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MUSLIM YOUTH IN FRANCE

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Introduction

During the last 18 months, in France perhaps more than in other European countries, Islam has turned into a frequent newspaper headline. The newspaper *Le Monde* even promoted Islam de France as one of the topics which marked at the national level the year 2003! The disproportionality between the size of the Muslim population and the media coverage it receives is an indication of the symbolic nature of the debate[1]. Muslim minds – and bodies - are arenas for the contested politics of the nation. Public debates were filled up to saturation with *the Muslim question*, which had been latent throughout the last decade and re-emerged in early 2003 with the much-applauded (and equally criticised) constitution of the Conseil français du culte musulman (CFCM), a body aimed at providing Islam with public recognition as well as the state with legitimate religious authorities; it was then given new impetus in April 2003 at the annual Muslim gathering in the Parisian suburb of Le Bourget, which that year included the then Home Minister Nicolas Sarkozy as the guest of honour; and it continued until adoption of the law at the National Assembly forbidding conspicuous religious signs in public schools.

This sequence of events highly exacerbated, in public opinion, the perception of Muslim youth as problematic and intrinsically alien to French culture, including French laicité – in both its explicit and implicit forms. These developments were also inextricably linked to international events and concerns, in particular the threat of Islamic terrorism. The discovery of the participation of a number of French youth in Islamic militant movements and in "jihad operations", particularly in Chechnya and Afghanistan (no less than nine Frenchmen are currently held in Guantanamo Bay), highlighted by media obeying to the usual constraints, and the declarations of Dalil Boubakeur, recteur de la mosque de la Paris and now president as well as spokesperson of the CFCM about "l'islam des (jeunes) surexcités" have contributed to fuel this explosive debate[2].

This paper attempts to answer four specific questions:

1) Who are the Muslim youth in France (socially, ethnically, economically)

2) What is the spectrum of their religious practises (from atheism to fundamentalism)

3) What are their interactions with non-Muslims (social and professional activities, interfaith dialogue)

4) What are their political engagement and repertoires of mobilizations (at local, national, European and international levels)

Given the large scope of these questions, this paper will not be exhaustive. It will be descriptive, attempting to give the reader an overview of the main developments related to Muslim youth in France. Rather than covering the wide range of Muslim discursive practices (Asad), it will focus instead on a limited number of key events which in my view highlight the dynamics that are structuring the future of Islam in France. The major issues facing young Muslims in France include the politics of state recognition of Islam; the question of the Islamic headscarf in public spaces; and the problematic articulation of a Muslim French identity in the political sphere.

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[1] Drawing an interesting historical parallel, Esther Benbassa has recently argued the Muslims have become the new Jews (*La République face à ses minorités – Les juifs hier, les Musulmans aujourd'hui*).

[2] Elsewhere Boubakeur (2004) has been more *nuancé*, calling for the need to understand the difficulties placed on Muslim youth. But the damage was done.

1. Who are the Muslim youth in France (socially, ethnically, economically)

Since the French Republic is "une, indivisible et laïque", there are no statistics regarding ethnic or religious populations, as this has been widely interpreted as both contrary to the Republican ideal and reminiscent of the fate of Jews in Vichy France. In reality, statistics on religious affiliation are not *legally* forbidden as long as they are not compulsory, as the demograph Michele Tribalat has recently pointed out[3]. However, they remain *socially* discouraged: since 1872, date of the last census in which religion was mentioned, statistics practitioners have been wary of entering into this type of questions.

In this context, figures about Muslims in France are political constructions ranging from 3 up to 7 million! These numbers have become a hotly contested issue, in particular with the rise of the National Front and the banalisation of a certain Islamophobia[4]. Inevitably, in all these demographic calculations, Islam becomes an ethnic category (are Muslims those that come from Muslim countries) rather than a religious one (are Muslims those who define themselves as such), and thus serves to exacerbate the reverse *communitarisme* which perceives many immigrants through the prism of a hypothetical Islamic identity – the number of Muslims being the number of people from majority Muslim countries and their offspring plus, sometimes, an estimation of the number of converts. However, contrary to the United Kingdom, where Islamic groups such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) have been campaigning for the inclusion of an optional question on religious affiliation in the national census, Muslim organisations in France have not further politicised this issue.

