

RESEARCH STUDY

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ISLAMISM IN FRANCE:

SITUATION ANALYSIS, CONSEQUENCES AND STRATEGY OPTIONS

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E·I·C·T·P

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AND STRATEGY OPTIONS**

IMPRINT

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INTRODUCTION

The numerous Islamist terrorist attacks in France over the last years have moved Islamism and its impact on French society to the heart of public discussion.

With the rise of ISIS in 2014 and numerous French foreign fighters joining the terrorist militia as well as alarming developments endangering social cohesion, the danger of radical Islamists disseminating Muslim communities has become apparent. Coupled with the notorious 2015 attacks against the Charlie Hebdo newspaper and later at the Bataclan concert hall, being with 137 casualties the deadliest attack on French soil since World War II, the situation of Muslims in France has thus become much more complicated.

Seemingly never-ending incidents in this respect emphasize the social tensions running through French society, indicating an ethnic and religious revivalism among the mostly immigrant populations of some French “banlieues”.

While the socially and economically marginalized suburbs clearly constitute a favorable breeding ground for any kind of social unrest, the confessionalization of immigration and the hijacking of Muslim communities by extremists who promote a radical vision of Islam have sparked a debate on the role of Islam in French society. This has opened up possibilities for groups within political Islam, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to increasingly exert influence over Muslim communities. Within the strictly secular French system, the ensuing discussions on the freedom of expression and the right to blasphemy have touched on sensitive issues of French identity.

The Mila affair, where a 16-year-old school girl had to be put under police protection after publishing an anti-Islam rant on social media, is indicative of this. Later that year, the teacher Samuel Paty was even murdered by a young Islamist for showing caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed while leading a discussion on the freedom of expression, which was the fifth Islamist attack in 2020 alone. With a considerable population adhering to the Muslim faith, the critical engagement with Islamism in France is of utmost importance and relevance as Islamist subversion and terrorist attacks are particularly prominent there.

Having thus become aware of the dangers posed by these developments, French President Emmanuel Macron announced on October 2, 2020, a new law to combat the “Islamist separatism” resulting from the difficulties in integrating the substantial Muslim population in France.

This study constitutes an initial attempt at systematically analyzing the phenomenon of Islamism in France. Starting from a situational analysis, the study then moves on to analyzing the consequences of current developments and ultimately provides an overview of the strategy options of the French state.

Mathew Guidère delves into a comprehensive situation analysis of current trends, relevant actors of political Islam, Salafism and jihadism that provides useful insights into the religious awakening of Muslim communities in France. Among other things he shows how radical Islamists have infiltrated some Muslim communities, thus contributing to an ever more polarizing discourse among them. Therein, anti-racist activist movements that rightly point to systematic discrimination are being hijacked in order to promote a narrative of victimhood, allowing for the defamation of any critic of Islam as Islamophobic.

Serge Sur subsequently examines the impact of current developments on French society. He therein outlines the consequences of debates on Islam for social cohesion. But he also underlines the difficulties in organizing Muslim religion in France, where secularism historically forms an incremental part of national identity. This touches upon issues like mosque constructions, religious practice in the workspace, the veil and its derivations, Islamic constraints on places of education as well as the overall impact of migration flows. Naturally, this also involves an analysis of how the new law against “Islamist separatism” will impact French society.

Yves Boyer then outlines the strategy options the French government pursues in dealing with radical Islamism. Apart from further strengthening cooperation on the international level and increasing surveillance activities, this involves introducing regional mechanisms for monitoring Islamist terrorism. In order to effectively combat not only terrorism but radicalization in general, tackling hate speech or democratic deficits that have been exploited by Islamist actors have now become priorities as well.

The situation in France is indicative of a wider European development and underlines the importance of states to come up with viable ways to responding to radical Islamist threats. Comparing the situation, the risks and the response possibilities in different European countries may thus lead to new insights that can help formulating a more coherent and unified approach. Examining the particularly relevant case of French Islamism is thus a decisive first step in this direction.

FRENCH ISLAMISM: SITUATION ANALYSIS
By Professor Mathieu Guidère

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INTRODUCTION

Islam is the second religion in France, after Catholicism, both in terms of the number of believers and practitioners. The most precise estimate (including practicing and non-practicing people) of the number of French Muslims is between 3.3 and 5 million people, which is between 4.8% and 7.3% of the total French population. In this group, one estimates at approximately 1.8 million the number of “practicing Muslims” (regular or not), that is to say 2.6% of the French.¹

It emerges from the various studies and surveys² that the proportion of French people of Muslim faith who declare themselves to be “practicing” is relatively high (from 30% to 50% of Muslims according to surveys and depending on specific items: for example, the Ramadan is practiced by over 70% of Muslims while daily prayer is practiced by only 30%). This proportion is much higher than the French of Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, Protestant Lutheran and Reformed faiths, but on the other hand, it is lower than that observed among Evangelical Protestants.

In addition, there are about 2,600 places of worship (which are mostly prayer rooms, not mosques), ranking the Muslim Faith just behind Protestant worship,³ but France has large mosques, capable of receiving more than a thousand persons during Friday prayers, and there are sometimes several mosques in the same town. Today, the construction of religious buildings is a vector of the affirmation of Islam in French society.

Islam has evolved over the past thirty years: far from “the Islam of the underground”, it is today visible in the territories of the Republic and installed in the public space. Islam is capable of raising the necessary funding for the construction of its places of worship, and it benefits from a financial support inside and outside France.

Thus, Islam has reached in France a place similar to that of formerly established cults such as Catholicism, Judaism and Protestantism. This is linked to the evolution of French society itself. Relying on a large immigrant population from the former French colonies, Islam spread far beyond these communities into the working classes of French society, sparking numerous conversions among the “native French” each year.

However, Islam is not the only dynamic religion in working-class areas. Many religions campaign to attract new believers, especially evangelical churches. For example, in the new town of Évry (near Paris) there is the former largest mosque in Europe, the largest pagoda in Europe, the last cathedral built in Europe, but also the places of worship of twelve other religions.

The affirmation of Islam in French society is thus part of a more general movement of the return of the religious faith, and fully participates in the competition that is engaged in the social and spiritual field of other religious movements with missionary aims (Evangelicals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhists, etc.).

However, Islam is the only religion that seems to pose a problem today in French society. This is due to several perceptual factors that relate to history as well as sociology and politics. Islam is still perceived in France as a “foreign religion” because of its association with North African and sub-Saharan immigration, even though the vast majority of its followers are of French nationality. In addition, Islam is perceived as “pervasive” because of the number and visibility of its practitioners, and also through “street prayers” and the forms of dress and clothing. Finally, and this is the most

determining factor at present, Islam is associated with violent extremism and terrorism, because almost all the terrorist attacks perpetrated on French territory are carried out by individuals or groups who claim to be of Islamic faith, even if their link with this religion is formal or fictitious. In addition, the situation of Islam and Muslims in France has become more complex since the wave of attacks in 2015: first, against the Charlie Hebdo newspaper in January 2015, then against the Bataclan concert hall in November 2015, the latter being the deadliest attack in the country's history since World War II (137 dead).

Today there are worrying signals of community, ethnic and religious revivalism that run through French society. The observation was made by President Emmanuel Macron, on January 23, 2020, about the identity tensions that cross French society. He said: "There is, in our Republic today, what I would call a 'separatism' linked to a global phenomenon of a radical Islam which is stretched, and a transformation of Islam, which must be looked in the face (...) It has been grafted on memory fractures, failures that we ourselves have had on the economic and on the social level."

There is great lucidity in this observation. In fact, what President Macron called "the radical Islam" is not a phenomenon specific to France but France is particularly exposed to it because of its secular values, its colonial past and its military interventions in countries with a Muslim majority. It is also grounded on an internal competition to Islam, thriving on the economic and social divide faced predominantly by Muslim populations living in the major cities' suburbs. However, understanding the Islamist phenomenon in France goes beyond economic variables; the causes are also linked to the social variables: the urban crisis of the "suburbs" (*banlieues*) that occurred in 2005 is not sufficient to understand the resurgence of Islamism. There is also an awakening of Islamic identity that position itself in a conflictual relation towards the French Republic and French secularism.

The affairs related to Muslim communities in France have never been so much at the center of intellectual, political and media debates. The focus on Islam and Muslims, which some politicians qualify as an "obsession" (the word is from Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the "*La France Insoumise*" political party in the Parliament), culminated in the discussion of the proposed "law against Islamist separatism."

This draft law was presented to the French Council of Ministers on December 9, 2020, and adopted at first reading by the National Assembly on February 16, 2021, then adopted by the French Senate on April 12, 2021, with a new title: "Draft law reinforcing respect for the principles of the Republic and the fight against separatism." It was finally ratified on July 22, 2021.

The law aims for better control of parastatal organizations, as well as concessionaires, delegates and public service providers. However, it also strengthens the control of associations of worship so they cannot "make speeches that are contrary to the Republic" or "exert psychological or physical pressure on people."

Among the "Islamist phenomena" specifically targeted by the bill are polygamy, the presumption of forced marriage, certificates of women's virginity, the funding of private schools outside contract with the state, as well as home schooling for children over three without medical reasons.

Several civil society organizations and associations, including "The Union of French Muslim Democrats" (UDMF), denounced this bill as "anti-Muslim."⁴

This is because the bill is unclear on its ideological target. While several deputies cited "political Islam", Prime Minister Jean Castex said the bill aims at fighting "Radical Islamism". He also specified that this law would concern more generally "any political ideology which would stand against the values of the Republic".⁵

For his part, the president of the “Muslim Association for Islam of France” (AMIF), Mr. Hakim El Karoui, close to President Macron and former adviser to the government, believes that the bill targets only one form of political Islam: “Salafism is an ideology, and as an ideology, we fight it.”⁶

The political and media debate, by simplism or ignorance of realities, tends to aggregate under the same term intermingled notions such as “Islam, Islamism, political Islam, radical Islam, Islamists, Muslims”, etc. Aware of the current tension in debates around Islam on the French public scene, the terminological precision aims to take a step back from violent events in order to properly analyze the dynamics at work in French society and to escape the double trap of the stigma of Muslims, on the one hand, and the minimization of the Islamist phenomenon, on the other. Accordingly, this situation analysis emphasizes the distinction between “Islam” as a religion and “Islamism” as an ideology, of which violent extremism and terrorism are only one of the modes of action. Thus, “Muslims” are people who believe in or practice the rites of Islam as a religion, while “Islamists” are political activists and militants who want to change society and take power by referring to Islamism as an ideology.

The word “Islamism” derives from “Islam”, to which is added the suffix “-ism” to designate the political ideology of those who position themselves against the separation of the State and the Religion. Thus, Islamism today refers to an ideology of religious inspiration with a clearly political aim: the establishment of a theocracy. It has evolved during the last decades to give rise to various forms of militant action that can lead to violent extremism and terrorism.

The most frequently cited form of Islamism is “political Islam” which refers to a politicization of the Islamic religion, that is to say the will to establish a theocratic regime and the refusal to separate the political and the religious rules in the public space. In addition, the individual and collective actors who subscribe to this current are driven by the desire to establish a social order based on the primacy of religious categories.

This phenomenon is not specific to France nor to Europe. Since the late 1970s, the world is experiencing a resurgence of a modern political Islam, and its consequences were far beyond the borders of the historically Muslim countries. It is reflected in the hegemonic will based on the takeover of all fields of social life thanks to a religious soft power based on indoctrination.

In France, Islamism can be explained by both exogenous and endogenous factors. On the one hand, a favorable breeding ground in French society, especially among populations of immigrant origin, often socially marginalized, economically fragile and less well assimilated culturally. On the other hand, the confessionalization of immigration which led, under the influence of international geopolitics, to a takeover of this Muslim communities by the most radical movements and bearers of a radical vision of Islam.

This led to a “glocalization”⁷ of Islam in France, which means its “Francization” on the social, cultural and political level, and makes the phenomenon particularly difficult to grasp in all its complexity. The main actors of this “glocalization of Islam” benefit from national and international networks, and mobilize different repertoires of actions, inspired from structured social movements, and use pacifist, legalistic modes of action (e.g. Muslim Brotherhood). Others are more radical and advocate a mode of revolutionary action that aims to bring down the Republic and to establish a theocratic regime (e.g. Jihadists).

Thus, there does not exist in France a unified and homogeneous “Islamism”, but multiple and competing “Islamist actors”, with different modes of action, who can occasionally find themselves on common targets and objectives, the most important of which is the fight against “French secularism” (well-known as “laïcité”).⁸

All this prompts to ask the question: who are these actors and what are their modes of action? What are the trends observed in French society, and what are the recent developments? To answer these questions, we offer below a brief analysis of the French situation, with a critical assessment taking into account the internal and external factors that determine the dynamics of Islamism in France today.

DEVELOPMENTS

The shift towards political Islam took place at the end of the 1970s, driven by a favorable international context. The year 1979 marks a decisive turning point at the international level, with the concomitance of significant events of a change in the Muslim world: the hostage-taking in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, by armed Islamists, demonstrating that, even the most sacred place, was not sanctuaried; the Iranian revolution resonating as an extremely powerful psychological victory for Islamist ideology and showing to the world that the outcome of a political project based on religion was possible; the start of the war in Afghanistan which rehabilitated contemporary jihad against the Soviet Union; and the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel which will cost the life, three years later, of the Egyptian president Anwar el-Sadat.

Radical Islamism developed rapidly throughout the 1980s, both among Sunni Muslims and among Shiite Muslims. In Shia Islam, Ayatollah Khomeini, after his stay in France (at Neauphle-le-Château) promoted a revolutionary Islamism that led to the overthrow of the Shah and the establishment of the “Islamic Republic” (1979). In its wake, various Shiite parties and organizations were created, advocating armed struggle (jihad), the most famous of which is the Lebanese Hezbollah, literally “Party of God”, created in 1982 under the leadership of Khomeini, in the midst of the Lebanese civil war.

In Sunni Islam, which represents the majority of Muslims in the world (80%), radical Islamism grew rapidly based on the writings of Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (executed in 1966 by the Nasser regime), because of his “theology of jihad”. His supporters found a field of application for his “theology” during the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. This war (1979-1989) led also to the birth of Al-Qaeda, under the effect of another Islamist ideologue of Palestinian origin, Abdallah Azzam (killed in 1989), mastermind of Osama Bin Laden, founder of Al-Qaeda. All their supporters then claim a medieval theologian, Ibn Taymiyya (died in 1328), first promoter of “Jihadism” and inspirer of the Salafist movement, whose foundations will be reinforced by a late disciple from the Arabian Peninsula, Ibn Abd Al Wahhâb (died in 1792), founder of “Wahhabism” which would later be the official doctrine of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Until 1990, radical Islamism of Sunni inspiration was engaged in fighting “the communist enemy” with the support of the West, then after the Gulf war (1991), the situation changed, and Sunni combatants became the enemies of Western democracies, and particularly of France.

FRANCE AND SHIITE ISLAMISM

France first suffered from the Iranian regime’s desire to export the “Islamic Revolution”. On the one hand, it was the target of its violent actions with attacks in France and abroad and, on the other hand, it was the target of its ideological propaganda in favor of political Islam aimed at Muslim communities in France.

During the 1980s, France was under attack because of its support for Saddam Hussein’s regime in its war against Iran (1980-1988). For its part, the Iranian regime was waging a war of “sacred defense” against secular Iraq, which it accuses of persecuting Shiite Muslims in the name of Arab nationalism, of which Saddam Hussein has positioned himself as the champion since the death of Nasser (1970). The Iran-Iraq war lasted eight years and ended without a winner or loser in August 1988.

At the same time, Lebanese Hezbollah, backed by Shiite Iran, was waging a “war of resistance” against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, and was attacking the foreign military presence in Lebanon. The first actions of Shiite group against Western interests date back to 1983. That year, Hezbollah organized the suicide bombing against the American embassy in Beirut (April 1983, 63 dead) and two suicide attacks against the multinational force (October 1983, 248 American deaths and 58 French deaths in the Dakar attack).

The practice of terrorism in all its forms (suicide bombings, kidnapping, hostage-taking, hijacking, etc.) was consecrated by Hezbollah as the preferred mode of action of contemporary radical Islamism, to the inside and outside Lebanon. Thus, between February 1985 and September 1986, the “Party of God” perpetuated a series of attacks in France, including that of the “Rue de Rennes” (September 17, 1986), causing a total of 15 deaths and 300 injuries.

There have also been targeted assassinations on French territory perpetrated by Iranian agents. The most striking is certainly that of Chapour Bakhtiar, the last Prime Minister of Iran before the creation of the Islamic Republic in 1979. He was assassinated on August 6, 1991 in his home at Suresnes, a Parisian suburban city. He was leading the “National Resistance Movement of Iran”, which nonviolently was fighting the Khomeini regime. On July 18, 1980, he had already escaped an assassination attempt at his home in Neuilly-sur-Seine, an attack that cost the lives of a neighbor and a French police officer (Jean-Michel Jamme).⁹

Thus, during the 1980s, France was the target of Shiite-inspired Islamist terrorism (Hezbollah-Iran), in retaliation for both its presence in Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and for its political and military support for Saddam Hussein in his war against the Islamic Republic of Iran (1980-1988).

In the same wake of events, French public opinion was sensitized to political Islam because of the “Salman Rushdie affair”. The publication of the “Satanic Verses” in September 1988 immediately triggered a strong reaction in the Muslim community because of its description considered offensive of Prophet Muhammad. For instance, India banned the book on October 5, 1988, followed by South Africa on November 24, then by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Somalia, Bangladesh, Sudan, Tunisia, Malaysia, Indonesia and Qatar in the following weeks.

On February 14, 1989, a fatwa calling for the execution of Salman Rushdie was broadcast on Radio Tehran by Ayatollah Khomeini himself, denouncing the book as “blasphemous” against Islam. As the novel suggests that Rushdie no longer believes in Islam, Khomeini also condemned him for “apostasy”, which is punishable by death according to the traditional interpretation. Khomeini made it also clear that it is the responsibility of every Muslim to execute Rushdie, and he even offered a reward for his assassination, which forced Rushdie to live under the protection of British authorities.

Muslim communities all over the world organized violent demonstrations and some militants attacked bookstores at the University of California at Berkeley, which offered the novel, and the offices of Riverdale Press in response to an editorial defending the right to read the book. On July 11, 1991, Rushdie’s Japanese translator, Hitoshi Igarashi, was stabbed to death at Tsukuba University where he was teaching, as was the book’s Italian translator, Ettore Capriolo, stabbed in Milan a few days earlier.

Salman Rushdie did not appear in public until Khomeini’s death (1989). His first public appearance was in Helsinki, with French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy (BHL), who gave him his speaking time during the annual meeting of the Nordic Council.

In this particular context, the first “veil affair” broke out in France, in September 1989. Several young girls were excluded from their school in Creil, a city near Paris, because they refused to

remove their “Islamic headscarf” inside school. In the following weeks, other Muslim pupils were excluded in other towns in France for the same reason. The comparison with the “Iranian veils / chadors” was evoked in the press, and it was mixed with a unanimous criticism of the Iranian regime, perceived as the ideological source of this new phenomenon in French society.¹⁰

From this date (1989), the “veil” has become the symbol of the penetration of political Islam in France, and several “veil affairs” have subsequently exploded, contributing to the tension of French public opinion and to a legislative development aiming to restrict its wearing in the public space: Law on religious symbols in French public schools, in 2004; Law prohibiting concealment of the face in public space, in 2010.

The problem is that, in the meantime, political Islam was no longer the prerogative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It experienced unprecedented expansion in countries with a Sunni majority, particularly in the south of the Mediterranean (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco), where the majority of Muslims in France come from. Thus, Shiite Islamism was no longer the only defender of the “Islamic veil”, it became also promoted by political Islam of Sunni inspiration, which then hit the Muslim communities in France with full force.

FRANCE AND SUNNI ISLAMISM

The fall of the Soviet Union is concomitant with the Gulf War (1991) and constitutes a turning point in international relations and a change of perception within the Islamist movements. The United States and their Western allies, including France, became the enemy and a priority target for all of the Sunni Islamist groups. In February 1998, Bin Laden officially launched his “World Islamic Front for the Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders” where the main leaders of radical Islamism in the world are gathered. The first terrorist acts of this “Islamic Front” were the attacks in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (August 7, 1998). The perpetrators of which were local members of Al-Qaeda targeting American embassies in Africa.

At the same time, civil war was raging on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, in Algeria, a former French colony and the main supplier of immigrant labor to France since the Evian agreements in 1962. The “black decade” in Algeria opposed, from 1992, the military regime to various armed Islamist groups, following the interruption of the electoral process in 1991. The course of events during this decade shows how France has become the first enemy of the Islamist terrorism, both in Algeria and in France.

The cycle of violence is mainly due to the “Afghans”, those Algerians who left to fight in Afghanistan against the Soviets during the 1980s, many of whom returned to Algeria at the end of the war (1989). Their number is estimated to be between 2000 and 3000 combatants who had passed through Bin Laden’s “Maktab Al Khadamat” (Service Office), which was the nucleus of the future Al-Qaeda.

These “Algerian Afghans” were fiercely opposed to democracy, seen as an imported and godless Western system, advocating direct action against the government in order to establish an Islamic state in Algeria. They formed the armed wing of the Islamist party, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS / ISF: *Al-Jabha al-Islamiyya li al-Inqadh*), when the latter won the local and legislative elections in 1990-1991. This occurred in the midst of the Gulf War (1991), an event that was, at the time, an extraordinary catalyst for the Islamist grip on the Muslim youth. However, on January 11, 1992, the Algerian army canceled the elections and pushed President Chadli Bendjedid to resign, replacing him with a former independence fighter in exile, Mohammed Boudiaf (1919-1992), assassinated shortly after. At the same time, it carried out mass arrests of members and sympathizers of the FIS, which it ended up dissolving on March 4, 1992.

The activists who remained at liberty interpreted these arrests as a declaration of war. In most of the country, they took to the bush and launched the first attacks against the security forces, the police and the army; as during the war of independence (1954-1962) the Islamist combatants were almost exclusively based in the mountains of northern Algeria, where the topography and vegetation are conducive to guerrilla warfare.

