into the family authority in order to free the young girls from pressure; in reality families are themselves under community pressure. I was actually for the 2004 law, knowing all these communities and how they function. I wrote an article in 1996 in Le Monde where I said that only the state can liberate the individual from community pressures. [1] Even families are under community pressures.

But, with laws like this one we can see that Islam today is not just French or British or German or Dutch or Belgian. Islam has a broader scope. The countries of origin intervene a great deal - look at the last elections of the CFCM (the French Council of the Muslim Faith elections on June 6, 2008). And France plays this game. This is the states' hypocrisy. There's a big contradiction between the juridical and the reality. For instance, France negotiated with Morocco for the leadership of the CFCM, and Algeria has intervened as well. In Germany, the Turkish islam is represented by Milli Görüs - Islamic Party Association which was banned in Turkey, and now it's free because of a change in government. MG has been chosen as the main intermediary in Berlin. Then comes the Turkish States' representation the Diyanet in Germany and all over Europe competing with Milli Görüs. So Turkey is very much involved in the lives of its Turkish migrants. Morocco and Algeria are involved in the migration of their nationals. Pakistan is involved in London.

Now the next step for the scarf issue - and I don't think this was a coincidence that it came out in 2003, 2004 - is because of this transnational Islam is so present on a local level. It came as an assertion of state sovereignty.

"EUROPEAN ISLAM"

JS - *Do you think there's some currency that European Assembly of Muslim Imams and Spiritual*

Guides organized for the first time in Belgium this year signals a distinctly "European Islam"? Or, does this reformulation become possible on a national level, like John Bowen's distinction between an "Islam de France" and an "Islam en France"? [2]

RK - I want an "Islam Français." "Islam de France" means that they are Muslims in France and that they belong to France. I want to see Islam nationalized, a French Islam. Like French Jews, German Jews. We don't say "Jews from France," for instance. The only way Muslims will gain legitimacy in France is to be "French Muslims." Perhaps I think this way because I'm more state-oriented. But we have such a problem of vocabulary for these issues. The new research refers to "Muslim immigration" - what does that mean? And scholars say "Youths with Muslim culture." What does that mean? If I hear "Catholic culture" "Jewish culture" I get upset! But because Islam is there, it's claimed, and we as scholars also put it in their minds. We put it in their claims, and now as researchers we don't know what to call them.

JS - *So you see this as a theoretical issue in scholarship that has implications on the ground? As a "category creation" with negative political implications?*

RK - Exactly. But only the other hand, these categories are appropriated and it becomes a matter of pride.

JS - *Is there something in "Islam" that is distinctly shared by European Muslims?*

RK - Many things are shared. French Islam, German Islam, English Islam, etc., etc. But you have Islam as such from the countries of origin, that are being mobilized, which have only one reference: Palestine. So this creates another level of mobilization beyond their relationships with each state. With whom do you identity? Are you proud of Al-Qaeda? Are you proud of bin Laden? Or you're proud of being from Sarcelles or Courneuve (two banlieues outside of Paris)? But Courneuve is not a place to be proud of. It's a place of violence, of poverty, of exclusion. So you have a group (the Palestinians) that legitimates your revolt - why not identify yourself with it? This is our failure of policy, of integration, and so on.

And the discourse on Palestinians is ready: A humiliated people. That America and Israel are one. So these issues are everywhere, not just in France. Go to Madrid. Morocco is in Madrid. Pakistan is in England. Turkey is in Germany.

TURKEY, EUROPE, FOOTBALL

JS - *Can you comment briefly about Turkey's inclusion in the Euro-Cup? I wondered when I saw the match what it might mean if Turkey won the tournament! These sporting events, they might seem very trivial but they are also symbolic public arenas for how these relationships get played out . . .*

RK -I was far more afraid of German nationalist youths, the Neo-Nazis, than the Turks being angry. Their relationship with Germany is not the same - you know, as much as we say there's one transnational, global Islam, everything is very local at the same time. Turkey and Germany don't have the same relationship as Algeria and France. There is no feeling of revenge. No colonization. No matter of pride to assert yourself as a better nation. Turkey and Germany are two different sovereign nations, each proud of that. They don't have any colonial revenge. The Turks know they are Turkish. They live in Germany, and they are grateful for that. They did very well economically thanks to

German liberalism. They recognize that. They invest in Turkey thanks to their work in Germany, but they are very proud to be Turkish. In Germany You won't hear someone say, "That Turk is not acting like a German." No one is expecting him to. But everyone appreciates that the Germans won. Both governments have been working very hard on this, ever since they knew they were going to play against Germany.

And Turks, even more so, they don't want to have the blame placed on them. For anything. For terrorism, for radicalism, and also the world has given the image of "moderate Islam" to Turkey, so that Islam shouldn't be an issue, because it's the state at the same time. But it's the policy. And this is the card to play in Europe right now.