Muslims in France are overwhelmingly of North African origin, which contributes to an Arab-centred vision of Islam in France contrasting clearly with Britain and Germany[5]. Following the old colonial patterns, Muslim immigration to France since the 2nd World War has come mainly from Algeria (with 43%, it is the greatest contributor to the population "susceptible d'être musulmane", according to Tribalat's telling formulation) and to a lesser extent Morocco (28%) and Tunisia (11%). These immigrant communities, like elsewhere in Europe, were initially perceived as temporary additions to the native populations. No significant efforts were made to integrate them in the urban landscapes. Instead they tended to be concentrated in industrial areas and in the outskirts of the main cities. While it is probably misleading to speak of urban ghettos (yet), immigrants of North African origin are disproportionally concentrated in the *banlieues* of French cities.

If subsequent generations acquired nationality easily as citizenship in France is based on the principle of *jus solis*, they have been less successful in acquiring the same socio-economic lifestyle as their fellow co-citizens. Unemployment rates are substantially higher in the areas where they tend to be concentrated. According to 2000 statistics from the Ministry of Employment concerning qualified labour, the unemployment rate of those born French was 5%, that of French by naturalisation 11%, but it reached 20% for foreigners of North African origin. Despite France's poor record in combating ethnic and religious discrimination, the idea of positive discrimination remains largely taboo: when last year Nicolas Sarkozy became the first prominent politician to

[3] See Tribalat's contribution to *Cités* « L'islam de France », PUF, 2004, p. 21.

[4] See for example the media coverage given to the book by Philippe Aziz on the so-called "paradox" of Roubaix, described in a very sensationalistic way as the first Muslim town in France.

[5] This paper will perhaps contribute to this vision by focussing mainly on Muslims of North African origin.

pronounce himself in favour, re-baptising positive discrimination as "volontarisme républicain", he unleashed a torrent of shocked reactions. Significantly, young Muslims in France often feel as "jeunes d'origine difficile", in opposition to the "FDS" (français de souche), as an Algerian writer based in France recently put it[6]. The public display of an Islamic identity often becomes the sign of a provocation, or resistance, to the reality of social exclusion.

Sociologists have also noted the slow and gradual emergence of a Muslim middle-class in France as a marking phenomenon of the nineties. Known as the *beurgoisie* since Rémy Leveau and Catherine de Wenden coined the term in their 2001 book, this middle-class is contributing to the (slow) emergence of a plurality of Muslim voices and discourses on Islam. Here the affirmation of an Islamic identity can be a (bourgeois) choice which reconciles a willingness to integrate into French society with a demand of social distinction, as de Wenden has noted. However, Islam in France continues to be largely perceived as the religion of the stranger, the poor and the excluded – a combination which, as Farhad Khosrokhavar has argued, produces strong negative effects for the integration of young Muslims in the French landscape (Khosrokhavar 1997).

The experience of Muslim youth in France is also highly "gendered". Muslim males are the inheritors of colonial stereotypes, often portrayed as vicious Arabs, prone to violence and delinquency. The widespread rejection of the *beur* (Arab in slang) by French society is commonly acknowledged. In a context where Arab has become synonymous with Muslim fundamentalist and international terrorist, the involvement of a tiny number of male French youth in jihad operations has contributed to exacerbate the negative image of Muslim young men in French media. This portrayal of the Arab / Muslim male contrasts sharply with the image of the Arab / Muslim girl, affectionately called *beurette*, on which all Republican hopes for integration of the immigrant North African populations were placed. Thus the (real) shock, among French intellectual elites, at finding the same young girls suddenly starting to wear the Muslim headscarf, and the (fallacious) willingness to dismiss it as…an international conspiracy. In French banlieues, this asymmetry is often reversed: Muslim girls are stigmatised and do not always enjoy the same freedoms of their male neighbours, who appropriate the existing public spaces[7].

The category of Muslim youth is, like all social categories, sociologically constructed. According to Didier Bourg, the category was first introduced by Muslims in 1987 with the emergence of the *Union des jeunes musulmans* (UJM) in the city of Lyon, and then quickly taken up by non-Muslim media and academia in the wake of the first congress of the UJM in 1992. The term « Muslim youth » denotes a change in relation to the elder generation, not only because the « young » Muslims are born in France and have little knowledge of the « country of origin », including its languages, but also because their Islamic religiosity is in many ways contrasted to their parents': if first generation migrants carried Islam as part of their cultural baggage, the new generation articulates the Islamic component of its identity in both personal and rational terms (Bourg 1998: 73). L'islam des jeunes became, for some, the equivalent of a French or European Islam, in the sense that it was enunciated in France (or Europe), by French (or European) Muslims, often in opposition with traditional practices and discourses[8]. Interestingly, this de-culturation of Islam is seen as bearing simultaneoulsy the seeds for an Islamic reformation (the hermeneutics of modernist intellectuals call for locating – in order to abandon - the cultural within the universal) and

[6] *Allah Superstar*, by Y.B. Editions Grasset, 2003. FSD is intended as a pun on SDF (*sans domicile fixe*), vernacular for a tramp.