In January 1993, one of the ex-members of the FIS, Abdelhak Layada, split up and created, with other “Algerian Afghans”, the Armed Islamic Group (AIG / GIA: *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya al-Musallaba*), that gained quickly the upper hand over other armed groups and extended its activities abroad. Thanks to support networks throughout Europe, the AIG became the most powerful organization of the international Islamist movement and attacked France, accused of supporting the Algerian military regime. Thus, on Christmas Eve 1994, an AIG commando hijacked an Air France plane from Algiers, with the aim of crashing it into Paris. Even though the elite gendarmerie group of intervention, GIGN, managed to neutralize the commando and regain control of the plane, on the tarmac at Marseille-Marignane airport, this was the beginning of a wave of attacks targeting France and which marked the internationalization of Algerian Islamism. Between July and October 1995, France suffered from 8 terrorist attacks that left 8 dead and nearly 200 wounded.¹¹

The case of Khaled Kelkal, member of the Armed Islamic Group (AIG / GIA) and the main responsible for this wave of attacks, represents a turning point in Islamist terrorism in France. He is the first Islamist terrorist raised and educated in France, who chose to attack his “adopted country”. On July 11, 1995, Kelkal was involved in the assassination of Imam Sahraoui, in his mosque in Paris. On July 15, 1995, he participated in a shootout against *gendarmes* in Bron, near the city of Lyon. On July 25, 1995, he was involved in the group that bombed Paris, at Saint-Michel-Notre-Dame RER train station. The attack caused 8 deaths and 117 injuries. On August 17, 1995, he was involved in another attack on *Place de l'Étoile* in Paris where a bomb injured 17 people. On August 26, 1995, he was involved in the failed attack on the Paris-Lyon TGV line.

Despite being hunted down, Khaled Kelkal managed to commit two more attacks: on September 3, 1995, a bomb crammed with nails exploded in the Richard Lenoir market in Paris; and on September 7, 1995, a bomb placed in a car parked in front of a Jewish school in Villeurbanne, near Lyon, left 14 people injured. Finally, Kelkal was shot on September 29, 1995 by members of the *gendarmerie* forces, and his death was filmed live by a television crew, which gave considerable echo to his action, and created controversy over sensationalism in the mediatization of terrorism.

During the same period, France was also targeted abroad through its nationals. On September 21, 1993, a group of the AIG assassinated two French surveyors, Emmanuel Didier and François Berthelet, in Sidi Bel Abbès. On October 24, 1993, three French consular agents (the couple Jean-Claude and Michèle Thévenot and Alain Fressier) were kidnapped in the capital Algiers.

However, the most significant event of this period is the assassination of the seven French Trappist monks of the monastery of Tibhirine, in Algeria, on the night of March 26 to 27, 1996. After being kidnapped and held hostages for several weeks, a press release from the Armed Islamic Group (AIG / GIA) announced their assassination on May 21, 1996. The heads of the monks were found on May 30, 1996, 4 km northwest of the city of Médéa.¹²

These massacres led to internal dissensions and to the official secession of a number of leaders of the AIG, including Hassan Hattab, who created, in September 1998, the “Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat” (SGPC / GSPC: *Al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya li al-Da'wa wa al-Qital*).

Between 1998 and 2003, the group became the best-structured and most effective armed Islamist organization in the country. By adopting a strategy of avoiding civilian targets and negotiating with other armed groups that had not yet laid down their arms in favor of the reconciliation policy led by President Bouteflika, the SGPC was able to extend its influence beyond its area of origin,

Kabylie, and to establish a lasting presence in the region, despite the strengthening of the fight against terrorism and military cooperation after the attacks of September 11, 2001, by Al-Qaeda.

In the 2000s, the supporters of “global jihad”, admirers of Bin Laden, prevailed over the old guard of the SGPC. The young generation led by Algerian Abdelmalek Droukdal (killed in Mali in June 2020 by French army), decided that the creation of an Islamic state in Algeria cannot be achieved without going through attacks directed against Western support of the Algerian regime and in particular against France.

In this perspective, Droukdal integrated Al-Qaeda, which seemed to be the most able to help him achieve his objective in targeting France, and created in September 2006: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM / AQMI). On this occasion, the number two of Al-Qaeda, Egyptian Ayman Al-Zawahiri, set him a double objective: “to spread jihad in Africa” and “to create fear in the hearts of traitors and unbelieving sons of France”.¹³

In subsequent years (2008-2011), AQIM developed a strategy of guerilla harassment directed against the Algerian forces and a kidnapping strategy directed against the Western nationals, particularly the French. This strategy allowed it to expand its influence in the Sahel region and its audience in France.

At the time, President Nicolas Sarkozy was under strong popular pressure, and it is in this context that the second “law on the veil” was adopted (2010), prohibiting the concealment of the face in public places¹⁴. This law reveals also part of a socio-political context where secularism and security gave rise to a lively debate entangled with identity issues. Many publicized incidents were controversial and brought the “issue of the veil” to the fore. For example, on October 3, 2010, the *Opéra Bastille* had asked a female spectator who wore a “full veil” (*burqa*) to leave the premises during the performance. A survey conducted by the newspaper *Le Point* on a representative sample of the French population reveals that 57% of French people are then in favor of banning the “full veil” in public places.¹⁵

RISE OF FRENCH ISLAMISM

The death of Bin Laden in May 2011 and the victory of the Islamist parties in several countries (Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Egypt) deeply changed the internal political situation in these countries and affected the geopolitical situation of the region. The international positioning towards the acceptance of political Islam and Islamist parties has also evolved, considering it as part of the political transition. In the turmoil of the Arab Spring, France was criticized for its support to former authoritarian regimes of Ben Ali (1987-2011) in Tunisia and Mubarak (1981-2011) in Egypt. The French have been also blamed for their military intervention in Libya (2011), and for the fall of the secular regime of Gaddafi (1969-2011), ally of the West in its fight against terrorism, which led to the proliferation of arms and the migration of Islamist combatants to the Sahel.

Between 2011 and 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) triumphed politically in most of the countries affected by the Arab Spring: election of the Brotherhood President Morsi in Egypt (2012-2013), victory of the Brotherhood party Ennahda in Tunisia (2011-2014), victory of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) in Morocco. These events directly affected the Muslim communities in France, made up mainly of people from the Maghreb.

Muslims in France were then divided between supporters of democratically elected Islamists and supporters of secularists defeated in the democratic elections. The evolutions and the problems of political Islam on the southern shore of the Mediterranean have direct repercussions on the French political scene and deeply impacted public opinion, which became more and more hostile to Islam in general and to Islamists in particular, especially after the Toulouse attack on March 2012, perpetrated by a terrorist of Algerian origin, Mohamed Merah.¹⁶

This was the first major attack in France since the terrorist wave of the 1990s. It was perceived as a turning point because of the nature of targets, as well as the media coverage made by the terrorist himself (the attack was filmed by an on-board camera) and followed hour by hour by the French media. This attack contributed to the dissemination of this new urban terrorism which heralds the wave of attacks in 2015 and 2016.

In 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) were removed from power in Egypt by President Al-Sisi, who declared them a “terrorist organization”, followed by the Gulf monarchies and in particular by the United Arab Emirates. In the meanwhile, mutual accusations of supporting terrorism led to the establishment of an embargo against Qatar led by Saudi Arabia.

This unprecedented political crisis between Arabs originated in the media coverage of the Qatari channel Al Jazeera of the Arab Spring (2011) and then during the Syrian crisis (2012), where Qatar supported movements linked to the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. This support had caused strong tensions with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, very hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood, which they consider a religious heresy and a political threat to the stability of their regimes.

During the same period (2013), the north of Mali was taken over by jihadists from Algeria and Libya under the command of Al-Qaeda (AQIM). The Sahel was gradually becoming a sanctuary for Islamist terrorism, threatening the very existence of the Malian state, which led to a military intervention by France at the request of the Malian government, from January 2013, as part of the *Opération Serval* (2013-2014).¹⁷

From June 2014, the rise of the organization “Islamic State” (ISIS) and its declaration of the Caliphate, reshuffles the cards in the Middle East and the Sahel region. In addition to Mali and neighboring countries, France found itself on the front line in the Levant (Syria and Iraq) for the fight against the various terrorist organizations which now claim to belong to the Caliphate of Al Baghdadi.

France paid its active participation to the international coalition, since the Islamic State (ISIS) claimed the attacks of January 2015 (*Charlie Hebdo*) and November 2015 (Bataclan). This participation to the fight against terrorism contributed also to the importation of the competition and conflicts between Islamist groups on French territory. For example, when under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012), the alliance with Qatar was privileged, it is the Sunni trend of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) which appeared to be “blessed by God” in the common perception of Muslims in France. They massively joined the ranks of the “Union of Islamic Organizations of France” (UIOF), that President Sarkozy had introduced within the “French Council of Muslim Worship” (CFCM) in 2003, when he was Minister of the Interior.

Conversely, under the presidency of François Hollande (2012-2017), the alliance with Saudi Arabia was privileged, and consequently, the Salafist trend of Sunni Islam promoted by this country took the upper hand in the perception of Muslims in France. This change in perception was enabled/facilitated by the media which then engaged in a “Qatar Bashing” that gave the impression that Qatar and its Brethren are evil compared to Saudi Arabia and its Salafists.

Thus, to each change of alliance in French foreign policy corresponds a change of perception in the Muslim communities inside France. After the fall of Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, the “Union of Islamic Organizations of France” (UIOF) was marginalized and it broke away from the “French Council of Muslim Worship” (CFCM), while the ongoing “Salafization” of French Islam was growing under the effect of the rapprochement made with Saudi Arabia.

Due to this dynamic, the terrorist threat is still high. During the last year (2020), there have been seven terrorist actions on the French territory and five terrorist projects. Besides, nearly 8000

people are under scrutiny for radicalization. This threat is more complex than ever because the attacks are conducted by individuals and not by cells. These individuals are inspired by Islamist propaganda but they are difficult to detect and to prevent. That is why knowing their connections and their source of inspiration is critical to security services. A better knowledge of the Islamist actors is the key to terrorism prevention.¹⁸

ACTORS

There are two types of Islamist actors in France who are at the same time connected and opposed. On the one hand, there are “State actors” represented by the countries of origin of Muslims in France, that defend the image of an open and tolerant Islam, as opposed to the Islam claimed by extremist groups and terrorist organizations. On the other hand, there are Islamic religious movements, coming from these same States, which act within the Muslim communities of France and which make the Muslim youth drift towards more radicalization.

There are two types of interference from these actors: a direct interference that is implemented during real estate projects, such as the construction of mosques or associative premises, and an indirect interference that is implemented thanks to the seconded imams, to the cross-border television channels and to the Islamic social networks. By funding religious buildings and channels, encouraging community associations, promoting Islamic aid and tutoring, several foreign States become engaged in a strategy of control and influence in the French society.

The main financing countries of Islam in France are: Algeria, Morocco and Turkey through their consulates and their diaspora associations; Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar through their diplomatic representations and foundations.

However, this foreign interference is not imposed on Muslims in France but responds to their request and project submissions to the Muslim countries. In practice, the beneficiary people or associations of foreign funding are well established on French territory, and they turn to the highest bidder. In other words, they ask for funds from the country (or its associated religious movement) which offers the most interesting financing and support. Therefore, there is a proactive demand for funding from French actors who can build community projects without this external funding, which is used to direct and control Muslim communities.

STATE ACTORS

For historical and geopolitical reasons, French Islamism is subject to the religious diplomatic action of several rival countries, the most important rivalry of which is between Algeria and Morocco. Both have a direct and indirect influence on the regional federations of Muslims in France, notably through funding the construction of mosques and private schools, and sending imams and Arabic language teachers.

For example, the Great Mosque of Paris (GMP) covers its operating costs thanks to a contribution from Algeria (1.8 million euros per year), while the Great Mosque of Strasbourg (GMS) was built thanks to a funding up to 53% by Morocco and the Saudi Arabia (contribution of 10.8 million of euros). Similarly, the Great Mosque of Saint-Etienne (GMST) was built thanks to a funding from the King of Morocco (contribution of 6 million euros).

These countries are also influential in France through their own network of Muslim associations, which are represented within the CFCM (French Council of Muslim Worship). For example, Morocco supports the UMF (Union of French Mosques) and the RMF (Gathering of the French Muslims), as well as the FNMF (National Federation of French Muslims). Since 2015, Morocco has also trained a good number of French imams, following an agreement between President

François Hollande and the King of Morocco, Mohamed VI, signed after the terrorist attacks that struck France that year (Charlie Hebdo).¹⁹

In many French territories, the countries of origin of Muslim immigrants have developed over decades a “consular Islam”²⁰, practiced in connection with the official Islam of the State, and aimed to control the Muslim communities and prevent them from joining the Islamist opposition that has been hosted by France during the 1980s and the 1990s. However, this “consular Islam” has been overtaken by radical Islamism promoted by the young generations of militants who criticize their parents’ practice of Islam in a revivalist way and who blame France of its support to the authoritarian regimes in their countries of origin.

Aware of this dynamic, President Macron announced, on February 18, 2020, the reinforced control of the funding of places of worship, as well as the end of seconded imams by 2024. He also designated Algeria, Morocco and Turkey as representatives of these foreign powers whose influence on the Islam of France must be reduced. Therefore, he imposed to the Muslim federations in France a “Charter of secularism”, a text with 10 items affirming the “Republican values” that was finally ratified by all the federations.²¹

However, this charter was a matter of dispute between Muslim representatives since each member federation of the CFCM (French Council of Muslim Worship) is closely linked to his country of origin; the Council regularly experiences crises and blockages. Thus, in March 2021, four federations of the CFCM (namely the Federation of the Great Mosque of Paris; the Gathering of French Muslims; Muslims of France-ex UOIF; and the French Federation of Islamic Associations of Africa, the Comoros and the Antilles) withdrew from the Executive Board and announced the creation of a “Coordination” in order to reflect on “the re-foundation of the representation of the Muslim religion in France”.

In reality, the crises of the CFCM reflect the internal struggles within political Islam in France, and the competition that rages between different Islamic movements, which today form the “State religion” in the countries of origin of the Muslim communities.

Morocco

In France, the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco arises as conflicts and competition within diasporas and immigrant populations. It finds its political expression in the competition for leadership within the CFCM (French Council of the Muslim Worship), sometimes subject to the influence of Morocco, and often to that of Algeria. However, this competition is also reflected in a violent way within the Algerian and Moroccan jihadist networks by attacks targeting France (by terrorists mainly of Algerian origin) and Belgium (by terrorists mainly of Moroccan origin).

This jihadist rivalry also emerged at the level of rallying to terrorist organizations. Thus, Jihadists originating from Algeria are mostly linked to the organization of Al-Qaeda (AQIM), while the Jihadists from Morocco join mostly the ranks of the Islamic State (ISIS).²²

On the doctrinal level, the Kingdom of Morocco strengthens among its nationals established in France, the conception of a “monarchical Islam”, articulated around the central figure of the “Commander of believers”, that is the King (Mohamed VI). This form of Islam based on the total allegiance to the emir allows a stabilization of the regime in Morocco and a control of Moroccan immigrants in France. Despite large-scale terrorist actions carried out by the Jihadists inside Morocco (Casablanca attacks in 2003 and 2010) and outside the Kingdom (Madrid attacks in 2004), Moroccan “monarchical Islam” managed to maintain its control over the Muslim community in France and to prevent a spread of violent extremism within its ranks. Today, it is considered in France as a “good barrier” against radicalization and violent extremism, and that is why many French imams are trained in Morocco before being able to officiate in France.²³

Algeria

Algerians represent the most important Muslim community in France, and they are very attached to their country of origin.²⁴ They are also influenced by political events and social evolution in Algeria through the media and social networks, including on the religious level. The Algerian regime is aware of this attachment and tries to use it for its benefit by promoting a “legitimist Islam” that is inspired from “Madkhalism”, from the name of its founder, Rabee Al Madkhali, an Islamic scholar from Saudi Arabia.²⁵

Madkhalism is a variant of Islamist thought within the wider Salafist movement that has been favored by Algeria – and other Arab States – because of its support for secular forms of government. Moreover, Madkhalist doctrine advocates absolute submission to the “holder of authority” (*Wali Al-Amr*), and thus commands respect for the political authority in place. Even though opposed to democracy, it rejects the idea of an overthrow of the regime and aims to avoid, by all means, “division” among Muslims and “civil war” (*fitna*). Although originating in Saudi Arabia, the movement lost its base of support there and was relegated for the most part to the Muslim communities in Europe, and particularly in France.

Madkhalism has been promoted by the Algerian regime in order to counter the influence of the more radical Salafi-Jihadist movement that has undermined traditional Sunni Islam. During the civil war (1992-2000), the Armed Islamic Group (AIG / GIA), which stroke France in several occasions (1994, 1995), gave birth to the SGPC / GSPC (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat). The latter joined the international jihadist network in 2006 and took the name of AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) as mentioned before. Therefore, not only Algerian Salafists survived the civil war but also many of them became Jihadists and were recruited in the ranks of the Muslim communities in France. For example, the main perpetrator of the 1995 terrorist attacks in France was an Algerian (Khaled Kelkal), and the Kouachi brothers, who perpetrated the terrorist attacks of January 2015 against Charlie Hebdo claimed to be members of Al- Qaeda.

Today, the powerful propaganda of the Salafi-Jihadist movement on internet and social networks reaches many members of the Algerian community in France and is the main trigger of radicalization. It plays mainly on the criticism of the Algerian military regime, presented as corrupt and nevertheless supported by France. But in reality, there is a lot of tension between the two governments because of many issues including the organization of the “Muslim Worship” in France.

Tunisia

Tunisia has developed in the late 1950s, under the leadership of its first president Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987), a progressive version of Islam, translated in the Tunisian legislation through the Personal Status Code (1956) which grants women many rights: abolition of polygamy, abolition of repudiation, prohibition of marriage with prepubertal girls, establishment of freedom of choice of spouse, etc.

Even if the secularization of society was imposed from above, it has left indelible traces in the Tunisian society, thanks notably to the continuation of Bourguiba’s secularist policy by his successor, Ben Ali (1987-2011). Despite the coming to power of the Islamist Ennahda party after the Arab Spring (2011), secular gains have not disappeared, and the Tunisian community in France remains deeply attached to these gains.

However, this community contains in its ranks some violent extremists who regularly strike France. They are mostly inspired by the Islamic State (ISIS) propaganda, since Tunisia was the main provider of foreign fighters to this organization after the Revolution (2011)²⁶. Today, even though the overwhelming majority of Tunisian community is attached to secularism, the Islamist ideology

is firmly defended by the main political party, Ennahda, who is promoting the establishment of a “Muslim democracy”.

Turkey

Along with Tunisia, Turkey is the only secular Muslim country on the Mediterranean shore. Yet, the Turkish government has been engaged for several years in an Islamic activism, which aims at a “Turkishization” of the Islam of France. The Turkish government is deploying a strategy aimed at consolidating the influence of the Turks on certain French territories and Muslim communities, particularly in Alsace (Eastern France), and especially in Strasbourg (head office of the European Parliament), thanks notably to the CCMTF (Coordination Committee of Turkish Muslims in France).²⁷

Among the notable actions of the CCMTF, it is worth mentioning the construction of a new mosque in Strasbourg, the installation of the powerful DITIB (the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs), the “Yunus Emre School”, as well as the project of opening a faculty of Islamic theology dependent on the University of Marmara (Turkey). All this marks Turkey’s desire for political influence and control, via religion, over the Turkish Muslim diaspora and beyond over populations of Maghreb origin, thanks to the pan-Islamic and pro-Sunni positions of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whether vis-à-vis Syria or against the State of Israel.

A sign of this growing influence of Turkey is shown by Fatih Sarikir, member of the Turkish Millî Görüş, who obtained, in January 2020, the strategic seat of Secretary General of the “French Council of Muslim Worship” (CFCM). He combines this position with that of President of the “European Union for Private Muslim Education” (UEPM), which manages eleven school groups in France.

Several statements show that the objective of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is to control, first of all, the Turkish diaspora, through the “Ministry of Religious Affairs” (*Diyanet*), then to influence the populations of Muslim origin in France by diffusing a new ideology which mixes Islamism and nationalism, entering into competition with doctrines already promoted by other countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia).

Turkish “Islamic-Nationalism” is not recent, but it has experienced a remarkable boom among Muslims in France after the Arab Spring (2011) because it makes the synthesis between the two dominant ideologies since the independence of the Arab countries in the 1960s. This ideological synthesis promotes a vision of “pan-Islamism” calling for the universal community of believers (*Ummah*) and for “religious confederacies” in the image of what existed under the Ottoman Empire between the 16th and the 20th century.

This conception of Islamism appeals to young Muslims by its call for unity and resistance to military, diplomatic, economic and cultural pressures from the West. This discourse has a real impact since it is carried by the leader of a member of NATO, Turkey, who knows what he is talking about. However, adherence to this form of political Islam can be problematic to Muslim communities in that it creates an identity conflict among young French Muslims, resulting from the “double allegiance” to the pan-Islamic vision of religion on one side, and to national regulations and laws that apply to Islam in France.²⁸

Saudi Arabia

In addition to the Saudi Arabia funding for the construction of several mosques in France, including the Grand Mosque of Lyon (90% funded by King Fahd), the action of this Kingdom is singled out mainly because of its ideological influence and its religious diplomacy which transformed, in a few decades, a minority current of Islam, Wahhabi Salafism, into a dominant Islamic doctrine throughout the Muslim world.

One of its levers of influence in France is the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) which is one of the five pillars of Islam. The Saudi administration decides, each year, how many visas should be issued to Muslims in France, and to which organizing association these visas are issued. Therefore, Saudis are able to promote associations in accordance with their doctrine (Wahhabi Salafism), without blocking access to Mecca to other pilgrims; otherwise, the monarchy would lose a lot of legitimacy. During the pilgrimage, the Kingdom also distributes Qurans and many religious books free of charge available to pilgrims, as well as various digital products relating to Islam and Salafism.

To disseminate its doctrine, Saudi Arabia was able to proselytize based on many institutions and foundations, which are old such as the “World Islamic League” (WIL), founded in 1962 and whose headquarters are in Mecca. Today, the League is composed of 53 States members, and has the status of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). It controls tens of mosques in several European countries, including France, where it has notably 2500 m² of buildings in the city of Mantes-la-Jolie, near the capital Paris.

Other institutions are used to strengthen the religious influence of Saudi Arabia, such as the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), founded in 1969, and based in Jeddah, which brings together 56 States. This organization has developed institutions each having a specific mission such as ISESCO (Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), a kind of “Islamic UNESCO”, as well as a development bank, a foundation for science, an organization for Islamic solidarity, and an international press agency.²⁹ There is also a “World Assembly of Muslim Youth”, founded in Jeddah in 1972, aiming to educate and organize youth following the precepts of Salafi Islam.³⁰

The influence of these organizations on young people emerges in France through financial and moral support for projects and associations aimed at the “Arabization” of Islam through the dominance of preaching in Arabic in mosques and the generalization of Arabic lessons given to children in places of Muslim worship, where the Arabic language is in high demand.³¹ In 2012, after a proposal from Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Libya during the session of the UNESCO Executive Council, a “World Arabic Language Day” was established, which is celebrated on December 18 of each year, in remembrance of the recognition of Arabic as the official working language of the United Nations by the General Assembly on December 18, 1973.