TURKEY'S SECULARISM

JS - *Maybe we can switch gears to discuss Turkey's Kemalist history of secularism since the 1920s and its own contemporary historical ties with the "West" and "modernity."*

RK - Turkish secularism was modeled on French laïcité, and the word used in Turkey is "laïklik." It has been established top down, there was no revolution, and the process of the organization of Turkey brought an ideology, as well. A secular Republic. What did that mean at the time? It meant to change the law, the alphabet . . . to secularize the society. Did it work? No. The elite was secularized, but the elites had been secular since the nineteenth century. The Ottoman elite had always been cosmopolitan. But it didn't work within the larger society. Then it became an issue among politicians when multi-party began in the late 1940s and 1960s. Some started to exploit religion and were against the Kemalist party's understanding of a secular Republic.

When I started my research on the Turkish immigrants here in France, of course, I come from a secular, non-Muslim milieu in Turkey myself, and I was very surprised to hear that how Muslims spoke here. Everything was interpreted through religion: the dowry, clothes, the swimming pool, success in school. Everything was "because we are Muslim." But I didn't see this as a political issue. It was a question of identity. It was therefore an immigrant, minority culture that was emerging. More interesting, I remember during my research when I heard so much about this Turkish Islam among immigrants, I asked a child "What is your religion?" He said, "Turkish." As a matter of fact in Turkey, despite the secularism, a Turk is a Muslim. A non-Muslim is not considered as a Turk. They are part of a minority status; they have a specific minority status based on religion.

But for Turkey, this Islam was supposed to be kept in the private sphere, like in France. Also, Islam was nationalized as "Turkish" to distinguish itself from Arab countries. The population is Muslim, but the state is secular.

Secularism is being negotiated in Turkey too. The Alevis (a Shi'ite sect of Islam) don't have any representation and say that so far the only representation is Sunni, so they want representation too, especially if the state is supposedly secular. So now the challenge to *laïcité* in Turkey is Alevi and not non-Muslim.

JS - *Perhaps it's anachronistic, but would you frame the Kemalism of the 1920s as a move closer to Europe, seeking to foster ties?*

RK - At that time, who would have thought we would have a European community . . . But yes, it was

part of a desire for Western modernization. Turkey is a European nation state, in the sense of a "Western" state. The penal code has been adopted from Swiss. It's all European-oriented, and was also a move to disassociate its Sunni Islam from the Arab states. To nationalize Turkey where Islam is the core identity, but the nation comes first.

EUROPE'S POSITIONS ON TURKEY'S INCLUSION

JS - *And now with the current negotiations, that Sarkozy became the leader of the 27 nations of the Union in July 2008, the foreign affairs leader of Turkey Ali Babacan has spoken publicly about his concern for the fairness of the talks.*

RK - Turkey started its integration into Europe more formally with NATO, and in the 1950s with the European Council, and they first asked to be part of the community in 1963, and then it was accepted as a candidate in 1999. It has a long history, it's a long process. In the meantime, in 1963 it made its request alongside Greece, which has already been accepted, even if it came out of a dictatorial regime and it was poor . . . So were Portugal and Spain. So they waited until 1999 to accept it as a candidate, and in 2005, they began the negotiations. The rest is all technical, with packages on human rights, economy, welfare, and so on.

But in the meantime, there have been many discourses which have excluded Turkey from normal membership. Even at the beginning of the negotiations, it was said, "Even if we begin the negotiations, it does not necessarily mean they will end with membership," even though all the other negotiations by law ended with membership. And, Sarkozy is the champion of exclusion. He wasn't sure how to define the exclusion properly, so he did so using geographical terms, putting Turkey in Asia. We know that his view is shared by the majority of people in France. And there was something in *Le Figaro* yesterday saying that only 30% of French people are for its inclusion in the EU. Turkish people have taken this exclusion badly; Sarkozy is now seen as a villain in the eyes of Turks. France, Germany and Austria are the countries who are the most against it.

JS - *And some like Jack Straw have had differing positions - Straw was opposed to the headscarves in England in 2006, but in 2007 spoke out for the inclusion of Turkey to bridge the gap between "East and West." Others like Wolfgang Schuessel have been more critical, echoing the reported 70% of Austrians who in 2005 were against full Turkish membership.*

RK - Austria has this trauma of 1683 when the Ottomans were at the gates of Vienna. This argument is totally irrational with regards to the EU today. The EU is a project about the future not about the past. For Germany it's a matter of culture and 2-3 million immigrants of Turkish-origin living there. In France, the Armenian issue has mobilized the Parliement, even though it's inconceivable that another country can vote on the history of another sovereign state. A society can accept the critique, mobilization can happen, but a foreign parliament cannot vote about another's historical record.

So, they've been pushing a lot - talking about Cyprus, genocide . . .

JS - *While as a scholar you can't predict or forecast what will happen with these negotiations, do you feel hopeful about a change in Europe, an opening toward Turkey? Particularly as it relates to its religious demography?*

RK - It's not a matter of being hopeful, it's about deciding what Europe is and what Europe wants.

And what Turkey wants in the long run.