[7] The movement Ni Putes ni Soumises is a mediatised attempt to intervene towards more gender-equal environments in the cités, mixité being precisely one of their mottos.

[8] See Stéphane Lathion, « La jeunesse musulmane européenne, vers une identité commune ? », in *CEMOTI*, Autumn 2002.

those of regression (fundamentalist movements within Islam have rejected all cultural elements as *bida'*, blameful innovations, in favour of a more puritan version of their religion) – for the better or for the worse, depending from which angle one perceives it[9]. Thus one could plausibly argue that the expression *islam des jeunes* has become dissociated from the age of the person in question. More recently, in reaction to the patronising tone adopted by some media practitioners towards *les jeunes musulmans*, which they perceive as "infantilisant", some Muslim leaders have started to question its relevance altogether.

2. What is the spectrum of their religious practises (from atheism to fundamentalism)

Since we do not dispose of reliable figures on the Muslim population, we know even less about the level of religiosity of Muslim youth in France. There is no reason to think that French Muslims are somewhat more or less pious than Muslims in any other European country – and very clearly the range of religious practises among Muslim youth in France is very wide.

A number of opinion polls conducted for newspapers and/or magazines (and responding to the constraints of media demands) have highlighted the diversity of Islamic religiosity in France. Based on "Christian" models, these polls tend to focus on definitions of Muslim identity (cultural or religious) and levels of Muslim practice (prayer, mosque attendance, fasting). They have often reached rather similar conclusions. One such example concerns the polls the I.F.O.D. has performed over the last fifteen years (1989; 1994; 2001), published in Le Monde. They show that the percentage of interviewees from families of Muslim origin which consider themselves to be either practising Muslims (36% in 2001 compared to 37% in 1989) or believing Muslims *only* (42% in 2001 to 38% in 1989) is rather steady and represents the overwhelming majority (here around ¾ of the total population). The number of those who openly declare themselves to be either without religion or belonging to another faith has remained throughout the years around 6%. The polls also indicate that daily prayer is decreasing (from 41% in 1989 to 33% in 2001) while Friday mosque attendance is slightly increasing (20% in 2001 compared to 16% in 1989). Fasting from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan seems to be followed by the majority (70% declared in 2001 to have fasted during *the whole month* and 7% *sometimes*, compared to 60% and 21% respectively in 1989). Muslim youth (16-24 years) are, along with the elders above 55, the most practising category: 69% declare the intention of performing the *hajj* at some time in their lives, and 74% declare fasting completely during Ramadan[10].

One of the major difficulties with such polls, however, is their limited sociological usefulness: even when they obey scientific methods concerning representativity, the sample is always too small to allow conclusive arguments (in the case of the IFOD 2001 sample, only 940 people). Furthermore, telephone surveys do not bring out the variety of meanings that underlie Muslim practices. If the politics of quantitative (and indeed qualitative) research are always complex, the pernicious use in France of indicators concerning lack of daily prayer and mosque attendance, alcohol-drinking and pork-eating as signs of Muslim "integration" casts doubts over the relevance of such methods of data collection for sociological analysis.

[9] The discourse of Tariq Ramadan is in many ways symptomatic of this dilemma. See Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, Islamic Foundation, Leicester, 199 ; and Leila Babès' reply, « L'identité islamique européenne selon Tariq Ramadan », in *Islam de France*, n° 8, Al Bouraq, October 2000.

[10] See www.ifod.com/europe/sondages/opinionf/islam.asp.

Indeed in France, the religiosity of Muslim youth is from the outset construed as problematic, immediately associated with Islamic fundamentalism and the failure of integration: while the Islam of the parents (*l'islam des parents*) is conciliatory, discrete and willing to integrate into France, the Islam of the children (*l'islam des enfants*) is portrayed as uncompromising, in rupture with both the parents' and French ideals[11]. The very concrete presence of some fundamentalist and pietist groups notwithstanding[12], this negative perception according to me stems largely from the (unspoken but underlying) idea that, in order to integrate in France, Muslims need to discard their religious practices: as John Bowen (2004: 45) has noted, not without irony, not practising is widely perceived in France as indicating "a willingness to fit in with French society" – an idea that incidentally is corroborated by a number of people of Muslim origin[13]. In any case, the regain of religiosity among Muslim youth in France is, at best, puzzling for non-Muslim publics. Demands for public recognition and visibility of Islam, often articulated by the youth, accentuate the uneasiness and are often perceived as *communitarian*, running counter to French norms – if not in its explicit and legal aspects (the law after all recognises both the freedom of *private* belief and the right to its *public* expression within the limits of French public order), at least in the social imaginary. The fact that this amounts to a form of majority *communitarisme* seems lost on all but a small fraction of French intelligentsia[14].