In France, the teaching of Arabic is mainly provided within a national program called “ELCO” (Teaching of Languages and Cultures of Origin), that is delivered by foreign Arab teachers sent to France by the Arab countries. These Arabic classes are given each year to 60,000 children of the Muslim community in France. This figure is ten times higher to the number of children who are taught Arabic in public and secular schools (only 6,000). In these schools, Arabic is taught as a mere communication language, whereas in the ELCO program, it provides teachers with an “authority effect” as the language of the Quran and of “religious truth”. Lessons are an opportunity to strengthen the Islamic identity and can be a soft way to disseminate an Islamic norm, which is sometimes contrary to the principles of the French Republic (freedom, equality, tolerance, etc.).

Because of the Saudi activism around the Arabic language, young people of North African origin tend to abandon the dialect of their parents and to adopt the language of the Quran. This trend has been observed even among the Berber communities of North Africa who does not originally speak Arabic but who are in the process of Arabization in France.

Aware of this development, President Macron announced, on February 18, 2020, the end of teaching of Arabic within the ELCO program, and the strengthening of the teaching of Arabic in public and secular schools, but this announcement might remain without any effect because it needs a lot of means (teachers, classes, textbooks, etc.) to achieve its goal.

In the meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has radically changed its policy under the pressure of the Crown Prince, Muhammad Bin Salam (MBS). The Secretary General of the World Islamic League

(WIL), Muhammad Abdelkrim Alissa, also a former Saudi Minister of Justice, officially supported President Macron in his fight against “Islamist separatism” in France. In a long interview to a French magazine, he declared: “Muslims must conform to the values of the Republic.”³² Coming from one of the most respected voices in the Muslim world, this statement breaks with decades of the League’s dissemination of rigorous Salafist and Wahhabi ideology around the world. It announces a direction-changing, which has been mirrored, in Saudi Arabia itself, by unprecedented and daring reforms. However, it remains uncertain whether this change in Saudi policy will have an impact on Muslims in France or if it will simply benefit more radical actors, who might fill the void left by the traditional Saudi actor.³³

Qatar

The World Islamic League (WIL) is not the only international influent organization of Muslim scholars. Its competitor is the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), an organization of theologians, headquartered in Qatar, and founded by Sheikh Al Qaradhawi, who is also a founding member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and who resides in Qatar since its expulsion from Egypt in the 1970s. For a long time, he had his own TV show on Al Jazeera channel, and was the only Muslim scholar to issue fatwas on the air.³⁴

Qatar has long used Al Jazeera channel and the IUMS to influence politically and ideologically political Islam in the Arab world. Since this organization brings together representatives of other Islamic doctrines favorable to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, it was a suitable tool for Qatar to promote a moderate view of Islamism. Since 2011, the IUMS has had the characteristic of referring to “Muslim peoples” instead of “Muslim community” (*Ummah*), and it claims to derive its legitimacy directly from “popular acceptance and adherence to its principles”. The organization also admits into its ranks anyone acclaimed by the public, even if this person has not necessarily followed the traditional course of Muslim theologians. This means that a significant number of renowned “TV-Preachers” can claim to be part of it and to give their opinion on the various theological questions submitted to the organization.

This “populist doctrine” of Islam is a reaction to a huge increase, in recent years, in the number of Islamic preachers and Islamic missionaries who do not derive their legitimacy from their theological knowledge or training, but rather from the adhesion they generate through media and the impact they have on the internet and social networks. Therefore, to avoid being marginalized, traditional scholars proceeded to the gradual integration of these preachers, even if their legitimacy is virtual and questionable.

Thus, Muslim youth find themselves torn between several “Islamisms”, and driven by competing movements that have in common the full integration of technological tools and a common enemy, French secularism. All these Islamic actors are suspected in France to lead a double play, presenting on one side an ally facet and, on the other, an enemy facet, supporting the vision of radical Islamism.

Qatar’s influence in France had its heyday under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012) who went so far to wage the war in Libya jointly with the Emir of Qatar, Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani.³⁵ However, after this “honeymoon”, Qatar was accused of welcoming and protecting the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood expelled from Egypt in 2013, then of providing military and financial aid to the armed groups of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and in Libya.³⁶

If these charges are now corroborated by facts, they are part of the rivalry between Qatar and Saudi Arabia that is a historical support of Salafists in the Muslim world. In fact, confronted to the Arab political context in full reorganization after the Arab Spring (2011), Qatar played against the big Saudi brother the card of the Islamist alternative of the Muslim Brotherhood. Even if it had fallen into line, at the end of 2014, by joining the “Islamic coalition” formed by Saudi Arabia against the Islamic State (ISIS), Qatar could not avoid being placed under blockade from 2017 to

2021 by the other Gulf monarchies, supported for the occasion by the Egypt of Al Sissi who had overthrown the Brethren president Mohamed Morsi (2012-2013).

RELIGIOUS ACTORS

All Islamic doctrines and movements are represented in France, to varying degrees, due to the large number of immigrants from Muslim countries. However, Muslim communities from southern Mediterranean countries, especially the Maghreb, constitute the majority and are much more active on the political, economic and social scene. These communities are driven by actors who represent the entire Islamic spectrum: starting from the most liberal and progressive Islam, authorizing the imamate of women, to the most conservative and fundamentalist Islam, threatening apostates and blasphemers with death.

These religious actors are of various kinds: missionary movement (such as Tablighism); pietist movement (such as Salafism); solidarity movement (such as Muslim Brotherhood); nationalist movement (such as Milli Görüs), or even violent movement (such as Jihadism). Each movement has its own ideology and style that distinguishes it and differentiates it from other religious groups and sects.

In France, there is no common organization or agreement between these groups, but they form an “Islamist ecosystem” that does not prohibit occasional convergences. Even though competing to attract sympathizers, they can converge within certain territories, joining for a common project, such as the refusal of the separation of the State and religion, as well as the establishment of a community governed by Sharia (Islamic law). All these forms of Islamism promote a deliberate choice of Islamic doctrine as a reference and as a guide for political action. All of them also implement a “theology of struggle and liberation” that uses Islamic referents to transform the French political and social system. Islamists take a stand against “the West” and against the “Westernization” of mores considered contrary, even harmful, to Muslim identity. However, they do not always agree on the best way to achieve their goals, and are competing for the control of social spaces (areas, clubs, associations, etc.), each movement trying to present itself as the best and the most efficient in countering French secularism.

Tablighis

In Arabic, *Tabligh* means “transmission”, and designates a revivalist religious movement founded in the 1920s by an Indian theologian, Muhammad Al Kandhlawi (1885-1944), but it quickly spread to the rest of the Muslim world and particularly to Africa. Today, the Tablighis are also present in Europe among the immigrant Muslim communities, and its modernist dimension lies in its integration of female missionaries.

The radical nature of the movement stems from the fact that the Tablighis have a literalist interpretation of the Quran and prophetic traditions.³⁷ Their insistence on “correcting” the beliefs and “reforming” the practices of other Muslims is also a source of permanent tension with other missionary movements.

The presence of this movement in France is attested since 1966. That year the movement adopted the form of an association called “Faith and Practice”. A few years later, a split of certain members gave birth to another association “Preaching and Call to God”. Finally, in the 1980s, it became known among Muslim immigrants as “Tabligh”.

Initially popular in Indo-Pakistani circles, the Tabligh spread thanks to its missionaries in other Muslim communities, particularly in the Paris region (especially in Saint-Denis) where its main center is located. It presents its mission as aiming to revive the obligation to preach within Islam. In this, he has a strong tradition of proselytizing which can annoy other Muslims who only wish to live their faith without appealing to others.³⁸

The movement relies on groups of missionaries from different nationalities who go door-to-door, in order to make the “tour” (*al-jawla*, in Arabic) and spread the ideas of “preaching” (*at-tabligh*, the proclamation). The disseminated principles are simple: profession of faith (*shahâda*), prayer (*salât*), knowledge of God (*ma’rifa*), and sincere intention (*niyya*).

From a dogmatic point of view, the Tablighists have a literalist interpretation of the main texts of Islam. They strive to follow the codes and prescriptions of Sharia and Islamic law to the letter. In their daily practice of faith, they promote “consultation” (*mashûra*) as a governance system, which makes them look more “democratic” than other groups. However, the members are strongly encouraged to dedicate their time, energy and money to preaching “in the path of Allah”, as did the very first companions of Prophet Muhammad (*sahâba*).

This missionary activity (*ad-da’wa ilâ Allah bil kburûj fi sabililab*) is a cardinal quality of movement that is the transmission of a religious practice that mixes religion and politics as preaching arguments. Trips lasting from several days to several weeks (*kburûj*) are also organized with the aim of spreading the Islamic faith. However, the most important of the trips remains the pilgrimage to Mecca, which should not be done directly but through a visit on one’s way to the great historical centers of medieval Islamic spirituality.

However, since it aims at the awakening of faith and the return to Islam, the Tabligh advocates a “logic of breakup” with French society, which makes it appear as sectarian in the eyes of public opinion. In addition to trips abroad far from “infidel society”, its members promote spiritual retreat and organize preaching outings that can range from three days to forty days, or even three months, focusing on prayer, reading and interpretation of the Quran, which might feed radicalization.

Finally, even if the movement claims to be “apolitical”, it nevertheless participated in the 2006-2007 consultations at the Ministry of the Interior with a view to the constitution of the representative body of the Muslim religion in France, before retracting and refusing to integrate the new formed Council (CFCM).

Today, because of its revivalist spirit and its literal interpretation of Islamic texts, Tablighism competes with Salafism on the French market of political Islam, but the latter seems to be more efficient in attracting new members and converting Muslim youth.

Salafists

The Arabic word “Salaf” means “Predecessors” and refers to the first generation of Muslims who lived during the first century of Islam (7th century AD). Today, the name “Salafists” refers to Muslims who want to live and practice religion like those “Predecessors” (Salaf). The movement was founded by the medieval theologian Ibn Taymiyya (died in 1328). Initially, it aimed to counter the influence of the Mongols who had invaded the Muslim world in the middle of the thirteenth century and put an end to the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad (1258), an event experienced as a major trauma by the Muslims of the time. Faced with this deadly threat, Ibn Taymiyya called for a renewal of faith and to a revival of the traditions of the first Muslims (Salaf), to regain the glory of Islam. Since then, whenever the lands of Islam are under attack, invaded or occupied by a foreign power, Salafism resurfaces as an active movement of Islamic struggle.

The revivalist dimension of this movement arises through the intensity of the reference to the Quran and the important activity of study and literal reading of Islamic traditions. This is why Salafists are divided into three categories: “Quietists” who refuse any participation in politics; “Scholars” who see salvation only in reading the Qur’an and prophetic traditions; and “Activists” who interpret the original Islamic text in the light of the current context.

Within this last category of Salafists (the “Activists”), there is a tendency to produce symbolic violence against non-Muslims, and against non-Salafist Muslims, that tends to drift towards radicalization and violent extremism. Its supporters, immersed in an imaginary from the early days of Islam characterized by violence and conquests, can commit violent acts today by identification or projection, because they believe them to be legitimated by this reference frame of the past.

In the 1990s, this movement has been determinant in the process of “salafization” of Islam, that is to say habituating minds to the ideas and practices of Salafists. France like other European countries welcomed on its territory many leaders of the Salafist movement from the southern Mediterranean who fled the crackdown against the Islamists in their countries (Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco). These Salafists settled in the Parisian suburbs and in the large cities of the south, such as Marseille and Toulouse, in areas with a majority of immigrant population.³⁹

During the 2000s, the Salafist activists benefited from the dissemination of their combat ideology by various terrorist organizations affiliated to Al-Qaeda. One of these organizations is the “Salafist Group of Preaching and Combat” (SGPC / GSPC), which became in 2006 Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM / AQMI), targeting France and its nationals in sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁰

Despite major events such as the revolts in the French suburbs in 2005,⁴¹ Salafists did not lobby or enter politics, unlike other movements like the Muslim Brotherhood. The Salafi movement did not institutionalize nor participate in the French political game. It remained on the fringes of politics, working at the level of individuals within Muslim communities, without seeking to forge alliances or to negotiate “accommodations” with French politicians.

This avoidance of politics comes from the fact that the Salafists regard democracy as an anti-Islamic system by nature, and refuse the institutional game in the name of purity and “divine sovereignty” (*hakimiyya*), advocating estrangement from institutions. For them, voting, electing, and accepting democracy amounts to accepting an authority other than that of God, that is to say becoming an “idolater.”

In other words, Salafists are not today political actors in France. However, they are major actors of the social debate, and deploy a vision on all subjects affecting Muslims, such as morality within the family (respect for parents and elders), or sexual behavior (respect for abstinence before marriage), among other issues.

Besides, unlike other missionary movements which make large-scale preaching the key to Islamic revival, Salafists aim for elitist conversion by setting an example and joining the word to the deed, by displaying distinctive signs of belonging to their group (specific beard, dress, greetings, etc.).

Since 2013, the political marginalization of the Muslim Brotherhood on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and the change in French policy under the presidency of François Hollande (2012-2017) in favor of Saudi Arabia have strengthened the position of Salafists in France and their establishment in many areas on the national territory.

Today, Salafists represent nearly 30 000 people in France. They are particularly active in the Parisian suburbs such as: Argenteuil, Asnières, Aubervilliers, Aulnay-sous-Bois, Champigny sur Marne, Colombes Nanterre, Corbeil-Essonnes, Creil, Dreux, Gennevilliers, Grigny, Les Mureaux, Maubeuge, Noisiel, Saint-Denis, Sarcelles, Sevran, Torcy, and Trappes.

Salafists are also present in most problematic districts of French cities, such as: Angoulême, Besançon, Bordeaux, Calais, Forbach, Grenoble, Le Havre, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Montpellier., Mulhouse, Nantes, Nice, Nîmes, Pau, Rennes, Roubaix, Rouen, Saint-Étienne, Strasbourg, Toulon, Toulouse, Tourcoing, Tours, and Vénissieux.

Some French territories and overseas departments are also concerned by this phenomenon. This is particularly true for Mayotte and Nouméa (New Caledonia), but also for some areas in the French Antilles.

Actually, Salafism represents today the fundamentalist Islamic mainstream. Its language, clothing habits, beliefs and traditions, are so widespread within Muslim communities in France that it has become hard to question or criticize it. It defines the “Islamic norm” among young people from Maghreb families who often adhere to Salafism without even knowing it, believing in the “Salaf tradition” and adopting its distinctive signs, in an imaginary quest for a “purity of faith” in an environment they deem “atheist.”

In addition, nearly half of French converts adhere to Salafism. In prison and among individuals unfavorably known to the police, this proportion is even higher, around 70%.⁴² This is visible through Salafist symbols: way of talking and saluting, way of practicing rites, and more importantly through the “clothing ethics”: loose pants for men (*qamis*) and loose veil for women (*jilbab*).

Paradoxically, Salafism is fundamentalist on the doctrinal level but it is very modern on the economic level. Even though it calls to respect “Muslim ethics” (prohibition of usury and fraud, prohibition of sale and consumption of alcohol and drugs), it is definitely liberal in its engagement in economy. It promotes a material adaptation to our time (modernity) without letting down the spiritual conformity to the past (Salaf), as a dreamed golden age made of glory and piety.

The danger of Salafism for democracy comes from its puritanism and its mythical horizon underpinned by a hegemonic desire and supported by a mastery of technological tools, massively used to gain new followers among the youth, especially on the internet and social media. Through this association between the “mythologized past” and the “technologized present”, Salafism forms today the “ideological matrix” of most extremist movements in the world.

Wahhabis

The Wahhabis are major players against France in the Sahel region and particularly in Mali. They are also present among Muslim communities of Sub-Saharan origin in France. They have strengthened in recent years due to the French military presence there, following the 2013 military intervention to drive out the Jihadists who occupied northern Mali.

Wahhabism has nothing to do with local maraboutic Islam, resulting from Sufi Islam such as Qâdiriyya and Tijâniyya. It is a form of Islam imported from the Arabian Peninsula where Wahhabism has developed from works of Islamic scholar Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd Al Wahhab (died 1792), who resumed and extended the religious doctrine of medieval theologian Ibn Taymiyya (died 1328), thus founding a doctrine that bears his name, Wahhabism (Al Wahhabiyya).

However, from a doctrinal point of view, this current is considered a branch of Salafism because it is based on a literal interpretation of the Quran and a strict implementation of Sharia. Its founder wanted to “purify” Islam and rid it of all the practices added over the centuries (for example, he had all the tombs of the holy men of Islam destroyed). For him and his followers, the objective is to recreate the situation and religious practice that prevailed at the time of Prophet Muhammad (7th century), regarded as a golden age.

The success of Wahhabism and its rapid spread came from its alliance with the tribal leader Al Saud, thus forming the base of the three successive Saudi Kingdoms (in the 18th, 19th, and 20th century). It was the first movement of the modern era to offer supporters of political Islam a practical model and an implementation of an alliance between the politician (Ibn Saud) and the theologian (Ibn ‘Abd Al Wahhab) for the founding of a theocratic state that merges politics and religion.

Given the financial support and spiritual attraction of Saudi Arabia, the land of the two holy places of Islam (Mecca and Medina), Wahhabism swarmed all over the Muslim world and gained sympathizers in Asia, Africa, then in Europe among immigrant populations. This dissemination has been particularly successful in sub-Saharan Africa, to the point that Wahhabism has taken over the traditional Islam of the Sufis, forming currently the doctrinal base of all extremist movements and armed groups that are active in West Africa and the Sahel region.

This “Wahhabization” of African Islam is not recent. In Mali, the first infiltrations of Wahhabism date back to the colonial period. A Malian scholar called Abd ar-Rahmân al-Ifriqî (1908-1957) was the first preacher and propagator of the doctrine. He went to Mecca for the pilgrimage, studied the doctrine of Ibn ‘Abd Al Wahhab, then he trained many Malians who came for the pilgrimage, before going back to Mali as Wahhabi missionaries.

Later, this missionary work was carried out through preachers and imams sent directly by Saudi Arabia to re-Islamize the African populations and convert them to the official doctrine of the Saudi kingdom. For this, Saudi Arabia relied on the “World Islamic League” (WIL), which it founded in 1962, and to which it assigned the main objective to counter the Christianization of Muslim by evangelical movements in West Africa. Thus, Salafi Wahhabism appeared as a revivalist movement likely to counter their influence, and this mission was entrusted to the Wahhabi preachers.

Evangelical pressure in Muslim countries of sub-Saharan Africa has never ceased, and this goal of re-Islamization has been reiterated on several occasions by the “World Islamic League” (WIL). For example, during the 11th World Conference of the League in 1982, the final declaration affirmed: “Africa is the continent of Islam, whether it is the past or the present.”

The spread of Wahhabism in the Sahel region, and in particular in Mali, has gone through a whole program of construction of mosques and Islamic centers, as well as health and solidarity centers, financed by the Saudis via the League (WIL).

This dissemination also went through the training of preachers on site and the installation of Islamic preaching stations, which are bases of Wahhabi missionaries supported by the League (WIL).

Since 1990, the three channels leading Wahhabi propagation have been the pilgrimage, the trade and education. Each African pilgrim who went to Mecca was initiated on site into the rites and practices of Wahhabism, presented as the “true version” of Islam and the prophetic tradition. Thus, the pilgrim left for his country with a new habit (*qamis*), with a new posture of prayer (arms crossed), with a new creed (*tanbihid*), and a new language (specific greetings). All of this set him apart from his fellow believers on his return to his home country, and he himself became a promoter and propagator of Wahhabism.

The second channel is that of trade since many pilgrims were important tradesmen because, according to Islamic dogma, the pilgrimage is an obligation only for those who have the financial means. These rich pilgrims not only imported huge quantities of products from Saudi Arabia, creating many Islamic stores (selling veils for women, clothes for men, skullcaps, incense, prayer rugs, etc.), but they also built many mosques of Wahhabi obedience as a sign of piety and thanks to God for their wealth.⁴³

The third channel is religious studies. Many African students have gone to Saudi Arabia to study the Quran, prophetic traditions (*hadith*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), as well as other religious sciences in Saudi universities, especially in Medina. There, they were introduced to Islam in its Wahhabi version, with a literal interpretation of the Quran and a rigorous practice of worship. When they return to their country of origin, these students became teachers of Arabic in public schools or imams in mosques, and propagated the version of Islam they had learned, thus forming generations of Wahhabi Muslims.

Some of these students then left for France to work or to finish their higher studies. They often ended up in the departments of Arab studies or Islamic studies in French universities, namely those in Paris, Strasbourg, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, and Bordeaux. They were shocked to see that the Islam taught and practiced in France was a thousand miles far from the Islam they had learned in their country, which could generate difficulties of adaptation and, sometimes, risks of radicalization.

However, the African Muslim communities in France represented by the “French Federation of Islamic Associations of Africa, the Comoros and the Antilles” (FFAIACA), have resisted the “Wahhabization” of Islam, thanks to the preservation of their Sufi Islamic traditions. However, in the Sahel region, this traditional Islam paved the way to the steamroller of Wahhabism, which flourished thanks to a complex political and social context.

In Mali, the central figure of political Islam today is Imam Mahmoud Dicko, born in 1954 and originating from the Timbuktu region. He is a famous religious and political leader in Mali who was notably president of the “High Islamic Malian Council” (HCIM) from January 2008 to April 2019. However, his background is typical of African Wahhabis. In fact, in his youth, he was one of the Malian students who went to study religious sciences in Saudi Arabia (in Medina). Following his studies, he returned to Mali impregnated with the Wahhabi doctrine and became teacher of Arabic, then imam of mosque in Bamako the capital. At the time, he claimed to be a “Wahhabi” and defended the rights of Arabic-speaking Muslims in Mali, while denouncing corruption and the absence of social justice.

In 2009, Mahmoud Dicko opposed the draft code of persons and family in Mali presented by the government, considering it as “anti-Islamic” and obtained its revision thanks to a major popular mobilization, emptying it of all aspects that were favorable to women’s rights.⁴⁴

In 2012, during the occupation of northern Mali by Jihadists, he took a position in favor of dialogue with Islamists and met their leader, Iyad Ag Ghali, with whom he remained in contact despite the international military intervention under French command.