JS - *Do you see this as a question of Islam or a combination of all of these factors we've discussed?*

RK - Everything. Demography, geography, Islam, everything. I wouldn't place it solely on Islam, even though the Turkish sensitivity over there is to say, "Hey they don't want us because we're Muslim." But I don't think it's the only issue, and it can't be the only issue. I would say that Islam should be an argument to take them in, moreover so if we take seriously of the "clash of civilizations". I taught a class on the EU and Turkey at sciences Po and a student who wrote his final paper on the military , addressed a security issue and asked, "How can Turkey fight against radical Islam in Europe since they are already Muslim? How are they going to sanction radical Islam?" This student is in his 5th year at Sciences Po. How can he say such a thing? Knowing that Turkey is also fighting against terrorisme and radical islam when Al-Qaeda attacked Istanbul some years ago. This student's position represents a larger lack of knowledge, and it's projection of something negative as a way to reject it.

But I don't think Turkey has that much to loose if they don't become part of the Union. Europe has more to lose. Turkey is playing a larger role, all recent developments of Turkey show that Turkey aims at leading the Muslim world uilding bridges with the USA and the EU. If the EU continues to become a "Euro-National" entity, it won't be open to globalization. Look at the constitution treaties - many countries have rejected them. France, the Netherlands and now Ireland to a certain extent all said "No." If Europe goes this way, it will lose.

Watching the evolution of these two spaces, I have more confidence in Turkey.

JS - *Perhaps the question of its inclusion within the EU has allowed Turkey to define itself on a number of issues, relating to the Arab world, its minorities, human rights, and so on. Likewise, the religiousness/secularity of "Europe" is also taking greater shape. What do you think the debate means for the young man in Courneuve (a banlieue of Paris)? What does this debate mean for European Muslims? How are they situated in this debate?*

RK - When you look at the institutional level, Turks in Germany and Arabs in France have one thing in common - they want their religion to be recognized and represented. They have cleavages and fights, and especially on a social level there is little communication. But on the representation of Islam, it comes back to identification.

There is some sense of solidarity because the understanding is that Europe doesn't want Turkey because it's Muslim. But, this is among immigrants. Muslim countries are watching Turkey and Europe to see to what extent it will reject Turkey to say, "Haha, you wanted to play the game of western modernization, good for you. You don't want to be "authentic Muslims," you wanted to play this secular Western game, and they don't want you because they still see you as Muslim, good for you." You have this among some countries, mainly North African countries. Egypt on the other hand is expecting Turkey to be part of the EU.

JS - *What about the new Mediterranean union? Is it an easy way out of the EU?*

RK -I was at a conference in Istanbul yesterday and one of the organizers there said, "This is a one-way ticket. No return." I don't think Turkey will accept any other arrangement than full membership. They cannot justify it. People are tired, offended, hurt in Turkey. They are tired. Either membership or nothing, and political leaders cannot play any other hand.

JS - *In your opinion, is the question of the headscarf in Turkish universities related to this larger debate?*

RK - No, no, no, it's internal to Turkey. The question of the headscarf in Turkey started long before it did in France and has noting to do with the question of membership. It is a delicate question. Sincerely, I don't know what to think. In France, I knew that I didn't want the headscarf in public schools, in France, the issue is one of community and family inluenced by external pressure and once you are 18, you choose what you want to do, you are a free individual, citizen, you can go to the University with a scarf if this is your belief.

But in Turkey, I have mixed feelings about the scarf on the universities in turkey. In Turkey, the university has always been the space for ideology. So to come in to the university with a scarf is to assert an ideology. Like in 1968-70. Then it was that men shouldn't have a beard because it's a symbol of communism. So it's a site of ideology, where all ideas are argued of course but has becaome also source of internal violence. So it can be seen as a way to penetrate an ideology in the university where you produce and reproduce ideologies. But, on the other hand, if the scarf enables women to attend the university, socially, I think it's unfair not to allow them access to the university without the scarf. In France it's hard to define free choice and religious pressure. In Turkey it's hard to define free choice and ideology. And I think that these ideologies are more dangerous than family pressure.

"CLASH" OF CIVILIZATIONS?

JS - *And just one last question, a point to which you referred earlier and which seems to shape a lot of the official political talk and the talk on the streets about Turkey's EU membership, and that is Huntington's infamous moniker of the "Clash of Civilizations." Are there alternatives to shaping the debate?*

RK - This phrase is nonsense. And Turkey's a place to go beyond this. Huntington created a lot of problems with this phrase. Now all modern countries are using this discourse in their favour, bringing out their "civilizations." Huntington came to Turkey to tell them, "Stop trying to be a part of Europe, be a leader in the Muslim world."

Islam IN Europe is the only way to denounce this view. Islam is a part of Europe.

JS - *Thank you very much for your time, Riva.*

[1] Kastoryano, Riva. 1996. "Le Retour du Foulard Islamique." Le Monde 15-16 December.

[2] Bowen, John. 2004. "Does French Islam Have Borders? Dilemmas of Domestification in a Global Religious Field." American Anthropologist 106:1 43-55.