Deconstructing this vision of the religiosity of Muslim youth as a problem, there has been a number of sociological explorations of the subjectivities attached to the religious practices of young Muslims in France. These studies have attempted to place Muslim religiosity in the framework of modernity, often emphasising the individualisation tendencies and syncretism common to other forms of religious revival examined by sociologists of religion (Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995; Babès 1997; Khosrokhavar 1997; Césari 1998; Flanquart 2003; Bouzar and Kada 2003). Some have pointed to the growing spiritualisation of Islamic norms, epitomised by the famous call "je porte le voile à l'intérieur" (Césari 1998). Others have focussed on Muslim girls wearing the hijab (externally, so to speak) and have argued - against the idea of an objectified meaning (ie, the inferiority of women) - the diversity of interpretations and motivations attached to it among Muslim girls in France (Khosrokhavar and Gaspard 1995; Khosrokhavar 1997; Nordmann 2004). All these analyses have, however, only made a marginal contribution to public debate, dominated by more simplistic (and media-friendly) ideas and emotional reactions[15].

The institutionalisation of Islam in France, which culminated in the constitution of the Conseil français du culte musulman in 2003, provided a privileged arena for the playing out of competing

[11] The paradigmatic example here is the case, not so uncommon, of Muslim school girls who start wearing the hijab against the wishes of their families and then find themselves involved in complex negotiations with their school principal, which sometimes leads to their exclusion. The irony is of course that, while these girls suffer from double exclusion, they are also sometimes perceived as victims of cruel fathers or elder brothers.

[12] Despite some media coverage of Islam in France, it is striking how little success the Salafi ideology and other radical groups such as Hizb Tahrir have encountered in the Hexagon. The apolitical Tablighi movement is popular in some areas, but recent research by Khedimellah points to the temporal dimensions of youth involvement with this organisation, which seems to correspond to a particular phase in a personal trajectory that most often does not last long.

[13] Interestingly, the afore-mentioned IFOD polls included a question inviting respondents to react to the following assertion : « the more one is integrated into French society, the less Muslim one is ». In 2001 22% of the interviewees agreed (compared to 33% in 1989) (Ternisien 2002: 47-8). See also Bouzar 2001: 166.

[14] The outright hostility which has invariably met the demands for introducing *halal* food in public canteens (in prisons as in schools) or the refusal to consider 'Aid al kabir as a possible national holiday are two examples of this.

[15] The 20-member strong Stasi commission, set up by President Chirac in July 2003 in order to discuss « the application of the principle of laicité in the Republic », did not deem necessary to draw on this rich sociological production to make its recommendations.

definitions of Islamicity. The process, initiated by P. Joxe in 1989, was fraught with the expected difficulties of representing, in one body, the diversity of Islamic tendencies in a context of recent settlement. Muslim youth in particular seem to have internalised - to some extent - the need to forge a *French Islam*, rather than maintain an Islam *in* France, thus echoing the expectations of non-Muslim publics[16]. A number of young Muslims, especially those sensitive to Tariq Ramadan's discourse, criticised what they perceived as a diplomatic management (une gestion diplomatique) of Islam in France at the CFCM, too dependent on foreign countries in its modalities (two of the major players, the Mosquée de Paris and the Fédération nationale des musulmans de France, do not hide their links to respectively Algeria and Morocco, while the third one, the UOIF, promotes a diasporic version of Islam close to the Muslim Brotherhood). Even when a number of historical leaders of the Muslim youth movement were included in the process, such as Farid Abdelkrim, ex-president and founder of Jeunes musulmans de France (JMF), Muslim youth (across the Islamic spectrum) have been among the most vocal critics of the Council's work: according to one prominent youth leader, Fouad Imarraine of the *Collectif des Musulmans de France*, the role of the Home minister in the selection of the CFCM members is in clear breach of the principle of laïcité. For Abdelkrim, the CFCM has gone from standing for "**C**'est **F**init le **C**alvaire **M**essieurs" to "**C**ontentez-vous de **F**aire **C**omme le **M**inistre".