In 2015, after the Radisson Blu terrorist attack in Bamako, he declared that Jihadism was “a creation of the West and of France in order to recolonize Mali”. In 2017, he took the head of a political movement that bears his name: “Coordination of Movements, Associations and Sympathizers of Mahmoud Dicko” (CMAS). This movement is at the origin of the union of the Malian opposition under the name of “Movement of June 5-Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques” (M5-RFP), which succeeded in overthrowing President Keïta in 2020.⁴⁵

In 2021, he called for negotiations with the Islamist armed groups led by the same Iyad Ag Ghali, which provoked strong reactions in France where President Macron threatened to withdraw French troops, if Mali moves towards an “Islamic Republic”.⁴⁶

Even if Dicko rejects these accusations, his call to negotiate with Iyad Ag Ghali is not reassuring in France, given the latter’s profile. Iyad Ag Ghali is a Malian warlord born in 1958 in the Kidal region, in northern Mali, and well-known to the French. In the 1990s, he appeared as the leader of the Tuareg rebellion in Mali and went through France to recruit supporters by organizing meetings in cafes in Paris to convince his immigrant compatriots to join the rebellion. However, since 1996, under pressure from France, he signed peace with the Malian government, and accepted to dissolve his “Popular Movement of Azawad” (PMA- MPA). It was then that he turned to religion and joined the Tabligh movement (Jama’at Al- Tabligh) as a preacher.

Between 1998 and 2000, he made several trips as a missionary inside Mali and abroad, in other West African countries. He even traveled to Pakistan to complete his training in “*Da’wa*” (Call to religion). Back in Mali, Iyad Ag Ghali took part in the various Tuareg rebellions that rocked the

country in the early 2000s, before signing the peace agreements with the Malian government in Algiers in 2006. As a sign of recognition for his efforts, he was appointed in 2007 as “Consular adviser” of Mali, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. This position that lasted three years enabled him to learn Wahhabi doctrine and to make contacts with activists from the harshest wing of the movement, so that he was suspected by the Saudis of being in contact with Al-Qaeda, and expelled from the country in 2010.

After his expulsion from Saudi Arabia, Iyad Ag Ghali joined France and settled in Paris, where he renewed contacts in the Malian community, before returning to Mali to negotiate with Al-Qaeda (AQIM) for the release of four French hostages, employees of the Areva company kidnapped in Arlit, Niger, in September 2010. Thanks to him, these hostages have been released in two waves, on February 24, 2011 and on October 19, 2013, for the payment of a ransom of 12 and then 30 million euros.⁴⁷

This operation intervened during the Arab Spring (2011) which witnessed an influx of many armed fighters from neighboring Libya, where the Gaddafi regime had just fallen. In early 2012, Iyad Ag Ghali took the opportunity to form his own armed group, Ansar Dine⁴⁸, which quickly became the most powerful Islamist group in northern Mali.

This group adopted an openly Wahhabi line and allied with other armed groups, including AQIM, to take control of northern Mali in March 2012. In the wake of these events, an “Islamic Emirate of Azawad” was declared, and Sharia law was strictly enforced throughout Northern Mali. Then in January 2013, Iyad Ag Ghali launched a military offensive against Southern Mali and conquered the city of Konna. However, he was stopped by the French army and was forced to withdraw from all the cities into the desert (Adrar of Ifoghas). This was also the end of the “Islamic Emirate of Azawad” and the beginning of the Islamist insurgency in northern Mali. Since then, Ansar Dine has led a guerrilla war on all fronts: against the Malian troops, the French army, the African and international armed forces.

In 2017, Iyad Ag Ghali formed GSIM (Group of Support to Islam and Muslims), from the merger of several armed groups including: Ansar Dine, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Katiba Macina, and the *Katiba al-Murâbitûn*. By taking the head of the new group (GSIM), he made the junction between the Wahhabi Salafism and the global Jihadism. However, today, this group is in competition with the “Islamic State in the Great Sahara” (ISGS). Since 2020, an open war opposes these two groups, GSIM and ISGS, the latter accused Iyad Ag Ghali of being an “apostate” because he had accepted the opening of peace negotiations with the Malian government resulting from the coup d'état supported by Imam Dicko.

This political situation in Mali has an impact on the Malian community established in France. This community has about 60 000 Malians including 10 000 living in the Paris suburbs, especially in the city of Montreuil, nicknamed “the second city of Mali.” These Malians are not indifferent to what is happening in their country of origin because they maintain strong links with their community there.

Two subjects are bitterly discussed by the Malians of France: the presence of French troops in Mali, and the positioning towards the representatives of political Islam in France. However, these subjects are generally treated from an ethnic perspective because the majority of the Malian community in France is originated of the Soninke ethnicity and comes from Kayes, a large town in western Mali, on the banks of the Senegal River, at 495 km northwest of Bamako the capital. One of theirs, Moussa Traoré (1936-2020), was President of the Malian Republic from 1968 to 1991. During his presidency, he helped his ethnic group members to settle in France.⁴⁹

Today, the Soninke like other ethnic groups in Mali is subjected to the proselytizing action of Wahhabism: now women loincloth come to the ankles and men are more pietist. Critics of those

who “live among the disbelievers”, the Malian immigrants, are numerous, and the resentment is exacerbated by the fact that the “Maliens of France” are perceived as rich people who have several wives and who own many buildings in their region of origin.

There is, in fact, an important movement of money transfer between France and Mali, which is operated by the Malian diaspora. Most of time, it aims to complete the construction of a house or to financially support a clan. But this money is sometimes embezzled during fund transfers. This hijacking occurs when individuals, taking advantage of the fact that certain names are very common, usurp identities to pocket the money.

In order to prevent the diversion of money and avoid paying high commissions, some “Maliens of France” choose to send their savings with those returning to Mali who play the role of “suitcase carriers” for their fellow citizens. However, the “Malian system” does not always work: it often happens that the “conveyor” is robbed or ransomed upon arrival to Mali by highwaymen, because of insecurity on the road between Bamako and Kayes.

In this deteriorating climate, radicalization wins the ranks of Malians who are exposed to Islamist propaganda through the distribution of a militant literature, the proliferation of religious libraries and cultural associations focused on Islamic education created specifically to target young men and women.

These actions contribute also to the discrediting of traditional religious actors who appear completely outdated. Itinerant preachers constantly challenge the doctrine of Sufi Islam and criticize the practices of the marabout in Mali. Besides, the majority of Malians consider that the French military intervention “served no purpose” and that this presence is counterproductive today, given the rapid change in perception among the population. It is on this ground of discontent that political Islam continues to thrive and to win sympathizers.

Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brothers, called “*al-Ikhwân al-muslimîn*” in Arabic, was initially a religious movement whose creation and evolution were marked by the political context of its time. Founded in 1928 by an Egyptian school teacher, Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), with the aim of restoring the “Islamic caliphate” in response to its suppression by Kemal Atatürk in 1924, this movement displayed from the start political demands of an anti-colonialist nature and quickly became a key player in Egyptian politics. In 1933, the female branch of the movement, Muslim Sisters (*al-Akhwât al-muslimât*) was created. In 1945, an armed wing was also created to fight the Zionist movement in Palestine. Subsequently, the Muslim Brotherhood took part in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

From the 1960s onwards, its branches developed throughout the Arab world, then abroad in European countries and particularly in France, with the creation, in 1962, of the “Association of Islamic Students in France” (AEIF), which became, in 1979, the “Islamic Group in France” (IGF / GIF). As from 1981, this IGF was strengthened by the arrival of Tunisian members of the Muslim Brotherhood who moved to France to escape the repression in Tunisia conducted against them by the regime of President Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987) and its Minister of Interior, Ben Ali, who then succeeded him in power (1987-2011) and continued the same policy towards Islamists. These “Brothers” took power in the IGF, and created two years later, in 1983, the “Union of Islamic Organizations in France” (UIOF / UOIF), in the city of Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy (Meurthe-et-Moselle).

In 1989, the UIOF acquired national visibility by defending the Muslim students expelled from their school during the “veil affair” in Creil. In the wake of these events, a training institute for imams, linked to the Union, is created in 1990 in Château-Chinon: the “European Institute of Human Sciences” (EIHS).

In the same year (1990), a conflict broke out between two “wings” of the UIOF: on the one side, there were Tunisian Islamists who wanted to direct the actions of the Union against the regime in their country using France as a back base; on the other side, there were Moroccan Islamists who wanted to distance from politics in countries of origin and focus actions on French society. This latter wing prevailed⁵⁰ and consequently modified the name of the organization from “*in* France” to “*of* France”, without modifying the acronym: “Union of Islamic Organizations *of* France” (UIOF / UOIF).

Throughout the 1990s, the UIOF continued its establishment in the social field, but it failed to transform it into political success due to the general context marked, in France, by the terrorist attacks of the IAG (Islamic Armed Group). During years, the Muslim Brotherhood were absent from the political debate on social issues (racial discrimination, social inequalities, suburban problems) and was content to recall the merits of academic and professional success. In reaction, many young people moved away, and chose to join new organizations such as the “Collective of French Muslims” (CFM / CMF). This brethren organization was much more political and more focused on the “Muslim youth of France.”

Over the course of its actions, the CFM gradually became a forum for political exchanges and religious debates that can be mobilized for specific actions. In 1994, the CFM organized demonstrations in Grenoble to support a student (Scheherazade) who was expelled from school for wearing a headscarf, and launched in the aftermath, a national campaign to encourage young Muslims to “register on the electoral roll for the 1995 municipal elections”. In 1996, the CFM created a support committee to Tariq Ramadan, banned from entering France, and invited him to give a series of lectures and training seminars entitled “Encounter with Islam” in different cities of France.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the positioning of the CFM enabled the organization to stand out even more from the UIOF, provoking a deep crisis within the Brethren movement as a whole. Many members who were disappointed from UIOF created the “Union of Muslim associations of Seine-Saint-Denis” (UAM 93), which brought together nine mosques among the most important of Saint-Denis (Aulnay-sous-Bois, Aubervilliers, Le Pré-Saint-Gervais, Bobigny, Gagny, Villemonble, Neuilly-sur-Marne, and Noisy-le-Sec).

In 2003, the positioning towards the invasion of Iraq by the Americans troops worsened the crisis within the Brethren movement, since the UIOF appeared as a representative of the Muslim community after its official integration into a new body, the “French Council of Muslim Worships” (FCMW / CFCM), created by the then Minister of Interior and future President Nicolas Sarkozy.

As a reaction, the CFM prevailed in the French political landscape as the main defender of Muslims interests. To do so, its leaders approached the far-left movements and alter-globalization networks, with which they denounced social inequalities and the misdeeds of capitalism. In 2003, the CFM participated at the “European Social Forum” in Saint-Denis and inspired the creation of another activist organization, the “Collective Against Islamophobia in France” (CAIF / CCIF). In 2004, the CFM organized demonstrations against the law on ostentatious signs at school and engaged more aggressively in social and political struggle.

However, the youth riots in the French suburbs in 2005 revealed the weakness of the Brethren movement as a whole. All trends combined, the leaders had no control over the course of the riots and their fatwas condemning car-fires remained ineffective. This loss of control over the Muslim community can be explained by the rise of Salafism among youth of immigrant origin in an international context marked by the civil war in Iraq (2005-2007) and the incessant attacks of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

The Muslim Brotherhood did not regain its aura and its influence until the Arab Spring (2011). The accession to power of Islamist parties in the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt), enabled the representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood in France to restore their image and to show that their model of action, the so-called “Bottom-up Islamization” was the right strategy to achieve political success even though it takes time.

This positive perception of the Muslim Brotherhood was reinforced by French policy under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012) who, after integrating the UIOF into the CFCM, led a pro-Qatari alliance while Qatar was, at the time, the main guardian and financier of political parties of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab countries.⁵¹

In 2012, the UIOF began to invite Islamist personalities who openly contest the values of the French Republic or who call squarely for *“jihad”*. The fact that these invitations occur in a tense context marked by the terrorist attack of Toulouse, in March 2012, created controversy, and pushed the Minister of Interior at the time, Claude Guéant, to ban the participation of six Islamist speakers who were invited to the annual congress of the UIOF.

The election of President François Hollande in 2012 and the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 2013 relegated the UIOF to the background, and marginalized its action within the Muslim community in France. Consequently, Salafists, supported by France’s new strategic partner in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia), have taken advantage of the situation to outsmart the Muslim Brotherhood and replace them almost everywhere in the territory.

The major attacks of 2015 accentuated the marginalization of the Muslim Brotherhood, which found itself caught up in the “Pro-Charlie” and “Anti-Charlie” controversy. The UIOF became one of the main targets of the government in its fight against radicalization and violent extremism. To curb this trend of weakening, the UIOF voted, in April 2017, the change of its name to “Muslims of France” (MF), the aim being to stand out from other political movements of Islam and to represent all the Muslim communities living in France. However, its main places of worship are mainly located in the Center (Limousin), the Grand-Est (Champagne-Ardenne) and the South-West (Bordeaux region). In addition, they have a weak presence in the capital region of Paris, as they have been supplanted by the Salafist movement.

Aware of this weakness, the Muslim Brotherhood also proceeded, from 2017, to reframing their discourse and their doctrine. Until then, they had developed a whole theological approach around Muslim minorities living in the West, ranging from the idea of “Muslim citizenship” (Tariq Ramadan) to the concept of “minority jurisprudence” (Youssef Al Qaradhwai), and also a “minority Sharia” (Tareq Oubrou), the objective being to legitimize the Muslim presence in the West and to contextualize the practice of Islam by adapting it to a non-Muslim environment. However, this theological effort did not convince the Muslim communities nor the political decision-makers because of the recurring Islamist terrorism.

Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood were urged by their members to abandon the Islamic referent and adopt the thought frameworks of the West. From 2017, they have revised their speeches and actions to position themselves at the heart of decolonial, anti-racist, neo-feminist and intersectionalist movements. Thus, the fight against Islamophobia, seen as “anti-Muslim racism” has become at the center of their concerns and demands.

Today, France is still the epicenter of the Brethren ideology, revisited in light of the new ideological movements imported from the United States. Muslim Brotherhood members are still active within the civil society and conduct concrete action in favor of the most disadvantaged in the fields of education, health and poverty, but this action is framed to be at the forefront of larger movements that fight against all forms of social injustice and Western domination (intellectual, cultural, sexual, economic, political and military domination).

This framing of Brethren action is visible in the claims of “Muslim Sisters” who are at the forefront of “Islamic feminism”. They claim the wearing of the veil as a symbol of “liberation from white domination”, as well as the right to organize “single-sex meetings” to escape the “psychological pressure of men” and, for some of them, the “pressure of white women”.⁵²

This trend was accentuated and deepened during the health crisis, in 2020 and 2021. The “Muslim Sisters” widely disseminated the idea that they were the victim of “systemic Islamophobia” since the French government has imposed overnight the mask on the entire population, while law n°2010-1192 of October 11, 2010 prohibits “the concealment of the face in public space” and applies to the wearing of any “outfit intended to hide his face”. They put forward its stigmatizing character since it is justified by security reasons (risk) when it comes to Muslim women, and at the same time, it is defended by the government for health reasons (protection) when it comes to the rest of population. Such arguments gained a huge audience due to social media, and they further undermined confidence in the rulers in general and in the democratic system in particular.⁵³

This fundamental questioning of French laws and values facilitated the infiltration of institutions because those responsible suddenly found themselves helpless towards the claims put forward in the very name of the values they defend (freedom, equality, respect, tolerance, etc.). It also facilitated political entryism because these demands occasionally joined the claims of other movements against racism, xenophobia, sexism, or even social injustice, colonialism or imperialism.

After having been favorable to “modernity”, the neo-Brethren now want to “correct” it, that is to say to “Islamize” it. For them, the ideal order would be that of a society regulated mainly by a religious norm, but being confronted to French secularism, they derive more advantages from using it than from fighting it. Knowing that they are indebted to the secular principle that gives them the possibility of freedom of conscience, organization and worship, they accepted it legally but hijacked it ideologically. The implicit idea is that if the French are secular, it is because they no longer have a religion, or because they have lost their religion (Christianity), which makes France a legitimate land of preaching for Brethren missionaries.

Thus, unlike Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood has a real political project, based on a solid strategy of minority defense, which leads them to act as a community lobby. However, as the Muslim community (*Ummah*) is seen as “universal”, they do not separate what happens in the Middle East (in Yemen, Libya, or Palestine) of what is happening in Europe and in France. They are supported in this perception by two Muslim capitals: Istanbul (in Turkey), identified as a base for the main ideologues of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Doha (in Qatar), where several leaders of the movement reside since a long time.⁵⁴

The connection with foreign powers is also confirmed by the strategy of recruiting Muslim students from different countries who have come to study in France, especially in science and engineering schools, because of their acceptance of “modernity” and their “modernist” discourse. But in recent years, Muslim Brotherhood missionaries have also recruited among the Muslim elites and those disappointed with integration, that is to say among the third and fourth generation of Muslims, who have graduated from higher education (Master degree or PhD.) and who have managed to find work in intermediary bodies or large companies, but who feel discriminated against because of their origins or their religious convictions. For those persons, the “Brothers” put in place a very effective individualized integration process, which is akin to sectarian influence. It is based on a mental and psychological care, which goes through the personal valorization and the social integration into the Muslim community.⁵⁵

Today, the number of Brethren militants in France is estimated at about 20,000, distributed among around 200 associations, the best known of which are: the “Islamic Relief” (IR / SI), the “Young Muslims of France” (YMF / JMF), the “Muslim Students of France” (MSF / EMF), and the “French League of Muslim Women” (FLMW / LFFM).⁵⁶

These members act as “religious entrepreneurs” and work in disadvantaged areas by investing in places deemed “strategic” for the movement such as sports’ halls, football or basketball fields, prayer rooms, and private schools or private classrooms and lessons. All these places of socialization allow to control Muslim youth and to diffuse an Islamic norm (halal versus haram, the pure versus the impure, etc.) which gradually becomes dominant and forms an invisible border between the areas with a Muslim majority and the others.

These territories are recognizable by the number of halal food restaurants and alcohol-free places, as well as Islamic clothing stores (*Hijab* for women and *Sarouel* for men). There are also specialist bookstores and market stalls that distribute Brotherhood propaganda literature, using Koranic Arabic. In some areas, when the Islamic norm becomes dominant, it is almost impossible for Muslims to escape the pressure of the community and, for non-Muslims, to avoid the social control. None can stay and live without submitting to this norm.⁵⁷

Numerous testimonies from Muslims show that this “Islamist ecosystem” does not allow dissent, as shown by the case of young girls who are subject to derogatory remarks when they wear a skirt and who end up fleeing their areas and moving somewhere else as soon as they can afford it. Sometimes the pressure and intimidation go beyond street harassment and turn into death threats, especially when it comes to apostasy or blasphemy against Islam or Prophet Muhammad.⁵⁸ This means that the Muslim Brotherhood ideology could lead to violent extremism and give rise to ideologies like that of Sayyid Qutb (Jihadism) or Al-Qaeda whose leader today (Ayman Al Zawahiri) is a former member of the Egyptian branch of the movement.

Jihadists

From the etymological point of view, the word “*jihad*” means in Arabic “effort” whether spiritual, intellectual or physical, but historically the word means “holy war”, and was conducted during different periods of Islamic history by fighters for the “defense” (*jibād ad-daf‘*) or the “expansion” (*jibād at-talab*) of Islam. In contemporary times, the concept of “*jihad*” gave birth to an extremist ideology, called “jihadism”, which developed during the war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), leading to the creation the organization of Al-Qaeda.⁵⁹

Jihadism as a radical doctrine was first promoted by the “Afghan Arabs” back home at the end of the war in 1989. Thus, the French discovered this violent form of political Islam through the “Afghan Algerians”, those fighters who started a civil war in Algeria in 1992, before attacking France and French citizens in 1994 and 1995. In this perspective, the above mentioned Kelkal case (1995) marks the start of endogenous terrorism, affecting the second generation of immigrants and Muslim converts. Since then, terrorists are no longer of foreign origin only, but they hold also French nationality. Subsequently, Jihadists who were born or who grew up in France, participated in various civil wars abroad: the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995), the civil war in Somalia (1992-1995), the war in Afghanistan (2001-2002), the civil war in Iraq (2005-2007), the war in Syria and Iraq (2012-2017).

This last war consecrated Jihadism as a major current of Islamism in France, but it remains divided between two rival organizations, Al-Qaeda and ISIS, whose members can cooperate on the occasion of specific attacks, as shown by the Paris attack in January 2015: the Kouachi brothers claimed responsibility for the Charlie Hebdo attack on behalf of Al-Qaeda, while the third terrorist (Amadou Coulibaly) claimed responsibility for the attack on the Hyper Kosher store on behalf of ISIS. Ultimately, the latter organization (ISIS) attracted the greatest number of French Jihadists in Syria and Iraq between 2014 and 2017. It also arouse many terrorist vocations on the national territory in France, causing more than 300 victims between 2015 and 2021.

Several traits characterize the French Jihadists. First of all, the sociological analysis of their profile over the past few years shows that they are perfectly French-speaking and not Arabic-speaking.

They are young and they master the modern communication tools, especially the internet and social media. They are Muslims from all national and ethnic origins, with a good proportion of women and converts. Their radicalization trajectories show that they are predominantly from a Salafist socialization, which was then projected to Jihadism, but this link is not automatic: some Jihadists engage in the battlefield without necessarily being socialized in Salafi communities. In contrast, half of Jihadists went through prison before engaging in violent extremism and committing terrorist acts.⁶⁰

Besides, the psychological analysis shows that these Jihadists present weaknesses and vulnerabilities, but they are not “madmen of Allah”. They dream of humanitarianism and revolution, with an ideal of the “Holy fighter” (*mudjâbid*) who accomplishes a divine mission with heroic bravery. They see themselves as elected members of the Muslim community, who are capable of accomplishing, with abnegation and altruism, what the vast majority of Muslims are unable to achieve, because of their weakness or treachery. For some, these dimensions relate to personality disorders, but it is difficult to diagnose them because of the religious and ideological dimension of their engagement in political violence.⁶¹

Finally, the analysis of operating methods shows that these Jihadists have a predilection for urban terrorism and privilege targets which have little changed over the years: the Jews associated with the State of Israel; the police and the military staff, symbols of the state security apparatus; the journalists and the media held accountable for disinformation and the bad image of Islam and Muslims. More recently, threats to thinkers, professors and symbols of Western education have increased: actually, a history professor (Samuel Paty) has even been murdered for using caricatures of Prophet Muhammad in class.