A different critique of the methods adopted by the French State in the institutionalisation of Islam has been rehearsed by some intellectuals and politicians which claim to represent…the silent majority of "Muslims": quiet, having spontaneously adopted secular religiosities and in many cases atheist (the term laïc in France being rather ambiguous), these silent "Muslims", un-quantifiable, were deemed to be the great absents from the Consultation. Despite the usual complexity of competing political agendas, the creation of the Conseil des musulmans laïques and the Conseil des democrates musulmans in the wake of the CFCM gives some form of expression to those Muslims which are not connected to mosques and fear the reduction of their multiple identities to a religious mould which they obviously do not identify with. The struggle for defining a Muslim in France is thus wide open.

3. What are their interactions with non-Muslims (social and professional activities, interfaith dialogue)

Interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims starts naturally at childhood, and in particular in public school – "gratuite, laïque et obligatoire", according to the celebrated formula. Contrary to their British counterparts, Muslims in France have not felt the need to create Muslim schools, despite the recurrent problems regarding the headscarf. To this day there are only two such schools in the whole of Metropolitan France, one in the Parisian suburb of Aubervilliers ("La Réussite") and another in the northern city of Lille ("Lycée Averroes"). (One of the ironies of the proposed law on laicité is, of course, to encourage the creation of Islamic schools[17] and thus prevent the living together (le vivre ensemble) the defenders of the law pretend to be upholding). In France's suburban areas, where the concentration of population of North African descent is already higher than elsewhere, "native" French families often exacerbate this by manipulating official rules and sending their children to other, more central (and better-equipped) schools. In some areas, euphemistically called "zones d'éducation prioritaire" (ZEP), as much as an estimated 80% of the pupils are of

[16] See Bowen 2003.

[17] It is rather remarkable that in French media these schools are invariably described as "Koranic schools", as if they were madrasas, bringing back fearful images of other times and places.

Muslim background. This, as a number of politicians have started to realise, can only add to the fragmentation of French society and lead to the rise of communitarian tendencies.

Accounts of first-generation Muslim life in France often emphasise the shared identity forged between North African, Portuguese and French workers active in the industrial sector. The fact that "some ate pork" while "others did not" was acknowledged, but unimportant. The rise of structural unemployment in the late 70's, and its disproportionate incidence on (both qualified and manual) labour of North African origin, has substantially reduced the possibilities for this kind of professional interaction and greatly affected Muslim youth: the countless stories of the Rachids and Mohameds whose CV gets immediately thrown away have become legendary.

While discrimination in employment affects all types of individuals from North African background, practising Muslims encounter a number of additional obstacles related to their religious practice. Prayer facilities in the workplace are virtually unheard of. Women wearing the headscarf are excluded from most forms of employment. Indeed, contrary to other European countries, women in such attire are a very rare sight in any kind of professional activity, in the public as well as the private sectors. Public institutions are out of reach for these women as the dominant conception of laïcité deems it contrary to the principle of state neutrality – a perception so far upheld by the Conseil d'état, the highest judicial authority in France; social mores (or rather, prejudice) contribute to further exclude these women from the private sector[18]. One can also wonder about the consequences of this exclusion, and to what extent the lack of contact between Muslim women wearing hijab and the wider society contributes to their integration or facilitates conspiracy theories. In any case, if the phenomenon of "new veiling" in Muslim countries bears some resemblance to the situation in France, it differs here in that it does not contribute to the professional emancipation of women, allowing them to penetrate into public spaces and offices previously reserved for men (MacLeod 1993; Göle 1996; Mahmoud 2001).

In the religious sphere, there have been for quite some time now a number of Muslim initiatives aimed at enhancing interaction between faith communities. One of the most prominent is the annual cycle of conferences organised at the Mosquée Adda'wa (or, more precisely, in the socio-cultural centre attached to it), in the 19th arrondissement of Paris. The success of these events, which draw large numbers of young Muslims as well as non-Muslim publics every other Saturday, rests to a large extent on the charisma of the director of the mosque, Larbi Kechat. Of Algerian origin, with a PhD in applied linguistics, Larbi Kechat was one of first imams in France to deliver the Friday *khutba* in French and to prone an open vision of Islam well suited to the French sensitivities of Muslim youth (Khedimellah 2002; Amiraux 2003). His integrity and independence from both Muslim countries and the French state (Kechat was first put under house arrest on false suspicions in 1994 and then, when his fortunes changed, refused to accept the state invitation to participate in the Consultation leading to the CFCM) have assured him an unparalleled prestige within the Muslim community (which allows him to invite Muslim intellectuals from all tendencies to his mosque). The conferences he animates deal with topics as varied and daring as AIDS, secularism, human rights and euthanasia. The panel of speakers is always diverse, often explicitly including people of other faiths as well as atheists. There are some signs indicating that it is even becoming fashionable for French academics to be seen at his Mosque…