All this demonstrates that Jihadism remains the most dangerous movement in France, and the armed wing of political Islam. Due to the persistence of internal and external factors that have contributed to its rise, it is unlikely to disappear in the years to come. Even if it is decreasing in intensity (for now, one to two attacks per year) and even if it is becoming more artisanal (knife or ram car attacks), its psychological impact remains intact and continues to widen the gap between the Muslim communities and the rest of the French population.

Millî Görüş

The Millî Görüş is a Turkish Islamic movement emerging in France but very active within the Turkish community in some territories. In recent years, it has also forged alliances with other Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to broaden the scope of its action and reinforce its influence. However, it does not have, at this point, an impact comparable to the main Islamist movements in France.

The name “Millî Görüş” literally means “vision of the religious community”. It was founded in 1969 by the former Turkish Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan, and developed, under the impetus of the Turkish diaspora members first in Germany, then in France, particularly in the region of Strasbourg. With the coming to power of Erdogan in 2014, the movement was taken over by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*Diyânet*) to serve the “pan-Islamic” policy of the Turkish president, insisting on the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and its historical links with the Arab populations of the southern Mediterranean.

The Maghreb was a dependency of the Ottoman Empire from the early 16th century to the late 19th century. Algiers became Ottoman in 1518, and Tunis is conquered in 1574. Only Morocco maintained relative independence from the Ottoman Empire. These historical links are recalled today by the militants of Millî Görüş and serve to forge alliances with the most influential and active movements within Muslim communities from the Maghreb.

Thus, after the attacks in 2015, the Millî Görüş joined the Muslim Brotherhood (UIOF) to denounce the police violence against the “Muslims of France”. The activists also opposed the law against “Islamist separatism” and organized protests against “Islamophobia” in many cities. But unlike their partners from the Brethren, the Millî Görüş do not rely on intersectional and decolonial ideologies to promote its ideas since Turkey was itself perceived as an occupying power by Arabs for a long time.

The movement benefits from the political and financial support of Turkey, which regularly organizes events in France. This support appears both in the social field as well as in online political communication and on social media. It aims to control the Turkish community and to anchor it ideologically to the Ankara regime.

DIGITAL COMPETITION

There is a digital competition between the various actors of political Islam in France. All of them use internet and social media to produce intense propaganda in French but also in Arabic and Turkish. This competition has evolved during recent years, leading them to dominate successively the online Islamist communication.

Before 2011, state actors dominated the digital space through institutional bodies and religious authorities, with a strong link with the regimes. Each Muslim country has a supreme religious authority, in the form of a “Council of scholars” (*Dar al-Iftâ*), which examines the religious questions submitted by the government and issues legal decrees (*fatwa*) applicable to citizens or state institutions.⁶² Depending on the regime, these “fatwas” may be advisory (as in Saudi Arabia) or binding on the government (as in the Islamic Republic of Iran).

All religious bodies and authorities are present on the web and have a digital communication tool, the power of which varies according to the country and the means made available to each authority. The Arab Gulf monarchies religious bodies, especially those of Saudi Arabia, are by far the best endowed and the most influential on internet and social media, thanks to financial and electronic resources made available to them.

All these instances are dominated by scholars and followers of Salafism and Wahhabism. Also, the preachers (*da'iyā*) who draw their legal arguments from these theological movements are much more important than all other doctrines of Islam. For example, the preachers affiliated with the Salafist movement had, until the end of 2020, more than 50% of Facebook and Twitter accounts than the preachers from all the other movements combined.

However, between 2011 and 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood preachers dominated the digital space thanks to online sermons and videos posted on YouTube. This domination is largely explained by the coming to power of a Brethren president in Egypt (Mohamed Morsi), as well as the appointment of a government dominated by this movement in Tunisia (Ennahda party) and in Morocco (PJD party).

Today, Muslim Brotherhood is much less present on the worldwide web because it is no longer in power in the aforementioned countries (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia) and also because its main sponsors (Qatar and Turkey) have reduced their financial and political support under their Western partners pressure. Actually, the Muslim Brotherhood has been declared, after 2013, a “terrorist organization” by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, and that was a determinant factor in losing its influence in the real and virtual space.

This left the field open to the more radical and violent movements like Jihadism. From 2014, the main representative of this movement, the Islamic State (ISIS) has experienced a rapid growth and largely dominated the web, with electronic publications distributed in several languages and on a

regular basis (*Dabiq*, *Dar al-Islam*, *Konstantiniyye*, etc.). At the peak of its power, ISIS could also count on more than 50,000 Twitter and Facebook accounts, very active to disseminate its propaganda.

From a strictly quantitative point of view, ISIS produced via its various “provinces” (*wilâyas*), the largest number of legal fatwas (around 50% of the total). Even if there are great variations according to the “provinces” (Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Nigeria, Caucasus, Afghanistan), the domination of this organization in terms of theological and legal production is indisputable on the considered period of time (2014-2017).

By comparison, the Islamic State (ISIS) has produced in its three years of existence, more fatwas and legal writings than all the member States of the Arab League combined (22 States) on the same period (2014-2017). This is all the more true as the religious authorities of these States were forced, most of the time, to issue fatwas in reaction to those issued by ISIS, leading to an inflation of legal decrees of the Salafist and Jihadist movement in a renewed digital competition context, under the media and popular pressure of the moment.

Today, the most effective tool of dissemination of Salafism and Jihadism remains the Internet and social media. The strength of the technological tools made available to Islamist preachers relies in the fact that they are accessible to all, and that their cost is very low compared to the sums committed by the Islamist movements and injected into the various religious institutions. In this regard, the Saudi scholars’ adaptability is remarkable: they knew how to use these new technological means to their advantage. Many Saudi sheikhs have millions of followers and they are today real opinion leaders within Muslim communities all over the world.

In addition, Saudi Arabia has had a virtual monopoly on pan-Arab media since the 1990s, which allowed it to influence Arab public opinion even more. Although it is not as efficient as the Internet, television remains a very important transmission vector, particularly in the Arab world where religious channels abound and where Islamist preachers from the Salafist movement are stars. By giving voice to the Salafism’s competitor, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Qatari channel Al-Jazeera, despite its media clout, has not countered the Salafist vision of Islam but only deepened the Islamization of Arab societies and the confessionalization of political debate.

Ultimately, both countries were alternately accused of supporting radicalization and extremism. Between 2017 and 2021, Saudi Arabia and Qatar even accused each other of supporting terrorism and presented the international community with alleged “evidence” of each other’s involvement in this support. This fratricidal war, in addition to the fact that it discredited the two enemy brothers, was the occasion of extraordinary publicity for the most violent groups, namely Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

TRENDS

The general perceptual trend⁶³ is a progression of radical Islamism in France, and this trend is supported by a cultural movement with numerous and diversified manifestations, converging towards the introduction of more religion in the public sphere and in the public debate. This trend is visible at the national level and can be observed through several phenomena revealing political, cultural and behavioral trends.

POLITICAL TRENDS

The promoters of Islamism do not all agree on the issue of political participation. Some radically oppose any participation in the political game, believing that it is a biased game which does not respect the basic principles of Islamic ethics and which is not worthy of their involvement, considering the risk of “losing their soul”. Others are more pragmatic and believe, on the contrary, that it is necessary to participate in the political game in order to be able to influence the course of

events and decisions about the Muslim communities: specific laws, community rights, exceptions and privileges, aids and subsidies, construction of mosques, etc.

In this last category of Islamists, two strategies of action have been implemented in recent years in France, with varying results and appreciation by the rest of the French population.

The first strategy is that of lobbying, and it consists of carrying out public and mediatized interventions intended to influence, directly or indirectly, the development or application of legislative measures as well as certain decisions of the public authorities that may have an impact on the Muslim communities. This was the case, for example, of demonstrations against the “global security law”, the “police violence”, or “face checks”, which have experienced a significant increase in recent months despite the restrictive pandemic context. However, lobbying also involves networks of influence in the economic and social field: those who deal with halal; those who deal with the repatriation of the bodies of the deceased; those who deal with the pilgrimage to Mecca, etc.

The second strategy is that of infiltration, and it involves the entry of Islam supporters (consultants, local elected representatives, spokespersons, etc.) into politics and media, in order to defend ideas favorable to the interests of Muslim communities, such as: regulation of halal, freedom to wear the veil in the public space, accompaniment of school trips by veiled women, pork-free menus in school canteens, etc.

These two strategies are very frowned upon in France when it comes to Muslims while they are implemented for other communities (Jewish, Armenian, etc.), which reinforces the perception of Islamophobia within the Muslim community.

Besides, France is a special case in terms of political lobbying because this practice has a very negative connotation as a legacy of the Jacobin and revolutionary tradition of France and is considered contrary to the general interest.⁶⁴ This very negative perception of lobbying has prompted activists of political Islam to engage in a long-term entryism strategy in which they work within an organization for decades, in the hope of gaining influence and a degree of power allowing their project to move forward.

Quest for representativeness

There is a recurring and passionate debate in France about the structuring of Islam. Some believe that Islam exists all over the world in its diversity, and it does not have to be an “Islam of France”, because religion belongs to believers and not to the secular State. Others believe that the Government must work for the structuring of “Islam in France”, in particular to prevent the most extremists from taking control of Muslim communities and promoting positions contrary to peace and security. The various ministers of the interior, in charge of worship, have been interested in the functioning of Islam, but it appears that any intervention by the State tends to legitimize its interlocutors, especially if it aims to support a project.⁶⁵

The absence of clergy in Sunni Islam, which is predominant in France, is sometimes analyzed as a lack of organization. It would lead to an absence of regulation, because there is no monopoly of religious interpretation. Therefore, violent radicalization could be seen as the result of a lack of “centralized organization” of worship, and that is why the successive French governments were pushing in this direction.

Currently, the only official body supposed to represent the “Muslim Faith” is the “French Council of Muslim Worship” (FCMW / CFCM), created in 2003 at the instigation of President Nicolas Sarkozy. This Council does not represent all the variety of French Muslims, and has a purely administrative character since it does not exercise any authority in matters of training and empowerment of imams or construction and maintenance of religious buildings.

Unlike the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths, the FCMW is statutorily organized under the Common Law of Association (Law of July 1, 1901 relating to the contract of association) in accordance with the “Framework agreement of 2001” signed by the Muslim federations.⁶⁶

This situation is not without consequence for the “Muslim Worship”, whose marginalization in relation to the general system of French religions can promote fundamentalist drifts and foreign interference. Muslim federations are often linked to foreign States, mainly Turkey, Algeria and Morocco, which use their consulate to finance a “consular Islam” (in accordance with the official Islam of their State) and to control the Muslim communities originating from their respective countries. Thus, Islam in France is today in a situation of “co-management” with these countries which largely finance mosques and send imams to France.⁶⁷

In addition, the FCMW suffers from a lack of representativeness and legitimacy in relation to the diversity of Muslims in France and their practice of religion. To overcome these weaknesses, the French government, under the presidency of François Hollande (2012-2017), had encouraged the creation of a “Forum for dialogue with Islam” (IDAI, 2015), but this initiative had no effect on the organization of Muslim worship. This is why the current government has encouraged, since 2020, the development of a “FCMW structuring in departmental bodies”.

In reality, Islam is already very well-structured on the national territory since a very long time, but this only applies to the “Muslim Brotherhood”. It is represented by the UOIF (Union of Islamic Organizations of France), established in France since 1983. Following its February 2017 congress in Le Bourget, it voted to change its name to “Muslims of France” (MF), which happens to be the reverse abbreviation in French of “Muslim Brotherhood” (*Frères Musulmans*, FM). Its solid establishment on the French soil is not put in doubt: it organizes every year the “Gathering of Muslims of France at Le Bourget”, an event attracting more than 350,000 visitors in three days.

This organization was formerly a member of the “French Council for Muslim Worship” (FCMW / CFCM) since 2003, but it left the Council in 2013 after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the support of the French government to the new Egyptian president, Al Sissi. Thus, the MF represents a current of political Islam (the Muslim Brotherhood) and an active minority which sets the tone in French society, but it is not representative of the diversity of Muslims in France, in particular those of other doctrinal traditions of Islam like Sufis or Liberal and progressive Muslims.

This is why new actors have appeared and are looking for institutionalization. Among the most publicized actors is the “Muslim Association for Islam in France” (MAIF / AMIF), founded in January 2019 by Hakim El-Karoui, a former adviser to the French government and close to President Macron.

MAIF is made up of two bodies. The first, a cultural association created under the 1901 Law, is intended to organize and certify financial flows linked to Muslim worship and to deal with “the economic regulation of the halal and hajj markets in France”. The objective is to collect funds from the actors of the Muslim ritual slaughter and the pilgrimage. The second, a religious association created under the 1905 Law, is supposed to deal with “the construction, arrangement, equipment, and renovation of mosques and prayer rooms”, but also the training of imams and leaders of religious associations. A third structure was created in 2021 to issue fatwas: the “Muslim Theological Council of France” (MTCF / CTMF).

All these structures express the need for structuring Islam and Muslim communities in France, but they have barely any territorial establishment or activists at the local level likely to promote their positions and actions.

Aware of these shortcomings, the current government seeks to provide the means for the development of this “Islam of France” by facilitating access to the status of religious association

which would allow, in particular, to benefit from tax advantages and remove any obstacle to the acquisition of buildings free of charge (donations and bequests), the income of which will be used to finance religious activities.⁶⁸

If the public authorities cannot force the local Muslim communities to organize themselves within the framework of the Law of 1905 on religious associations, they want to divert them from creating associations under the Law of 1901 on general associations by changing their means of control. This aims to limit the risks of taking power (putsch) of a religious association by radical elements aiming to expel liberal leaders in favor of a hard fundamentalist line, thanks to the establishment of a deliberating body that will decide on the membership of any new member. In addition, resources exceeding 10,000 euros from a foreign donor (State or person not resident in France) must be declared to the administration, which may oppose their payment.

For the government, this project constitutes a new step towards a better integration of Islam into the religious legal system in France and consequently towards a greater integration of Muslims into French society. However, on the ground it is not supported by the main actors who are moving towards a more political Islam.

Participation in elections

In electoral matters, the representatives of political Islam have no presence at the national level or in national political bodies (in Paris). Even ministers and government advisers from “diversity”, a term designating in France people of immigrant origin who are appointed as officials, are convinced secularists, opposed to Islamism and communitarianism, and that is why they are perceived as “traitors to the Muslim cause” by representatives of political Islam.

However, the French local political system can constitute an instrument at the service of the valorization of the religious network and provide resources to the Islamists. To do this, the representatives of political Islam follow two strategies during elections: on the one hand, creating their own lists and, on the other hand, infiltrating other parties lists.

The first strategy was implemented during the last municipal and European elections (2019). These two elections saw the birth of so-called “community lists”, which assumed religious affiliation to Islam. Thus, during the last municipal elections, the prefects⁶⁹ had identified 10 so-called “community lists”, the majority of which in the capital region, Île-de-France, and mainly presented in Nanterre, Clichy-la-Garenne, Châtellerauld and Joué les tours, under the banner of the Union of Muslim Democrats of France (UMDF / UDMF), which defines itself as a political party of “anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism and anti-colonialism.”

The Ministry of the Interior has spotted other lists in Gennevilliers, Garges-lès-Gonesse and Annecy as well as in the Lyon metropolis.

There are also other lists affiliated with the “Equality and Justice Party” (EJP / PEJ) which is a branch of the AKP, the party of Turkish President Erdogan.

However, these lists are extremely marginal and do not have, for the moment, national territorial electoral coverage, which explains their very low score at the national level. Thus, in the 2019 European elections, the list of the “Union of Muslim Democrats of France” (UMDF / UDMF) obtained only 0.13% of the votes.

Nevertheless, these community lists have a strong territorial presence, particularly in certain districts of the following cities: La Courneuve (in Seine-Saint-Denis), Montereau (in Seine-et-Marne), Maubeuge (in the North of France), and Vaulx-en-Velin (in the Rhône). For example, the UDMF won 40% of the vote in the Épinette district of Maubeuge during the 2019 European elections.⁷⁰

Because of this specificity (absence of national representativeness and very localized establishment), the “community lists” appear more as “partners” on the part of the political national majorities, which allows them to influence the local or regional political game.

As for the positioning of local elected officials, some denounce the “clientelism” at work in these territories. The districts inhabitants vote little, but when they vote, they do so with scores of 90%. This is what then allows them to have religious claims: prayer rooms, community sports halls, or mosques (the request for emphyteutic leases is seen as legal). These interactions are observable in the local political system where it is sometimes necessary to go through the mosque to find social housing or a job in the municipal team. This is the case, for example, in Aubervilliers, or Tremblay-en-France, or Mantes-la-Jolie.

For local elected officials, Islamism is not costly but offers advantages at the political level: obtaining power and influence, especially among underprivileged populations where religious representatives are recognized, respected and even arouse the admiration of their co-religionists. They can thus ensure the maintenance of social peace in exchange for certain “accommodations”.

In the French context, “accommodations” designate the arrangements, adjustments or adaptations made by French officials and elected deputies towards the representatives of political Islam for various reasons and in disregard of the laws and regulations in force. These “accommodations” relate to claims of a religious nature, which are contrary to the principles of “living together” (respect for human dignity, equality of the sexes, secularism and religious neutrality of the State, etc.).⁷¹

There are also, during an election period, cases of violations of article 26 of the Law of 1905, according to which “it is forbidden to hold political meetings in premises usually used for the exercise of worship”. However, some mayors of cities where there are areas with a strong Muslim community do not hesitate to go and address Muslim voters in a mosque during Friday prayers. The mayor would speak in the mosque to discuss, for example, the acquisition or the renovation of a facility for Muslims by the municipality.

State services are focused on violent radicalization and believe that “nonviolent Islamists” are better than “terrorist bombers”. But in doing so, the Government gives the impression that it abandoned the populations of disadvantaged areas, suffering today from the “Islamist norm” and pressure in their daily life.

In some areas, part of the violence turned against the mayors who had made promises to groups that gave them the votes they needed for their election, but were then unable to fulfil. Some elected officials are trying to buy social peace and find compromises with those who have become the new masters of these territories. This trend has been reinforced during the covid-19 crisis (2020-2021): not only there was a lack of health rules respect in these areas but also the health crisis has shown that charity can be a particularly powerful tool for entryism in French society. Many Muslim charities ensured, during the lock-down, distributions of food aid to populations who found themselves without resources and without aid from the State.⁷²

Participation in civil society

The participation of representatives of political Islam in civil society involves mainly the creation of community associations and the infiltration of student unions. Islamists have an associative establishment in many districts of the French suburbs, particularly around the capital, Paris. These associations are created under the statute of the Law of 1901 (culture), but they rather deal with “worship” activities (learning of the Quran, the rites of Islam, etc.). Administrative authorities and State representatives do not sufficiently control these associations, to avoid accusations of racism or Islamophobia. Police services are reluctant to close associative places of worship for fear of shifting the problem to the local communities (street prayers).

There is also a strategy of entryism into the associative network in some French cities with a strong Muslim presence, in particular in the north of the country (former industrial sites) and in the south of France (traditional host areas for Maghreb immigration). In these cities, the representatives of political Islam do not live on the margins of French society, but have infiltrated all fields of socio-economic life. They also invested the professional unions and the student unions, to assert their community demands and their religious points of view. For example, there is a trivialization of the women veil wearing in these representative bodies.⁷³

Some associations create a range of real estate companies or cultural associations in order to escape controls and be able to finance much larger activities or projects. This funding, which is not limited to religious buildings financing, is intended to segment entire areas, often undergoing urban renewal, through paramedical practices, community food stores, sports clubs, in short all the places of socialization that participate in these areas daily life.

There are also reports in these areas on illegal activities funding through “halal fast food” restaurants which might engage in undeclared income laundering, but also the practice of “prophetic medicine” by individuals suspected of radicalization (registered on S Records), fund transfers to suspicious people in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, or travel agencies specializing in pilgrimages to Mecca suspected of promoting the departures to combat zones. Some associations⁷⁴ receiving public subsidies were diverted and used to send money to relatives in Syria, or to finance the activities of Islamist leaders or organizations abroad.⁷⁵

Finally, the “Annual gathering of Muslims in France” held at Le Bourget, near Paris, is considered, by many observers, as “the largest gathering of Islamists in France” given the nature of the guests invited to participate in the debates (all related to political Islam) and the kinds of activities and products on display during this gathering, including for children.⁷⁶ All this means that the majority of French people perceived this event and some others alike, as moments of “Islamist propaganda” aimed at “Islamizing” French society further.

Questioning secularism

There is a strong questioning of secularism. According to the Law of 1905 on the separation of Churches and State, secularism is defined as the neutrality of the State with regard to religions and worships. However, this principle is not always respected: for example, some private confessional schools are financed, directly or indirectly, with public money. This is all the more shocking for the French population because these schools often promote values contrary to the Republic principles such as the veiling of little girls or single-sex hours in swimming pools, among other phenomena.⁷⁷

Other attacks on secularism are more symbolic but are more problematic in the French context. Some elected representatives of the Republic participate in “*Iftar*” (breaking the fast during Ramadan) which takes place at the foot of buildings, reserved for men and excluding women. In doing so, these local elected officials participate in the dissemination of Islamic norms in these areas and legitimize the role of religious actors by directing residents’ requests to imams. In some areas, imams have replaced social workers. They are no longer educators but they are religious men who do the work on the ground with young French people of Muslim faith.⁷⁸

Other visible forms of questioning secularism include: opening of prayer places in the workplace; offering halal foods in public professional circles; recognition of Islamic rules in matters of personal status (Muslim marriage, repudiation, polygamy, inequitable inheritance for women); custody of the children, which goes to the husband in the event of separation; setting up of Muslim cemeteries or separate squares in French cemeteries; authorization of Islamic finance and its restriction to Muslims only; institutional and fiscal recognition of Islam; tax deductions for Muslim organizations and associations; inclusion of Islamic alms (*zakat*) in the tax deductions calculation; development of Islamic political parties and lobbies to defend the

interests of Muslim communities; introduction of quotas for Muslims (positive discrimination) in administration, media, electoral lists, and for the hiring of Muslims.

While some of these requests are not problematic in terms of fundamental freedoms and the legitimate right to practice one's religion, guaranteed in any pluralist society (such as Muslim squares in cemeteries or the right to ritual practice), other proposals (gender inequality, polygamy, full veil) are not accepted in the current French political and social context marked by identity tensions and a rise in nationalism.

The motto of the French Republic contains "liberty, equality, fraternity", but these principles are increasingly eroded when it comes to the situation of Muslim women. In many areas of the national territory, a misogynistic and segregationist ideology has been gradually implemented due to successive renouncements by all the public actors, for fear of being accused of racism, or Islamophobia. For example, the celebration of religious marriages (without civil marriage at the townhall) is not sanctioned, and "administrative tolerance" is exercised towards polygamy as part of the "folklore" of the Islamic culture.⁷⁹

Regarding homosexuality, there is not only a taboo but also a risk of persecution against homosexual Muslims. In many territories, family and community pressure is far too strong to be able to assume a "coming-out". There are implications in economic terms, family isolation and social marginalization. This is all the more worrying as lesbians and gays of North African origin are not protected by State services, and the press remains silent regarding homophobic acts in French suburbs for fear of being accused of stigma or xenophobia.⁸⁰

Religious claims in the public sector

Claims of a religious nature in public services are constantly increasing and affect all State institutions and administrations. This phenomenon has been documented by the French deputies Éric Diard and Éric Poulliat, authors of the report "Radicalization in public services: prevent, detect, sanction" (2019). According to this parliamentary report, drawn up following the 2019 attack perpetrated by an employee of the Paris police headquarters⁸¹, there are "different levels of radicalization" in the public services:

First, public services considered as "pretty good" in countering Islamic radicalization such as the army, the gendarmerie, the police, the fire brigade, who are "best suited to the response against radicalization," especially the army whose fight against terrorism authorizes the back-screening of individual files. In addition, since January 15, 2020, cases of radicalization within the internal security forces and intelligence services have been subject to centralized monitoring. In terms of recruitment, the introduction of the principle of "prior authorization to secret-defense" before taking up any post within an intelligence service also goes in the same direction.

Secondly, public services considered "in the process of improvement" such as the national education, where the deputies noted "attacks on secularism and cases of apology for terrorism after the Charlie Hebdo attacks" (2015). Since then, the ministry has created a "radicalization referent" per educational academy.

The main religious requests in schools are: the introduction of Islamic courses within the framework of national education and private schools under contract; the right to establish completely private Islamic schools; the right to derogate from diversity (boys and girls) in certain activities such as sport; the request for "course exemption" for girls during their period; the right to wear the veil at school for girls; the exclusion of academic or literary works offensive or critical of Islam; the proposal of Islamic menus (halal) in school canteens.⁸²

In higher education, and despite the appointment of a “radicalization referent” in each university, there is still a reluctance on the part of the boards of directors to go against a strong cultural tradition according to which the University must remain a space of total freedom. However, the minister of higher education has provoked controversy in February 2021 by demanding an investigation into “the Islamic-leftism” in the French University.⁸³

Regarding sports, more and more associative sports’ clubs (football, basketball, boxing, and wrestling) are suspected of religious proselytism since they promote behaviors indicating Islamic norms in their internal regulations such as special requirements for playing football or for taking a shower. At the local level, sports structures intended to welcome and train young people are targeted by recruiters from radical Islam. But the 2018 circular allows local authorities to better detect and prevent the radicalization of young people.⁸⁴

Thirdly, public services “where the situation is difficult” such as the transportation sector. The parliament deputies, authors of the aforementioned report, indicate that: “At ADP [Paris main Airport, the second biggest in Europe], among the 80,000 personnel, 80 are followed for radicalization”, while these personnel intervene in a sensitive field requiring sometimes to have a red badge, allowing access to the airport tarmac, for example.

The same observation applies to the metro company of Paris, RATP (*Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens*). After the 2015 attacks, the parastatal company has been described as a “den of Jihadists”. The provisions of the Law of 22 March 2016 relating to the prevention and fight against incivility, public security and terrorist acts in public passenger transport, have made it possible to implement an action plan. Consequently, the sanctions at the RATP were numerous in 2016 and 2017, with 5 to 6 dismissals during the year, then they decreased: 2 dismissals in 2018 and only 1 in 2019.⁸⁵

Now, the RATP services systematically seizes the police service called SNEAS for verification before any recruitment or internal mobility to a sensitive position. Thus, since October 2017, there have been 6,542 referrals for recruitments leading to 177 negative opinions, that is 2.8% of all recruitments.⁸⁶

Regarding the health sector, the parliamentary report notes that the same phenomenon has also developed in recent years among health personnel, and that detection is particularly difficult because of the rules of medical confidentiality and the habit of settling matters internally and not by referring to the hierarchy.

Finally, there public services “where the situation is critical” according to the report, such as the penitentiary system. France has more than 500 detainees for terrorism and nearly 1,500 common law detainees who have become radicalized within prison. Radical Islam is widely spread among both wardens and inmates. Concerning the guards, since March 2019, the administration “systematically screens the successful prison supervisors” and the staff serving are entered in the file of reports for the prevention of terrorist radicalization (FSPRT). As for detainees, there are special units for the most radicalized, but the majority of other detainees remain under high pressure from their Islamist Inmates.

Religious claims in the private sector

Religious demands within French companies are increasing and they range from the provision of a prayer room to the right to pray during working hours without deduction of wages (three daily prayers of 15 minutes each performed during working hours); or the request of official holidays for Muslim employees, that is a nonworking day for the “Eid al-Fitr”, which marks the end of the Ramadan fast, and a nonworking day for the “Eid al-Adha”, which commemorates the sacrifice of Abraham.

Most of the time, employees' representatives denounce the Muslims dependence on company agreements which only grant them exceptions in the best cases when it comes to public holidays. In this regard, Terra Nova, a think tank close to the French Socialist Party (in power from 2012 to 2017), was the first to propose, in 2017, the creation of two public holidays for Muslims and Jews, instead of two Christian holidays (Pentecost and Easter).

As for fasting during the month of Ramadan, it does not only involve requests for leave, often requested by Muslim employees wishing to fully live this period outside the company, but it also involves changing working hours. Employees who have not taken their leave during this period often ask to arrive to work later and to leave earlier, which causes disorganization of work and complications in management.

In addition, these requests involve safety issues at work, especially for very physical or manual tasks, as fasting increases the risk and frequency of accidents for some tasks. The risk is higher when Ramadan takes place during the summer, or when it is marked by intense heat and long days. Sometimes, when the requested schedule adjustments are refused, practicing Muslims nonetheless fast at the risk of being exhausted or having accidents. Therefore, errors and malnutrition risks, coupled with a lack of sleep, increased especially because it is forbidden to drink from sunrise to sunset.

The responsibility of directors, site managers and team leaders is considerable depending on the number of people involved, the schedules of each, the need to serve customers and the physical risks (fatigue, syncope, falls, exhaustion, driving accidents) linked to the fatigue of employees who fasted all day long and then took part in the festive meals of Ramadan during the night without having hardly any rest.

The economic sectors most affected by this phenomenon are mass distribution, in particular cashiers, handlers and delivery drivers; as well as building, catering, hotel and security services. These are employment sectors that are particularly open to diversity and to a Muslim workforce of immigrant origin or from poor areas. The low level of qualification required for the tasks of cashiers, department employees, construction workers, drivers, waiters, and the exclusion that can contribute to the underemployment of qualified people from ethnic minorities, explain the over-representation of Muslim employees in these sectors.

The resulting frustration makes them privileged targets of Islamist proselytism, which precisely feeds on resentment. For example, many supermarkets and hypermarkets, located in peri-urban or industrial zones, are privileged places for radical recruitment. In these economic sectors, the visibility of Islamist infiltration are numerous and varied: traditional clothing, prayers in shops, use of Arabic in the workplace, religious conversions, stopping of machines for prayers, etc.⁸⁷

There is also a tendency to demand for "halal menus" and boycott non-halal food found in the supermarket shelves in areas with a Muslim majority, such as pork, or alcohol. To meet these demands, some companies have established themselves in mass distribution as a supplier of halal products.⁸⁸

Finally, despite the Laws of 2004 and 2010 restricting the veil wearing in public spaces, companies are often faced with refusals to remove the veil within professional activities. Employees who attacked their employers for discrimination on grounds of religion generally won their case in the last instance, before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), except when there was an internal company charter explicitly stating that the wearing of religious symbols in general, and not just Islamic symbols, is prohibited in order to promote neutrality in the customer relationship.⁸⁹

Even in this specific case, Muslim employees increasingly attack their employers for discrimination because they have examples of non-French companies located in France that have a policy of total

tolerance towards religious symbols. This is the case of the Swedish company IKEA, which adheres to an American model of management and opts for full religious freedom. Thus, its saleswomen are authorized to wear the veil in most stores. All of IKEA employees (not only Muslims but also other religions) can thus show distinctive religious symbols, even ostentatious, under French law, since the face of unveiled woman or other holder of turban is identifiable as being part of the company, thanks to a recognizable badge and uniform, and as long as the rules of safety and hygiene are respected, the identity of each being preserved.

Supporters of political Islam are increasingly referring to this kind of example, in order to ask for a modification of French law, arguing that it is their right to display religious symbols in the public space. Thus, the American-style management model of minorities based on religious identification is taking over the French model based on religious neutrality. This evolution is visible through many cultural trends of Islamism in the French society.

CULTURAL TRENDS

The Muslims culture in France is increasingly supported by an ideologization of Islam in the public sphere. There is an ideological offensive of Islamists which consists in affirming and enacting a certain vision of Islam, and in imposing it on Muslims in France, with a view to seizing power within the community and, more broadly, in the territories where these communities live. From a cultural point of view, the transformative action of Islamists on the “Maghrib Islam” over the past thirty years is a reality which has shifted “the Islam of the Chibanis (Elders)” from a traditional religion that is predominantly pacifist, to an ideology that is rooted in “combat identity” in the young generations of French people with an immigrant background. Given that the majority of the Muslim youth is from Maghrib origin, these trends are most visible among them.

Identity and religious awakening

The “Islamic revivalism” in the French society is polymorphic and involves many fields. It gets into all aspects of public sphere, and tends to impose a new social norm by taking advantage of individual freedom, especially among young Muslims, whether at school, in neighborhood associations or in local communities: religious motivation of children to play sports, separation of boys and girls, promotion of ethnic differences, and more assiduous practice of religion in the common space.⁹⁰

The recurring examples of conflicts, expressing the desire to have a Muslim specificity recognized in public services, are due to individuals and not to groups. Whether they are at the origin of demands or whether they come to support them, the role of this active minority reveals an increasingly visible and audible phenomenon.

This revivalism comes with a desire to affirm religious beliefs in the public sphere, in business, in school, as well as to seek recognition of Islamic faith in public institutions and organizations, which often conflicts with the principles of French secularism.

In some places of worship, there are also preachers who call to hatred and discrimination in speeches designed to mask their real message to the public authorities. Some of these preachers are foreigners, but others are French. It is therefore also an internal affair in France, and not only a matter of international relations with foreign states.

The identity and religious awakening observed throughout the Muslim world since the 2000s is having repercussions in France among Muslim communities, so that the social norm is much more religious today than 30 years ago. This identity awakening is joined by a religious revival of French Muslims, which provokes both an individual remobilization observed through numerous manifestations of faith, and by the emergence of new forms of militancy.

Along with this awakening of identity, opposition to secularism has grown leading to increase requests for the revision of the secular legal framework: in 2019, 37% of Muslims believe that “it is up to French secularism to adapt itself to the practice of Islam”, whereas they were only 29% in 2011 (progression of 8 points in 8 years).⁹¹

There has also been a strong increase in opposition to the 2010 Law, prohibiting the wearing of the full-face veil in the street (from 33% in 2011 to 59% in 2021). Among French Muslims, 68% believe that a young girl “should have the opportunity to wear the veil at school”, and 54% say that she “should be able to assert her religious identity at work”.⁹²

This renewal of faith is not the singular fact of some nationalities or particular ethnicities, or social classes, nor even of young people from Muslim families. There is a growing number of French converts who are drawn to Islamism, and who sometimes engage in radical Islam as shown by the phenomenon of French fighters in Syria.

The supporters of radical Islamism are now trying to take control of Islam in France. This proportion is certainly the minority (less than 10% of Muslims), but it is the most active; it covers the territory and exert psychological pressure on the members of the Muslim community who can receive threats or can be intimidated if they do not respect Islamic prescriptions: for example, if they start drinking alcohol in public or eating pork with other French people who are not Muslims.

The pressure of Islamists has worsened since the 2015 terrorist attacks, because the majority of Muslims has shown compassion and support to the French government and population, and has been perceived as “traitors” by the most radical Islamists, especially if they do not follow the precepts of Islam: for example, if they live in cohabitation with a French person, or they marry a Jewish person, or they announce their homosexuality to the community (coming out).

Thus, the Islamic revival is carried out under the influence of political Islam which harasses the faithful Muslims who are today the first victims. Because of this pressure, there is almost no religious freedom for Muslims in many areas of the France and almost no freedom of conscience in many suburban areas. The French areas called “Territories of Republican reconquest” in the official language are in reality places where Islamism has become “normal” in the sense of “ordinary” and “normative”.⁹³

Rise of communitarian Islamism

The trend towards “communitarian Islamism” is on the rise since 2015 and is related to a social phenomenon called “communitarianism”. This means a system of social organization based on small self-governing communities with an ideology that emphasizes the religious responsibility of the individual to the community and the social importance of religion in Muslim communities in France. This phenomenon shows a strong progression to such an extent that some French political analysts describe today’s France as an “archipelago of islands ignoring each other”, in other words a fragmented France where the social body, far from forming a unified nation by a democratic ideal, is based on very numerous communities living apart from each other, on ethnic, religious, or cultural bases.⁹⁴

This trend, perceived as a simple form of social organization in multicultural societies such as the United States or Canada, is badly experienced by the majority of French people and rejected by the elected representatives who believe, for the most part, that “communitarianism” is a threat to the nation spirit.

“Communitarian Islamism” is perceived as opposed to the principle of “national sovereignty” because it considers the French people in small groups as a combination of minorities, and splits up the territory in sub-areas governed by religious norms, which is contrary to the French idea of the

“indivisible national community”. By defining a new scale of structuring values, communitarianism atomizes society and prevents a continuity of application of the French Republic laws and values. As some areas are dominated by specific communities, sovereignty is not exercised over these territories: for example, schools burned down, the police have difficulty entering these areas, firefighters are often attacked, etc.⁹⁵

More importantly, “communitarian Islamism” is perceived as opposed to the principles of French secularism, called “*laïcité*”, because it challenges the very idea of “living together”. By defining a so-called “Muslim community”, this ideological trend places ethnicity and religion above French citizenship and national identity. In addition, by demanding that the French Republic upholds specific religious claims (regarding equality between men and women, food standards, etc.), this Islamism participates in a process of splitting up the national community on religious basis.

This tendency towards communitarian Islamism worries the majority of French citizens, especially as it develops over many parts of the national territory, favoring the emergence of a counter-society aspiring to live according to its standards that are not always in conformity with the laws of the Republic.

The concentration of Muslim populations in some territories is due to the history of immigration in France and has been reinforced by the newcomers’ significant tendency to settle among the diaspora already present in these territories. This is explained by the diaspora contribution to reduce the cost of integration and particularly that of obtaining information on housing and employment. In addition, this dynamic is emphasized in France by the “Social housing policy” which contributes to the creation of geographic concentrations that are detrimental to the integration and diversification of the population.⁹⁶

Since the 1980s, immigrant populations have in fact been gathered in some territories. In the capital region, “*Île-de-France*”, for example, this was particularly true in “Seine-Saint-Denis” and in “Val-de-Marne”, where the rate ranges from 15% to 30% of immigrants for “Seine-Saint-Denis” and from 13% to 21% for “Val-de-Marne” today. Therefore, the creation of communitarian Islamism also results, indirectly, from policies for social housing allocations and immigration settlement which induce a concentration of populations with identical origins in the same place.

Settling populations in the same areas has generated specific problems for Muslim communities (violence, drugs, unemployment, etc.). Then, the “*quartiers difficiles*” (difficult districts) were almost emptied of all intermediate bodies (administration offices and small enterprises). Consequently, people who have stayed are the ones who cannot afford to leave these territories.

The social and economic dimensions of communitarian Islamism should not be underestimated. Difficulties in accessing employment and inequalities in the broad sense, are economic and social causes of the phenomenon, and a prelude to a potential separation from the rest of French society. On the social ground, the Islamists have thus fed on inequalities and the lack of integration of immigrant populations from North African, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Turkish origins.⁹⁷

This concentration of population of immigrant origin and of its descendants led to the creation of territorial enclaves in which religious principles and prohibitions of Sharia (Islamic Law) would apply. For years, “ghettos” have been developed in working-class areas, separating them from the rest of the French population. They form an environment labeled as an “Islamist ecosystem”⁹⁸ and marked by phenomena of sectarian influence providing a fertile ground for cutting off the rest of French society.⁹⁹

Besides, Muslim populations, geographically kept apart from the rest of the French population, are often influenced by religious intolerance, as well as gender and racial inequalities existing in their country of origin.

The French government seems to have become aware of the phenomenon by identifying “Republican reconquest districts”. On November 27, 2019, the Minister of the Interior (Gérald Darmanin) published a circular making “the fight against Islamism and community separatism” a new priority for the action of the Government officials in each region or French territory (Prefects).

In addition, many young people use religion to show a form of rebellion, which does not necessarily mean violence, but in any case, is an inversion of the norms hierarchy and an offensive vision of the religion, not only with regard to the French non-Muslims but also with regard to their co-religionists.

As for this phenomenon, President Macron showed his determination to fight any form of “communitarian separatism” during his trip to Bourtzwiller on February 18, 2020, by affirming that: “In the Republic, political Islam has no place”. He was followed by the Minister of the Interior who also declared: “We must be intractable with community abuses and separatism.”¹⁰⁰

The porosity between communitarianism in general and Islamist radicalization is increasingly invoked by French authorities, but it is nevertheless far from being obvious. Communitarianism does not necessarily lead to radicalization in the sense of breaking away from society, and this radicalization does not automatically generate violent extremism and terrorism.

Moreover, “inter-communities violence” is increasing, showing a decline of the State’s control over the national territory. For the French public opinion, one of the most significant episodes of this loss of control took place in June 2020 in the city of Dijon, in Eastern France. The media tracked three days of clashes between members of the Algerian and Chechen communities (around 200 armed people), who came from all over France to avenge a young Chechen who had been attacked by a member of the Algerian community.¹⁰¹

Facing this kind of violence, the French police hesitates to intervene because policemen fear either being targeted by each community members, since they are perceived as “foreigners” to the territories where they are taking action, or being accused of “Islamophobia” and police violence at a time when the “Black Lives Matter” movement is gaining in importance in France and is spreading within Muslim communities.

Salafization of ideas

Salafization is the fixation of Salafi beliefs in categories of thought defined by dogmatic denominations. It is a process that aims at intellectual and cultural control of French Muslim citizens by exercising more symbolic power and by enforcing strict religious obedience. The main tool for applying Salafi-based ideas is the “ready-to-think” religious concepts for community life and for social and economic interactions to which ordinary citizens must submit under social pressure or the threat of retaliation (intimidation, marginalization, aggression, etc.).

In this perspective, many French territories have experienced a greater diffusion of concepts that are specific to Salafism (Sharia, Islamic State, caliphate, etc.), and a Salafization of ideas resulting from French democracy such as the “Shura” presented as the Islamic equivalent of the “Election” in the French Republic system.

The privileged channel for this Salafization of ideas and concepts is internet and social networks, which are the main source of information and the main tool of interaction among young Muslims in France. However, this channel is today dominated by the Salafi networks of Islam and offers very few progressive interpretations and liberal readings of religion.

In addition, the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014, and the attacks it claimed in France in 2015, contributed to the dissemination of the Salafi-Jihadist ideas of this

organization via elaborate and available propaganda materials published in French on internet and social networks. Given that this terrorist organization remained in power until the end of 2017, it attracted hundreds of French fighters who bolstered its credibility, and facilitated the deployment of its ideas in France, mainly: Sharia, Islamic State and Caliphate.

Despite the fall of ISIS in 2017 and the death of its leader Al-Baghdadi in 2019, Salafi ideas have persisted on internet and social networks. They were discussed and sometimes defended by some French Islamists who promoted the cultural heritage of medieval Islam and echoed the political concerns of the French immigrants' countries of origin in Africa and the Middle East.

Besides, the movement of popular uprisings during the Arab Spring (2011) contributed to the Salafization of ideas, because it allowed Salafi political parties to gain visibility in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, among other Arab countries. This access to the public space and opinion, even if it showed the limits of the solutions proposed by these parties, favored the diffusion of Salafi ideas and popularized typical concepts of Salafi Islam such as: *ummah* for nation; *shûra* for consultation; *hurriyya* for freedom; *musâwât* for equality; *‘adâla* for justice; *hakimiyya* for governance, etc.

Even though the Islamists were overthrown in Egypt in 2013, other parties of political Islam remained in power in Tunisia (*Ennahda*) and in Morocco (PJD). In the latter country, Islamists used their allegiance to King Mohamed VI as the official “Commander of believers” to undertake an extensively confessionalization of Moroccan society and of Moroccan fellows who live abroad especially in France where Moroccans represent the second largest Muslim community in number.¹⁰²

In addition, the Tunisian Islamists impact in France, represented by Ennahda party, was even greater because they managed to offer a decent image of political Islam to the West, as they accepted a pacific transition of power. In particular, the head of Ennahda party, Rached Ghannouchi, who became, in the meantime, president of the Tunisian Parliament (ANP), succeeded in reformulating Islamic concepts in terms that are understandable and acceptable to French leaders, claiming to work for a “Muslim democracy” in Tunisia, referring explicitly to what happened in France for the “Christian Democracy”.¹⁰³

In doing so and given the Islamist influence networks on the two shores of the Mediterranean, the impact of this Islamist ideas presentation was huge in France, especially that Tunisia has very strong historical ties with France and has been presented in the media since 2011 as “the only democratic success of the Arab spring”, showing the evidence of a possible coexistence between the political Islam and the parliamentary democracy.

All this contributed to a more confessionalization of political ideas and to a reinterpretation of the socioeconomic realities in the light of an Islamic frame of reference that is far from the usual framing of French political science. There again, there was a revival of Islamic political reflection which confronted the dominant reading grids and resulted in opposite ideas promoted by regimes in Tunisia but also in Turkey.