The success of the Adda'wa conferences is ample testimony to the strong demand for intra and inter-religious debate in contemporary France. Elsewhere, in interfaith dialogues, actors

[18] In fact, the public debate has made a nasty turn in the wake of a number of (violent) incidents involving Muslims in hospital. The current discussion is not on whether Muslim women wearing the headscarf should be allowed to work in hospitals or not, but rather whether Muslim patients wearing the hijab can be treated in public hospitals!

consistently complain of the lack of Muslim involvement (and also of Jewish participation, but for other reasons). It should come as no surprise that most of local and national interfaith activities are driven by Catholic groups, both at the institutional (priests, churches) and the unofficial levels (common believers). The scarcity of qualified Muslim theologians is seen here as one reason underlying this absence. Indeed, a few Muslim names dominate between them the interfaith scene in France: Ghaleb Bencheikh (brother of the mufti of Marseilles, Soheib, and author of a book with the Jewish rabbi Philippe Haddad), Dalil Boubakeur, Mohamed Mestiri (International Institute of Islamic Thought – France), Mohamed Talbi and, at least until recently, Tariq Ramadan. A number of Muslim women have also started to participate in interfaith activities but, especially when compared to their female co-religionists involved in processes of political participation, they remain rather marginal here. To bridge this gap, the newly-established CFCM is already in the process of creating a commission to deal with interfaith activities (an area which has the comparative advantage of being rather consensual, compared to the burning issues of training imams and defining Islam in a secular state).

More important than the lack of qualified theologians in explaining the lack of Muslim interfaith participation, is perhaps the disparity in the *expectations* of the different actors: while non-Muslim publics, in the current climate dominated by international Islamic terrorism, understandably seek *reassurances* regarding the peaceful intents of their Muslim neighbours, if not the nature of the Islamic texts themselves, making efforts to comprehend a religion they have historically – and theologically - perceived with hostility, Muslims (particularly the youth) often believe there is no particular need for this kind of dialogue since Christianity is "recognised in the Qur'an".

Jews are also ahl al kitab, the People of the Book, and their status acknowledged in Islam. But relations between the Muslim and Jewish communities in France (the two largest in Europe) are probably at an all time low. The various contributions to *Les territoires perdus de la République – Antisémitisme, racisme et sexisme en milieu scolaire* (edited by Emmanuel Brenner, first edition 2002; updated 2004) paint a vivid and horrific picture of judeophobia among Muslim youths in secondary (and, in one case, even primary!) schools. The banalisation of anti-Semitic acts in school, which range from the use of the qualifier "Jewish" as a synonym for "unreliable", to the denial of the Holocaust and the abuse of Jewish teachers and pupils, is deeply disturbing. While anti-Semitism has sadly a rich genealogy in France, it seems beyond dispute that a high number of anti-Semitic acts have been perpetrated by young individuals of North African origin. The anti-Semitism of sections of Muslim youth is an outstanding barrier to their integration and has generated high levels of anxiety within French society, similar to fears related to international terrorism. Although the authors of *Les territoires perdus…*disagree, it is hard not to see a link between the exponential rise of this anti-Semitism in France (within and outside the school: the desecration of Jewish tombs, the burning of synagogues) and the escalation of violence in the Middle-Eastern conflict, particularly since the rise coincides rather well with the beginning of the second intifada[19].

[19] Brenner also seems to establish a correlation between assertive Islam (as measured by the number of headscarfs) and antisemitism in France. However, a careful reading of the examples he gives would suggest, if anything, an inverse relationship between the level of religiosity of the Muslim individual and the propensity for antisemitic acts: for instance I have found no cases of abuse by girls wearing the Muslim headscarf. Despite these weaknesses, the book has been a major contribution to contemporary debates on laïcité.