This development goes hand in hand with the progression of cultural relativism and a questioning of the universalism underlying the French approach. It leads to think, for example, that women's rights may vary according to cultures and societies. This differentialist logic has benefited, in recent years, from ideological movements such as “Cancel Culture”, “Woke Culture” and “Intersectional Studies”.¹⁰⁴

There is also a rise of the idea of a “Muslim nation” (*ummah*), in the sense of a universal community of Muslims, without distinction of nationality or ethnic origin. This idea has continued to progress over the past decade, even though Muslims do not form a homogeneous block, nor a united and indivisible group. In France, Islam is even more pluralist, and Muslims are split between the national

realities of their countries of origin, their ethnic affiliation, and disparate religious practices (e.g. the Islam of Moroccans is different from the Islam practiced by Turks).¹⁰⁵

This trend to reinterpret political concepts in the light of Islam has led to reconsider what makes the specificity of the French situation, namely the concept of “*Laïcité* / Secularism”. This concept was not only questioned with regard to its meaning (what does secularism mean today?), but also due to the historical context of its development (in 1905, it was about the separation of Churches and State). Now, the French concept is also reconsidered with regard to its ideological objectives and social affairs.

French secularism is more and more perceived by Islamists as the expression of “atheism” and translated in this meaning into Arabic (*dabriyya*). The fact that the government wants to defend secularism is thus presented as the will to impose atheism on Muslims in France, and prevent them to freely live their faith and freely practice their religion. In addition, given that other religious communities, such as the Jewish, are not “bothered” in their religious practice and visibility in the public space, Islamists present the officially promoted secularism as a deliberate policy of discrimination against the Muslim community alone.¹⁰⁶

Today, France is facing a paradoxical situation: while the French idea of secularism (*laïcité*) is defended by the government as protective of all religious communities and ethnic minorities, it generated an opposite perception in the Muslim community where secularism is perceived as the State driven discrimination against them. This is the most perceptive result of the confessionalization of political ideas by Islamists in France, but it has also consequences on language, behavior and social activities.

Salafization of language

Beyond the integration of an entire Arabic vocabulary from Islamic history and culture into the everyday French language (“Ramadan, cadi, ouléma, imam, fatwa, mektoub, jihad, califat, oumma, zakat, salafisme, jihadisme,” etc.), the Salafization of language concerns the daily and recurring uses of words and expressions that have become idiomatic in French. Young people of Maghrib immigration have introduced into the French language several words borrowed from the dialects of their parents (Moroccan Arabic, Algerian Arabic, and Tunisian Arabic). These words are today integrated into the speech of some young people in their daily communications, as shown in the following examples: “wesh!” (what!), “kiffer” (appreciate), “seum” (venom, rage, from the Arabic “semm”), etc.

These lexical interferences between French and Arabic could have been considered as normal and related to the usual contact of languages if the lexical borrowings in French was not imbued with religiosity linked to Islam. This is the case, for example, in the frequent use of the expression “*Insh'Allah*” (God’s willing) regarding every action considered or planned in the future, because the person firmly believes that its realization depends on of the divine will and not of his personal will.

The use of “*W'Allah*” (I swear by God) is also typical of this integration of Islamic words and values telling thereby the sincerity of their faith. Today, almost all sentences in everyday language of young people begin with “*W'Allah*” in the French suburbs.

Finally, and this is the most important element, the Salafization of language involves the integration of Islamic concepts referring to standards which are often contrary to the values of the French Republic. Some social workers observe trivializing standard Islamic level of language: it is the case for example in the use of the word “*hshûma*” to describe the “shame” of violating a religious prescription. Beyond that, it is the frequent use of the word “*harâm*” to designate the religious prohibition or, literally, “sin” and “sinful actions.”

The word “haram” is used to designate in Arabic all that is prohibited by religion. It comes from the root [h/r/m] which literally means “forbidden” and which refers to anything that has been made “illegal” by the Quran or by Tradition (Sunna), as opposed to “*halâl*” (permitted/legitimate).

This Salafization of language has become the norm in many territories of France, and is spreading to all youth, not only young people of North African or Sub-Saharan origin. These linguistic uses are not secularized and do not promote emancipation nor freedom. Based on a religious reference, they disseminate ideas contrary to individual freedom, gender diversity and equality between men and women. However, the French school insists, through its curricula and education, on these values (freedom, equality, etc.), which leads to the creation of a “double standard” for young people. Consequently, they undergo, with full force, a “conflict of standards”: they are torn between the Western and liberal standards of French society and the Islamic and conservative standards of their family and their close environment.

This inner conflict can affect the mental health of young people thereby causing personality disorders. This duality of norms constitutes a favorable ground for a potential identity schizophrenia. It has also often been analyzed by terrorism specialists as one of the characteristic features of young people profiles who have fallen into radicalization and violent extremism.¹⁰⁷

BEHAVIORAL TRENDS

Individual behaviors in Muslim communities become more dependent on social norms which are largely affected by Islamic culture. Islamists determine most of what is considered as morally “acceptable” or “unacceptable” in the Muslim communities of France.¹⁰⁸ Imposing religious categories on Muslim citizens behavior is related to applying strict obedience to the religious norm. The main tool for implementing these rules is the “morality police” which involves people who make remarks on clothing and may harass others for their free behavior. These are codes of behavior for community life and social interactions with which ordinary citizens must comply under social pressure or threat of retaliation (intimidation, marginalization, aggression, etc.).

The behavioral trends are expressed today in many different ways:

- a) **Visibility:** Visibility consists of making visible, or imposing the visibility of certain practices in the public space, such as “street prayers” or “prayer rooms” in public buildings, etc. From the Islamist point of view, this visibility is justified by the lack of Muslim prayer places and by the French authorities’ refusal to grant authorizations for the opening or construction of new prayer places. However, this explanation does not stand when it comes to “prayer rooms” in the private enterprises for example.
- b) **Normalization:** Normalization is a process through which behaviors claimed to be “Islamic” are becoming “normal” in French society. In other words, the “Islamic standard” (e.g. *halal* versus *haram*) is imposed beyond the strict circle of Muslim communities. This standardization particularly comes forward through the demand of “pork-free menus” for children in many school canteens, in Muslims-populated areas, and in administrative detention centers where detainees of Muslim faith predominate.¹⁰⁹
- c) **Habituation:** Habituation consists of teaching and transmitting children and young people gendered habits legitimized by a reference to Islam, such as the obligation to take a shower in underwear in the collective changing rooms of football clubs for young boys, or the exemptions requests from school swimming pools for young girls refusing to wear swimsuits¹¹⁰. Among adults, more and more outfits deemed “Islamic” are visible, such as the “*Saruel*” (large short pants) for men, or the “Fashion Hijab” for street clothes for women, as well as the bathing “Burkini”¹¹¹, the “Sports’ hijab” for outdoor physical activities.¹¹²

These types of phenomena have concrete consequences on social interactions. In several areas, street and public space have become places where pressure on women not having the “right outfit” has been reported, and where the presence of young women in cafes is seen as an “exhibition” which deserves reprimand.¹¹³

Veil Expansion

Women’s veil is expanding in French society while getting evolved in shapes and colors, which indicates a progress in Islamist influence. The type of veil varies according to the traditions of the country of origin. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, for example, the blue *Burqa* (full veil) prevails. The black *Chador* is the most widespread Iranian form of the female veil, consisting of a large cape covering the head and body, and imposed on women by Khomeini since the “Islamic Revolution” of 1979. In the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Emirates, etc.), women cover with *‘Abāya*, wide cape worn over outfits, sometimes associated with the *Jilbāb* and the *Niqāb*, a loose veil that covers all the body and leaves only the eyes visible. Finally, the Egyptian *Hijāb* is also a loose veil, dark in color, which covers the head, neck and shoulders but reveals the face and hands.

In the Maghrib countries, marked by the tradition of Sunni Maliki Islam, women traditionally wear the “*Hāik*” (white Algerian veil) or the “*Safsāri*” (white Tunisian veil), a large silk fabric, white in color, which is worn over outfits. However, this traditional veil has been competing since the end of the 1980s by other types of veil imported from different regions of the Muslim world. The pressure is such that the traditional white veil has almost disappeared in the Maghrib, and is no longer worn by French descendants of Maghrib immigrants who wear only the black veil imported from Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or the Islamic Republic of Iran. This trend happened during the last three decades.

However, with the rise of political Islam, each type of veil has become the visible expression of belonging to one of the identity movements and militant trends. Whereas this choice is sometimes conscious, it is most of the time unconscious among women, depending on their religious culture and their activism.

In this internal competition to Islamism, certain types of veil have taken precedence over others in Muslim communities in France. For example, the “*Hijāb*” has been very successful among young women when the Muslim Brotherhood movement was in power, especially after the election of the Brethren’s president, Mohamed Morsi, in Egypt (2012-2013). Nevertheless, the Salafists spread the veil called “*Jilbāb*” as a distinctive sign of the “virtuous woman” and it became predominant after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (2013).

At the same time, the black color of political Islam has been promoted to the detriment of the white color, characteristic of traditional Islam. The white veil has been so marginalized that young Muslims do not even know today that it has been an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Maghrib societies for centuries.¹¹⁴

In France, since the Laws of 2004 and 2010¹¹⁵, the veil has become a political marker and an identity claim. For activists of political Islam, it is a rallying sign and a tool for political communication. Some women also claim it in the name of anti-racism and the fight against postcolonial domination. Some feminists even defend the veil in the name of “free choice”, putting aside its political and ideological dimension. In the name of “religious freedom”, they accept attacks on gender equality and the persistent of a sexist patriarchy. All of them have renounced French universalism in favor of cultural particularism.¹¹⁶

However, this question is highly debated among French women of Muslim faith. Some of them believe that the veil is a denial of freedom, whatever some veiled women say. For them, it is also a denial of equality between men and women. In addition, it leads to a separation between the

Muslim community and the rest of the society, perceived as non-Muslim. Symbolically the veil wearing is sometimes justified by the fact that women would arouse, without the veil, the desire of men. This Islamist “ideology of shame” is progressing in France, but saying that a woman has to hide her body and hair if she wants to be in the public space is not accepted by the majority of French society, which is traditionally liberal regarding mores and relations between men and women. On the ground, however, the situations are more complex because many women wear the “*Hijâb*” regardless of the Islamists injunctions, just to avoid “street harassment”.

In short, the veil is seen in France as a real to the very idea of universalism and equality between man and woman. The “Islamic veil” phenomenon particularly worries the French authorities because it is now spreading in certain working-class areas to little girls who are veiled at a very early age. Even though these cases are still in the minority, they are most visible.

And last but not least, the lock-down following the covid-19 crisis gave the opportunity to an Islamist ideological offensive explaining that fully veiled women (*burqa* and *niqâb*) were naturally protected against the virus, and that the French authorities – by imposing the mask on face and social distancing – only conform to Islamic prescriptions on veiling and on the separation of sexes. Many Islamists have mocked the “French paradox” which consists in setting fines for veil wearing by Muslim women and making mandatory the mask wearing during the health crisis.

Halal Expansion

The word “*halâl*” means “allowed, legal” and is opposed in Arabic to “*harâm*” (forbidden, illegal). Halal concerns primarily “food” in a general sense, but it has a broader meaning that refers to anything that is consistent with the ethical and moral principles of Islam.

Food prohibitions are cited in the Quran, in the *surah* entitled “the Table” (*Al-Mâ’ida*):

“Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah , and [those animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you [are able to] slaughter [before its death], and those which are sacrificed on stone altars, and [prohibited is] that you seek decision through divining arrows. That is grave disobedience. This day those who disbelieve have despaired of [defeating] your religion; so fear them not, but fear Me. This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. But whoever is forced by severe hunger with no inclination to sin – then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.” (Quran, 5, 3. Author’s translation).

Due to the explicit mention in this verse of the word “*khinzîr*”, which has been interpreted to mean “swine, pig, pork, hog”, the meat of this animal is considered “haram” (prohibited, unlawful) by all Muslims, and thus is not consumed. For the majority of scholars, it is even forbidden for Muslims to breed or trade this animal.

In Islamic culture exist other dietary restrictions such as dogs, cats, or monkeys, as well as any animal not sacrificed according to Islamic ritual. But these prohibitions are lifted in the event of constraint or hunger, without any other possibility of food or intention to sin.

Today, “halal” mainly refers to the method of ritual slaughter (*dhabîhah*), that is the way to kill the animal and spray blood, being oriented towards Mecca (*qibla*) and invoking the name of Allah (In the name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate / *Bismi Allabi ar-Rahmân ar-Rabîm*). The acting person must belong to the category of “People of the Book” (Muslim, Christian or Jew). This is why Muslim theologians generally consider Jews “kosher” meat as “halal”, since the animal is slaughtered in conditions close to Islamic rules.

In France, Muslims do not know what is going on in the slaughterhouses, but they conform to community when it comes to the “legality” of meat. In addition, the ritual slaughter method is subject of controversy: sanitation affairs, animal suffering, certification and control of the meat, etc. But “halal products” are very flourishing and they sharpen financial appetites because they encompass almost all products today. Many economic sectors are now following this “halal standard” (hotels, cosmetics, applications for smartphones, etc.) thus contributing to a global trend of “halalization” of society.¹¹⁷

At the same time, the “Islamic corporate” has become a reality in France, succeeding in imposing its standards: adapted hours for work, interruptions for prayers, separate toilets for men and women, specific spaces equipped for ablutions and prayers, etc.¹¹⁸

Halal is in any case a very profitable market, expanding and globalizing, weighing 2000 billion dollars per year. It represents 6 billion euros in France, but it is not controlled by religious institutions, unlike the kosher industry for the Jewish community.

The entrepreneurs in this market are not all Muslims and do not always master the “halal” certification which is controlled by Islamists, the only ones who have the legitimacy to define the “halal standard”.¹¹⁹

These entrepreneurs have understood the double normative and financial power of halal, that is to say the pressure that can be exerted by Muslim consumers, hence the importance of “Islamic marketing” in this halal industrial machine. This means that the halal is not a neutral standard and can have consequences in terms of expanding the communitarian logic and isolation of Muslims from the rest of French society. This is true for example with regard to the food standard, which is, at present, the most significant in the field of halal. Many local elected officials observe that the situation has worsened in recent times, leading to the separation of children during meals in school canteens, and the “moms” are at the forefront of the battle to impose Islamic standards of halal at school meetings.¹²⁰

More broadly, Islamism is now at ease with neoliberalism: the halal economy makes the junction between economic liberalism and Islamic fundamentalism. In France, it participates in the trivialization of the religious norms by the market. In many French suburbs and on social networks, this trend has created a “halal ecosystem” which puts pressure on people exposed to it. This ecosystem promotes a social norm that distinguishes Muslims from non-Muslim citizens, and tends to further isolate the Muslim community from the rest of the French population.

Violence Expansion

Social networks have become a daily reality that accompanies and structures the lives of Muslims in France. Even if the nature and importance of the network (family, friends, personal, professional) vary from one person to another, many produce informational and emotional content through their exchanges and interactions with others. These links between individuals create e-groups or virtual communities that come together around a certain number of questions, themes or shared centers of interest.¹²¹

The Islamic networks thus formed are sometimes designed as a social structure influencing the behavior of individuals, and sometimes as an ecosystem acting on the psychology of groups. Whether it is the roles assumed in the personal network (family, friends) or the links forged within the framework of a professional network (work relations), there is a strong tendency towards the expression of hatred on these social networks.

Hatred has become commonplace in the “Digital Wild West” represented by the social web. Far from fostering dialogue and opinions exchange, social networking has been invested by radical

minorities who act like “haters” and “trolls”, spending their time to vent their anger and resentment on others. These individuals attack their target verbally, hidden behind nicknames and fake profiles. Some of them have been repeatedly reported to platforms, deleted and then reactivated under a new name.

Anonymity is, in fact, one of the powerful engines of digital hatred because it offers the possibility of carrying out a verbal aggression with complete impunity. Hatred speech produces an effect of devaluation that damages the image of the attacked person, and it remains permanently visible on Internet. The power of these social networks enables the viral dissemination of hate messages, and forms a global sounding board with considerable echo and destructive impact on victims, which results in many attempted suicides.

Paradoxically, the existing legal texts characterize hateful content by linking it to specific acts such as “racism” or “anti-Semitism”, and sometimes “apology of terrorism”. However, the demarcation of these forms of hatred directed against people belonging to the same community remains difficult to establish and counter.

The role of the internet in accelerating and amplifying radical Islamists’ hate speech has been proven. In France, the court found 10 people guilty of harassment and one of making death threats against a young woman accused of blasphemy.¹²²

Not only has the Internet become a kind of repository or universal library for all radical Islamists, but it also allows the dissemination on a planetary scale of certain preachers’ messages who clearly go against democratic values such as the prohibition of “shaking the hand of a woman”, or “sitting on a chair on which a woman sat”, or “eating with Christians” or “having Jewish friends”, etc.¹²³

The fight against hate preachers is not easy because they are often hosted outside French territory. In France, however, the authorities estimate the number of preachers who disseminate hate speech against democracy at around 60 people. But they are difficult to stop because they often use a “double language”: in French, their speech is smooth, metaphorical and civilized while in Arabic, it is polysemic and subversive, drawing on fundamentalist doctrines of Islam. They present themselves as “victims” of the West in the general and the French government in particular.

Victimhood Expansion

Islamists nurture a sense of victimhood within the Muslim community. The victimhood discourse is carried by people who claim to be “victims of the French system” and who justify their anti-French or anti-social behavior by this positioning as a victim. For example, many Muslims of Algerian origin present themselves as victims of an all-powerful State repression, and they view France as nostalgic for its colonial past. In this regard, socialization role should not be underestimated, in particular the stories and narratives built around the Algerian war (1954-1962) which fuel the rejection of the French and hatred towards France.

Besides, it is in the shared criticism of the State that the junction takes place between anti-colonial and anti-racist networks on the one hand, and Islamists on the other hand, all come together to criticize the French state. Many community associations receive subsidies from the government, and still they spread victimhood and guilt, using a discourse that promotes clash between “them” (Westerners) and “us” (Muslims).

From this perspective, the political Islam rhetoric is the same regardless of the area of the country: wherever the Islamists are located, they present themselves as victims of the system, whereas their victims among their coreligionists urge the government to protect them for Islamist pressure and threats.

From the Islamist point of view, “French Islamophobia” has increased in recent years, specifically since the major attacks of 2015, as a fear (phobia) of Islamist terrorism. It is now presented in the public debate as “racism against Muslims”, aimed at justifying discrimination against them in France and a warlike policy against Muslims outside France.

In recent years, the propagators of the Islamophobia concept have been joined by anti-racist and decolonial activists such as the “Indigenous of the Republic” (*Les Indigènes de la République*). According to this network, France would inflict “ideological colonization” on Muslims, and the French State would be “Islamophobic by nature”. In other words, there would be a “systematic Islamophobia” deriving from the colonial heritage of France.

In doing so, the anti-racist fight against Islamophobia leaves the door open to collaboration with Islamists who also denounce “State racism”. Under the guise of the “right to be different”, they infiltrate secular society, playing on guilt. These groups deploy a “victimization protocol” which takes civil society actors hostage in the name of Islamophobia and prevents the differentiation of social action from political activism.¹²⁴

Thanks to this objective alliance, Islamists have been able to prosper by presenting themselves as victims under the guise of combating racism. This communication strategy echoes the official reactions of many Islamic governments like Pakistan, and of leaders like Erdogan, president of Turkey, who have chosen to describe France, on several occasions, as “Islamophobic”, thus allowing the perception to settle that Muslims are victims of persecution and humiliation because of their religion.¹²⁵

The challenged critics of religion go beyond the legal framework defined by the Pleven law of July 1st, 1972, sanctioning incitement to racial hatred towards religions. They are particularly numerous among French Muslims who have a higher sensitivity to remarks or questions relating to their religion.

This is due in particular to the fact that in the Muslim-majority districts, the religious norms and actors have become a “regulatory authority” only capable of providing an order form in the absence of law enforcement. But this development has resulted in an ethno-religious fusion of concerns and interests between disparate populations that have Islam as a common factor, that is to say, the Muslim communities originating in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

However, this victimhood discourse is driven by geopolitical reasons such as France’s military intervention in Libya (2011) and in Mali (2013), or French opposition to Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean (2020), and it serves to discredit the French policy and model of integration. The goal is not to reach immediately the heart of French society but first to persuade Muslims to dissociate themselves from democracy and to spread the idea that they are stigmatized and discriminated in France more than anywhere else.

This strategy has been relatively successful: many studies show that radicalization feeds on the feeling of discrimination. The French National Institute of Demographic Studies (INSEE), in its survey “Trajectories and origins”, which studies the trajectory of the immigrants’ children, indicates that 40% of them may “suffer from a denial of French citizenship”. But this percentage varies according to the origins: with North African or sub-Saharan origins, this rate exceeds 50%.¹²⁶

This perception feeds the Islamist discourse: in their sermons, many preachers explain to young people that they are discriminated, and that their parents have been humiliated before them. They repeat to them that their identity is to be “Muslims”, but not Muslims like their parents were, “new Muslims” with strong identity and political affirmation. For example, they are asked to defend the Prophet of Islam against all atheists. Even though the offense of blasphemy

against religion was removed by the French Revolution (1789), it has reappeared in recent years as an offense to believers. Part of Muslim youth now believe that questioning their religion is racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia.

Complaints' Expansion

There is a tendency towards the judicialization of cases affecting critics of Islam or Muslims, which emerges through the multiplication of complaints against ordinary people, institutions or companies perceived as “Islamophobic”. The filing of complaints is part of a strategy of judicial harassment aimed at intimidating those opposed to Islamist activism and at creating a climate of self-censorship in the media and the press.

The phenomenon now affects higher education as shown by the case of two professors from Science Po Grenoble who were accused of Islamophobia, in March 2021, for having precisely criticized the presence of the term “Islamophobia” in the title of a working group held during a week of debate on equality: “Racism, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism”.¹²⁷ One of the professors declared that the word “Islamophobia” is a “weapon of extremist propaganda”. In response, the main student union of the institution denounced the professor and called to fire him. The case sparked a controversy at the national level when the Grenoble branch of the National Union of Students of France (UNEF), the main student union in higher education, relayed the case on social networks.

This strategy is not new, but it has spread to all sectors and is used by new actors. These new forms of censorship affect all sectors, including tourist companies, holiday centers, beach areas. Organizations for the defense of civil rights call for a reaction against all forms of discrimination and stigma, but Islamist activists use community associations to join the calls and “impose respect for Islam”.