4. What are their political engagement and repertoires of mobilisations (at local, national, European and international levels)

The collective imaginary of the French nation as an "abstract universal", to borrow an expression from Khosrokhavar, has placed strong restrictions on multiculturalist attitudes. Muslims respond to the national constraints and are sensitive to the boundaries of legitimate political discourses. Since engagement in secular activities under an Islamic repertoire is invariably looked at suspiciously, Muslims have "naturally" adopted secular discursive strategies as justification of their forms of political participation. If this ensures a strict separation between "churches" and state, in the case of Islam it also restricts the range of mobilisation which could precisely reassure French publics on the compatibility between Islam and democratic forms: since political engagements under the name of Islam are rendered problematic, Muslims have no option other than investing in secular forms – thus at same time comforting the mainstream perception that Muslims need to emancipate themselves from their religious referential in order to participate in the affairs of the polis and thus become full citizens. Muslim women wearing the hijab are once again suspected of being incompatible with civic democratic participation: when they seek to prove their active citizenship by joining political parties or participate in movements at the grassroots level, they have to deal with attitudes ranging from benign neglect to outright hostility. Siham Andalouci, general-secretary of *Presence musulmane* and member of the Green party, and Saïda Kada of *Femmes françaises et musulmanes engagées* in Lyon, are two cases in hand. This tends to exclude them further from the political spheres.

Despite the lip service paid to the global Muslim community or ummah, Muslims in France have not deeply engaged in international politics beyond the occasional demonstration in support of Palestinians or, more recently, against the American-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. 2003 will perhaps prove to be a turning point in that, for the first time, Muslim youth in France have invested the field of global politics…in the form of the anti-globalisation movement. The main proponent of this mobilisation has been Tariq Ramadan, the Swiss intellectual who has been carefully justifying Muslim participation in (Western) politics in theological terms (Ramadan 1997; 2003). The articulation of a religious discourse in anti-capitalist tones is not unique – the numerous liberation theology movements have been rehearsing it for a number of decades. Islamist groups throughout the Muslim world have also often rejected "globalisation" as a form of Westernisation[20]. But while they have perceived it as a form of cultural hegemony, threatening the established religious order, Tariq Ramadan is perhaps the first to integrate the concerns of the anti-globalisation movement within an Islamic repertoire: the distinctions between dar al islam and dar al harb, he argues to his attentive audiences, have become obsolete in the globalised world. The West, as he readily concedes, is a land of greater freedom for Muslims than many so-called Islamic countries, and must therefore be reconceptualised as dar al da'wa (the realm of mission) or, preferably, dar al shahada (the land of testimony). In an interesting twist, under globalisation, it is the profit-driven neo-liberal economy which has become 'alam al harb (the world of war). The European Social Forum, which was held in Paris in November 2003, provided an opportunity for testing the impact of this ideology on Muslim youth. The active presence of young Muslims with an Islamic discourse, noticed for the first time, was controversial[21], but proved Muslim youth in France are no longer tied to traditional

[20] In 2001 the Muslim World League organised in Mekka an international conference on the topic of globalisation which focussed on the threats it posed to the Islamic way of life.

[21] In particular since a polemic article by Tariq Ramadan in which he criticised a number of prominent French Jewish intellectuals for having abandoned universal causes to defend exclusively Israeli interests, circulated in the email list of the European Forum.

restrictions on political participation and are capable of forging alliances with non-Muslim interest groups for the perceived common good.

At the local level, second and subsequent generations of Muslims in France have also been attempting to participate more actively in public debates for a number of years. The *Forum citoyens des cultures musulmanes* (FCCM), launched in April 2001 by the young director of the Muslim publication *La Médina* Hakim El Ghissassi and the businessman Rachid Nekkaz, is in many ways exemplary. Among the actions of the FCCM were a campaign for the registration of youth of immigrant origin in electoral lists in late 2001 and the elaboration of 89 proposals to the 2002 presidential candidates (*Pour une France juste – 89 propositions du F.C.C.M. aux candidats*; Editions La Médina, Paris 2002). Members came from a broad spectrum, including religious and secular backgrounds, but gathered around shared French and Muslim identities.

One has to return here to the forms of political mobilisation which the proposed law banning the Muslim headscarf from schools has given rise to. The *affaire du foulard* has been regularly disturbing France for the last fifteen years. The Conseil d'état decided the hijab was not in itself a sufficient motive for exclusion – but this decision was not accepted by all in the educational sector[22]. If the question is complex, it is hard not to perceive, in the revival of the headscarf issue in 2003, some kind of political manipulation: with the number of problematic cases in schools steadily dropping, according to the official statistics, the speech of Nicolas Sarkozy at the annual gathering of the Union des organisations islamiques de France (UOIF) last April[23] rekindled a societal debate that would consume, on a daily basis, countless pages in the press and long hours on television until February 2004 (when the law was finally overwhelmingly adopted by the National Assembly). The literature on this subject is long, but what is interesting for our purposes here is to analyse how the debate helped shaping the attitudes of Muslim youth towards political mobilisation. The institution of the CFCM, remarkable throughout the months for its absence from the public debate, was not favourable to the ban. It issued a statement criticising the recommendation of the Stasi report, but seemed paralysed by the internal differences. The president of the Council, Dalil Boubakeur, put in place by the Home minister, encouraged Muslims (through the national press) to "obey the law". Even the UOIF seemed ready to compromise; the hesitations of its leadership regarding the staging of demonstrations created frictions with its base. In the end, however, the position of Muslim institutions proved irrelevant, as two teenagers, Woissila (17) and Ilhame, took the matter into their own hands: with the authorisation to demonstrate in Paris on December 21st granted by the local authorities in just 20 minutes, they spread the news through what the French call "le téléphone arabe", a telling euphemism for the age-old method of oral communication. Their call was quickly relayed via the cyberspace: besides email groups and Internet forums, one interesting website, www.relatif.com, was created for the occasion by a friend of the two girls called Wafa, a 30-year old woman trained in computer science and living in the Parisian suburbs. According to Wafa, the aim of www.relatif.com was to teach Muslim girls how to mobilise effectively and at little cost (personal communication) : thus the site encourages Muslim women to dress in tricolour headscarves (blue,

[22] For a number of years there was the bizarre instance of young girls being excluded by the school's headmaster for « refusing to comply with laicité », only to be reintegrated later, triumphally, following a favourable decision by the Conseil d' état. Needless to say, this was not easily digested by a number of headmasters and teachers hostile to the headscarf.

[23] In his speech, which Sarkozy later said was "his answer to the April » (2002, the date of the first round of the presidential election that saw Le Pen come second), the Home Minister, after being applauded, was copiously booed when he argued that Muslim women must remove their headscarf for the ID photograph. Instead of considering this as the affirmation of Muslim citizenship ("sifflets citoyens"), the subsequent media coverage construed the incident as proof of the superiority of shari'a over national law for Muslims in France. It would be the starting point on a debate on Muslim loyalties which would quickly revolve around the Muslim headscarf in public spaces.

white and red for the French national flag), and shows, with the help of digital photographs, how to make such headscarves at home; it provides ready-to-print leaflets as well as reminding potential demonstrators the exact words of the…French national anthem[24]. The idea was to reverse the binary opposition between Islam and the West, and to show that these Muslim girls are also French citizens[25]. This demonstration drew over 6,000 people (rather remarkable given the short notice and lack of institutional support), and besides French flags, European flags were waived, indicating the broadening of political horizons of French Muslims. Conscious of the overwhelming consensus among French politicians and intellectuals on the desirability of a ban, Muslims are increasingly placing their hopes in the Strasbourg-based European Court for Human Rights. The subsequent demonstrations (in January and February 2004) were more politicised, drew larger numbers and included non-Muslims from the umbrella organisation *Une école pour tous-tes*, a heteroclytic coalition of Muslim, anti-racist, human rights groups and feminist movements.

Conclusion

While the question of the Muslim headscarf has highlighted the tensions between the wider French society and its Muslim population, it should not hide the cultural and structural inter-penetration taking place: many Muslim women wearing the headscarf at the same time show many signs of "acculturation": alongside their male co-religionists, they contest misogynist interpretations of Islamic texts, reject patriarchal family structures, uphold the principle of gender equality, respect individual choice. However, having internalised human rights discourses and democratic forms of participation, they will not automatically subscribe to the liberal interpretations of "government sheikhs" and necessarily fit into the French mould. Muslim youth are attempting to forge an identity which they can relate to their present context and to their historical roots. The precise role of Islam in the construction of this identity is of course the subject of much discussion and negotiation among Muslims. In any case, their bodies are the arena for competing politics and symbolism which they master only partially. While the misunderstandings and suspicions are multiple and reciprocal, the majority of Muslim youth in France is embedded with French culture and, actually, rather proud of their Frenchness.

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[24] Interestingly, one of the proposals of the Forum citoyen des cultures musulmanes to the 2002 presidential candidates was the teaching of *La Marseillaise* in primary school…

[25] It is rather doubtful whether the demonstrators were successful in passing this message. Some media portrayed the demonstrations as « anti-republican », while a number of intellectuals hostile to the headscarf in schools felt vindicated, arguing the events « only highlighted the urgency of banning » the piece of cloth.

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