This strategy was carried out by several associations, mainly the “Collective against Islamophobia in France” (CCIF), dissolved in 2020 by the French Government but immediately reconstituted in Belgium. This association (CCIF) has made a specialty of systematically attacking all those using words deemed “Islamophobic”. It used French law as an instrument of “legal intimidation”. Thus, any criticism against Islamism exposes politicians, journalists and even the common people to legal proceedings launched by this association.¹²⁸

This strategy of legal intimidation, and the speeches directed against a France deemed Islamophobic encouraged a breakup approach among young Muslims. Secularism has been presented as liberticide and as a “State racism” institutionalized tool against Muslims. For example, the “Demonstration against Islamophobia” of November 10, 2019, made use of several references to the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews during World War II, while the yellow star was worn by demonstrators and organization officials who welcome, in their speech, the “Righteous”, that is the French who differ from others by defending and protecting the persecuted Muslims.

Until 2020, many companies feared the CCIF, because it developed an important group for information and legal assistance to Muslims experiencing discrimination because of their religion. The association also focused a large part of its action on media campaigns on social networks, listing Islamophobic acts according to complaints and informal reports, etc.

This strategy was also used by Barakacity, an association that was also dissolved in 2020 due to its links with radical Islam. In June 2021, its former president even won his case against the French Interior Ministry that he accused of “snorting Muslims” because of his registration on the RPF file of people suspected of radicalization, even though he himself was convicted of public insult to a female secularist activist.¹²⁹ Finally, he decided to pay the sum corresponding to the conviction of the French Interior Ministry to the CCIF association, that has been reconstituted in Belgium.

Another association, “Muslims of Noisy-le-Grand » which manages the mosque¹³⁰ and has been sanctioned for its links with Barakacity, has accused the authorities of abuse of power. This is not a unique case, and the trend is on the rise.

CONCLUSION

The terrorist attacks in January 2015 (*Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Casher), then in November 2015 (Bataclan concert hall in Paris), perpetrated for the first by Al-Qaeda and for the second by ISIS, have heightened awareness of the Islamist threat, not only as a security risk but also as a societal phenomenon which arises in different ways and in several territories of France, particularly in difficult areas and in the suburbs of large cities.

The most noticeable trends are those of an identity and religious awakening in the Muslim communities of France. Religion is increasingly mentioned as a criterion for defining individual identity and belonging to a group. Young people consider themselves to be “Muslims” before being “French” and believe that the values and prescriptions of Islam are superior to those of the Republic. This hierarchy of values is the source of numerous claims and tensions with the authorities and with the rest of French society.

This identity awakening goes hand in hand with the rise of communitarian Islam that does not make religion a choice and an individual practice, freely consented to, but a system of education and socialization through religion within a group of believers. The relative closure of this group makes this communitarian Islam perceived as a sectarian drift aimed at separating individuals from the rest of the French society and indoctrinating them in a direction contrary to Republic values (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity).

To achieve this goal, radical Islamists have succeeded in recent years in disseminating in Muslim communities, and sometimes beyond, new political ideas such as the “caliphate”, which were formulated from a denominational point of view to oppose democratic ideas. Behind these new ideas, there are Islamic concepts such as “*shura*” (consultation) which go against the system of representation as it is known in French democracy.

There is also a confessionalization of behaviors that are now perceived, analyzed and judged with reference to religion. In other words, individuals act not based on respect of the Republic laws, but rather in reference to a real or imagined Islamic norm.

Along with these religious judgments, there is an expansion of hate speech, especially on the internet and social media, against all those who speak freely about Islam or who dare to criticize Muslims or Prophet Muhammad. Expressing hate online has taken many forms, ranging from verbal assault and threat of death to bullying and harassment.

Paradoxically, even those who threaten others feel themselves as being the victims of a system which blasphemes their religion and persecutes their co-religionists. The extension of victimhood discourse within Muslim communities in France is a growing phenomenon that is currently fueled by anti-racist, anti-colonial and intersectional movements.

This feeling of being a victim is reflected in an increase in complaints against individuals, groups or even institutions suspected of being Islamophobic. In this regard, Islamophobia is increasingly defined as anti-Muslim racism and its scope continues to grow affecting all areas of public life, from freedom of expression to freedom of education.

However, behind the accusations of Islamophobia, there are blatant attacks against the basic principles of French Republic as the equality of all before the law or gender equality or freedom

of expression. These principles are attacked in the name of religion (for example, claims of single-sex activities), but at the same time, they are used to claim Republican rights (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, etc.). They are both the tool and the target of political Islam against the French Republic.

Among the emblematic trends of this instrumentalization of democratic principles are religious demands in public services. Islamist activists appeal to the principle of equality to demand the application of unequal rules within administrations. There is also an upward trend in religious claims in business, which means that laws that apply to the public sector do not automatically apply to the private sector, and that businesses have to deal with those claims that deflect managers from their primary mission.

To advance these religious demands, the political participation of Islamists has continued to grow and diversify in recent years to such an extent that the greatest living French novelist, Michel Houellebecq, has made it the subject of his famous novel, *Submission*, which tells about the coming to power in France of an Islamist president.¹³¹

To prevent the most extremists from seizing power in Muslim communities, all governments have sought to promote a certain representativeness of Islam in France. Even if President Sarkozy was at the origin of the creation of the FCMW / CFCM (French Council of Muslim Worship) in 2003, the debate on representativeness has not been settled and leaves the way open to self-proclaimed representatives and propagandists to disseminate a distorted image of Islam, and to instrumentalize the real problems of Muslim communities to serve thereby their political ends.

Muslim participation in elections remains uncertain but some elected officials have been suspected of buying Muslims' votes in exchange for community benefits such as the granting of an authorization to build a mosque or an approval for a worship association.¹³² There are quite a few "community lists" in local elections that score honorable, but they have no impact or influence at the national level.

This inability to advance religious claims at the national level has led Islamists to focus their efforts on participation in civil society. They have multiplied cultural associations which are, in reality, religious associations. They have also forged links and alliances with other players of civil society who fight against racism or social injustice, in order to give more echo to their actions and their demands. This situation is still in the minority, but it is deeply destabilizing in French society since Islamists seek to control part of the French population, and to create dilemmas aiming to make people accept this de facto separation.

Faced with the assertion of political Islam in France, two schools of thought clash, and they both have local and national relays, as to the best way to manage this new threat. On the one hand, the "Confrontationists" advocate no deal with Islamists whatever their doctrine is, and the refusal to compromise with the representatives of political Islam in France as well as with the countries of origin that they accuse of promoting a dangerous ideology. On the other, the "Accommodationists" call for dialogue with moderate Islamists, and consider that it is possible to make them evolve toward a more democratic view.

The "confrontationist" school, represented in France by the extreme right (National Front / *Rassemblement National*) and part of the right (Republican Party) considers Islamism in general as a civilizational threat, and refuses any distinction between "moderate" and "radical" Islamists, because of their common goal: the establishment of a theocratic State and the application of *Sharia* (Islamic law). The supporters of this line of conduct have pushed, in recent years, towards a policy of repression, which has been concretized in several reforms of the French security apparatus and increasingly harsh laws against radicalization and Islamist terrorism.

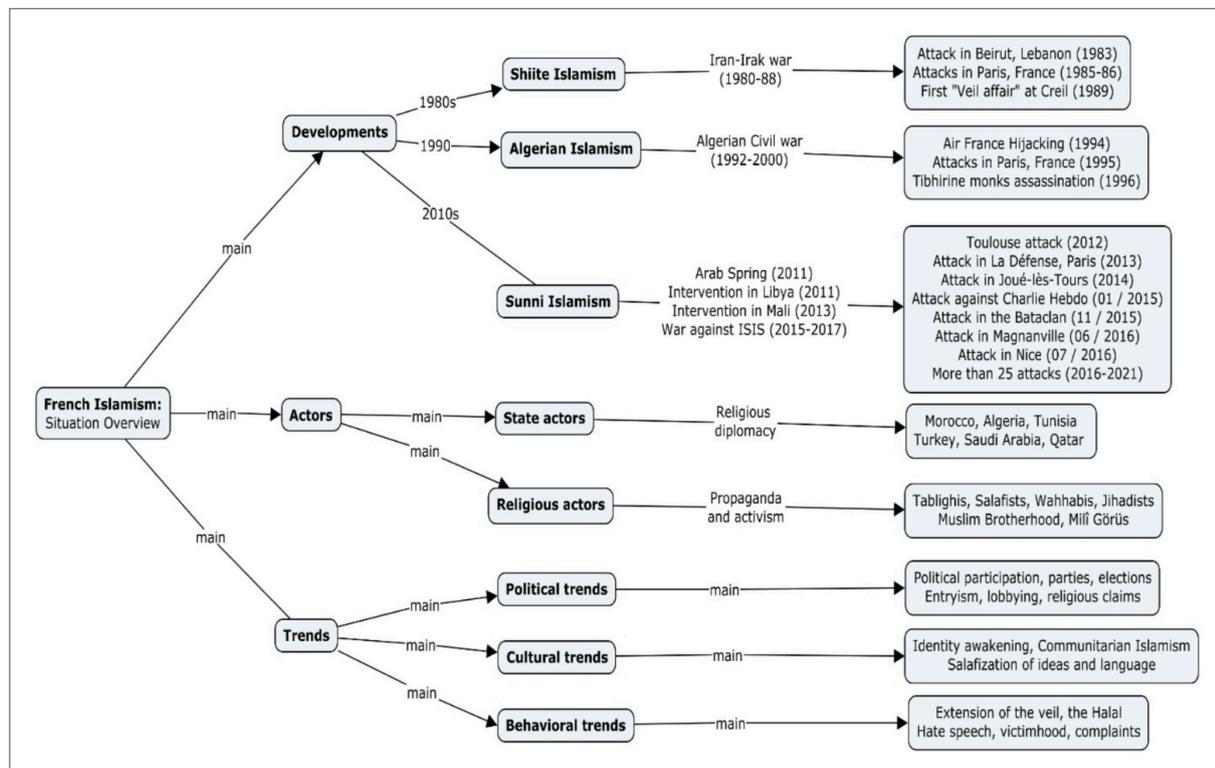
Conversely, the “Accommodationist” school, represented in France by the left (Socialist Party) and the extreme left (*La France Insoumise*) makes a clear distinction between “radical Islamism”, which resorts to violence, and “modern Islam”, that accepts the rules of the democratic game. Moreover, for the supporters of this line of conduct, the establishment of Islam is part of the socio-demographic evolution of French society, which has become more multicultural and more mixed. Consequently, they have always supported – and still do – the normalization of relations with the Muslim communities and a radical change of policy on integration, to avoid tipping into violence.

Due to the presence of these two schools of thoughts hardly reconcilable at present, the Islamist issue in France is meant to last, and to impact more and more politics and society in the years to come. Since the terrorist attacks of 2015, marked by the opposition between those who claimed “Je suis Charlie” (I AM Charlie) and those who yelled “Je ne suis pas Charlie” (I am NOT Charlie), Islamists have strongly consolidated their positions in France, while Democrats have been deeply destabilized by the economic and health crisis.

The coming year (2022) will be marked by the presidential and general legislative elections, and there is no doubt that the “Islamist Issue” will be in the center of political debate. President Macron and its government already voted laws and took many decisions¹³³ to make the French people vote for them, but due the pandemic it is doubtful that France’s social and economic situation will be better until then.

FIGURE

French Islamism: overview of the main developments, actors, and trends



SOURCES:

- 1 See the study by the Montaigne Institute, Paris, France: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/ressources/pdfs/publications/a-french-islam-is-possible-report.pdf>
- 2 See the Pew Research Center study: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>
- 3 See the Summary of the study on religious expression and visibility in the public space today in France, published in July 2019 by the general rapporteur of the “Observatoire de la laïcité” (Secularism Observatory).
- 4 See the report in *Le Figaro.fr*, on February 14, 2021: “Separatism: demonstration in Paris against anti-Muslim discrimination.”
- 5 See the interview of Prime Minister Jean Castex in the newspaper *Le Monde*, on December 8, 2020.
- 6 See his interview in the magazine *L'Express.fr*, on October 2, 2020.
- 7 The term “glocalization” refers here to the “global” political Islam becoming “local” in the French society by adapting itself to its dynamics and problematics, and moving from the position of the “Islam *in* France” to the “Islam *of* France”.
- 8 The targeted France’s values are also those enshrined in Article 1 of the Constitution, the first paragraph of which states that: “France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It ensures equality before the law of all citizens without distinction of origin, race or religion. It respects all beliefs. Its organization is decentralized.”
- 9 The organizer of the attack, Anis Naccache, was sentenced to life imprisonment for this attempt to assassinate Chapour Bakhtiar, before being released and deported in 1990 as part of a deal with Iran. One of the assassins, Ali Vakili Rad, arrested in Switzerland and extradited to France, was also sentenced to life imprisonment, then released in 2010 in exchange for the release of a Frenchwoman detained in Iran (Clotilde Reiss).
- 10 See for example the article of the local newspaper *Le Provençal*, on October 19, 1989, entitled: “La guerre du voile n’aura pas lieu” (The war of the veil will not take place).
- 11 See the French Experience of Counter-Terrorism: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/shapiro20030301.pdf>
- 12 The monks of Tibhirines were beatified on December 8, 2018 by Pope Francis.
- 13 About this mission, see Guidère M. (2007), *Al Qaeda Conquest of the Maghreb / Al-Qaïda a la conquête du Maghreb*, Paris, Editions du Rocher.
- 14 See the report on the law in *Le Monde* newspaper: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2014/03/15/voile-apres-dix-ans-d-interdiction-de-nouvelles-tensions_4383602_3224.html
- 15 See these articles in French: “Veiled woman excluded from the Opera Bastille: What the law says”, on www.rtl.fr, October 20, 2014. “A majority of French people would be in favor of a law banning the full veil in France”, on www.lemonde.fr, January 19, 2010.
- 16 On this attack, see the analysis article of the Times of Israel: “Toulouse Jewish school attack ushered in era of terror for France.” <https://www.timesofisrael.com/marseille-jewish-school-attack-ushered-in-era-of-terror-for-france/>
- 17 See France24 TV report: <https://www.france24.com/en/20140111-france-mali-military-intervention-operation-serval-anniversary-timeline>
- 18 See the interview of the French head of internal (DGSI) and external (DGSE) security services in *Le Figaro*, 13/11/2020: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/terrorisme-l-interview-exclusive-des-chefs-du-enseignement-20201113>
- 19 See this article in French newspapers: “Hollande wants imams trained in Morocco and France”, *Le Parisien*, September 20, 2015. <https://www.leparisien.fr/archives/hollande-veut-des-imams-formes-au-maroc-et-en-france-20-09-2015-5108841.php>
- 20 See the report of Montaigne Institute, Paris, France: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/ressources/pdfs/publications/a-french-islam-is-possible-report.pdf>
- 21 See the Teller Report: <https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2020-10-02-speech-on-separatism--%22what-will-we-have-left-to-muslim-structures%22-.H1xIvqFVID.html>
- 22 See the Report: “Jihadists’ Grievance Narratives against France”: <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2018/02/Bindner-Jihadists-Grievance-Narratives-Against-France-February2018.pdf>
- 23 See France24 TV report: <https://www.france24.com/en/20150920-france-imams-receive-tolerance-training-morocco-islam-religion>
- 24 Anecdotally, this attachment is shown by waving the Algerian flag at every sporting occasion even if the Algerian team is not playing, which annoys French supporters.
- 25 The precepts of this scholar created a movement called “Madkhalist Salafism”, a current of quietist Salafism, although its followers refuse to be qualified as “Madkhalists” and claim to be only “Salafists”. See Guidère M. (2017), *Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalism*, Rowman & Littlefield.
- 26 See the Time report: <https://time.com/4739488/isis-iraq-syria-tunisia-saudi-arabia-russia/>
- 27 See France24 TV report: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210401-france-says-no-place-for-turkish-group-which-spurned-charter>

- 28 See France24 TV report: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210423-policewoman-fatally-stabbed-near-paris-french-pm-to-visit-site-of-attack>
- 29 See ISESCO Director interview: <https://www.france24.com/en/20131109-interview-abdulaziz-othman-altwajjri-isesco-director-general-culture-education-religions-islam-west>
- 30 See “The Rise and Decline of Saudi Overseas Humanitarian Charities”: <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/resources/docs/CIRS-CIRSOccasionalPaper20JonathanBenthall2018.pdf>
- 31 See the book by Pierre Conesa, “Dr Saoud and Mr Jihad: The religious diplomacy of Saudi Arabia”, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2016. See also Pierre Conesa et al., “Le Lobby saoudien en France: Comment vendre un pays invendable”. Paris, Denoël, 2021.
- 32 See press report: <https://www.naijaonpoint.com.ng/muslim-world-league-top-dog-the-terrorist-attack-on-samuel-paty-has-nothing-to-do-with-islam/>
- 33 See the interview with the Secretary General of the World Islamic League (WIL), Muhammad Abdelkrim Alissa, in the French magazine *Le Point* (07/09/2021): https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/mohammad-abdelkrim-alissa-les-musulmans-doivent-se-conformer-aux-valeurs-de-la-republique-09-07-2021-2434828_24.php
- 34 Given Al Qaradhawi’s support for suicide attacks, the IUMS was listed as a terrorist organization by various Arab countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Today, the IUMS is headed by Ahmad al-Raysuni described as the “supreme authority of the Muslim Brotherhood.”
- 35 See the BBC report: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-14887635>
- 36 See the Carnegie report on Qatar policy: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/qatar_arab_spring.pdf
- 37 The “Tablighi movement” leans for the justification of its proselytizing preaching on the Quran (3: 104): “Among you there must be a party who invite people to all that is good and enjoin the doing of all that is right, and forbid the doing of all that is wrong. It is they who will attain true success.”
- 38 The French academic, Gilles Kepel, evokes the presence of the Tablighi movement in 1987, in his book intitled: *Les Banlieues de l’Islam*.
- 39 See “France and Its Muslims: Riots, Jihadism, and Depoliticization”: https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_ESPRI_0610_0112--france-and-its-muslims-riots-jihadism-an.htm
- 40 AQIM is still targeting France fifteen years later. See its “official threat” published in July, 15, 2021. See *Le Parisien* newspaper report: <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/terrorisme-la-france-menacee-par-al-qaïda-les-prefets-appeles-a-la-vigilance-cette-23-07-2021-QMJGILMTDFHGRDTZYBQF4ZBDMQ.php>
- 41 Other major events include: the Iraq war in 2003, the Arab Spring in 2011, and the war in Syria in 2012.
- 42 See Marc Hecker, “137 Shades of Terrorism. French Jihadists Before the Courts”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 79 bis, IFRI, Paris, France, April 2018.
- 43 During the field survey carried out in 2018, there could be two competing mosques in the same district, separated by a few tens of meters each, but built by different merchants and with different imams
- 44 See France24 TV report: <https://www.france24.com/en/20200713-mahmoud-dicko-the-populist-imam-challenging-mali-s-president-keita>
- 45 See African News report: <https://www.africanews.com/2021/06/05/mali-m5-opposition-rally-in-bamako-in-support-of-colonel-assimi-goita/>
- 46 See President Macron’s statements following Dicko’s announcement:
<https://www.marianne.net/monde/afrique/macron-menace-de-retirer-barkhane-du-mali>
- 47 See on this subject, the article by Mediapart:
<https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/260117/aqmi-recu-42-millions-d-euros-pour-les-otages-d-areva?tab=full>
- 48 The name “Ansar Dine” literally means, in Arabic, “Defenders of religion”, but it historically refers to the “Ansar” who are the inhabitants of Medina (a city in nowadays Saudi Arabia) who had welcomed the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, in 622 (date of the Hegira), to defend him and support him militarily against his enemies. Consequently, “Ansar Dine” are the “Allies of religion” or even the “Auxiliaries of Islam”.
- 49 The Soninke are an ethnic group present throughout West Africa but established mainly in Mali, along the Mauritanian border. They are Sunni Muslims but with a strong Marabout tradition. The marabouts are kinds of shamans to whom local people attribute multiple powers: they restore health or social order with the help of talismans and explanations of unhappiness. But these magical practices are criticized by Orthodox Muslims and particularly opposed by the Wahhabis who have made the ending of Maraboutic tradition a major argument of their preaching.
- 50 After their defeat, the Tunisian Islamists broke away from the UIOF and founded the Ennahda party which, three decades later (2011), won the elections in Tunisia. Its leader, Rached Ghannouchi acted until 2021 as the president of Tunisian parliament.
- 51 See Carnegie report on Qatar policy during the Arab Spring: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/qatar_arab_spring.pdf
- 52 See Teller Report: https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2021-03-21-%0A---france--the-%22single-sex%22-meetings-of-the-unef-trigger-an-outcry-in-the-political-class%0A--.BJWUGkXHE_.html
- 53 See RFI radio report: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20200805-covid-19-anti-maskers-mock-french-government-call-for-mandatory-mask-wearing-health>

- 54 There is a very active web structure, AJ+ (Al Jazeera+), as part of Qatar media group, which is focused on promoting the Brethren strategy in defending Muslim minorities and criticizing intolerance and Islamophobia in the West.
- 55 See Khalil al-Anani, "The Brotherhood's Art of Recruitment". <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190279738.001.0001/acprof-9780190279738-chapter-5>
- 56 See Farhad Khosrokhavar. "The Muslim Brotherhood in France". https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230106871_10
- 57 On July 8, 2021, the Austrian Parliament banned the display, wear or distribution of Muslim Brotherhood symbols. The oldest symbol represents two crossed sabers surmounted by a Quran. Austria's new anti-terrorism law provides for a fine of 4,000 euros and a prison sentence of up to one month in prison. In the event of a repeat offense, 10,000 euros and 6 weeks' imprisonment. One of the main symbols targeted by the law is the "sign of Rabia" (*RABI'Ā*), also called the "hand of Tamkin" (empowerment), that is to say the four fingers raised, the thumb folded. However, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan usually greets this way when traveling in Western countries.
- 58 For example, see the BBC report on the "Mila Affair": <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57342528>
- 59 Jihadism represents the radical and violent fringe of political Islam, and Jihadists are the most extreme militants of Islamist movements. They have only one aim, the establishment of a theocracy, which can be local in the form of an "Islamic State" or global, in the form of an "Islamic Caliphate". To achieve this, some Jihadists are nationalistic and promote a "territorialized jihad" which is limited to the borders of a single state, but the majority of them are pan-Islamists and call for a "detrterritorialized jihad" which does not recognize national borders. In France, Jihadism is debated among experts who doesn't agree on its nature and origin. On the one hand, those like Gilles Kepel, who consider that it is the result of a process of "radicalization of Islam"; on the other hand, those like Olivier Roy, who consider, on the contrary, that it is the manifestation of an "Islamization of radicalism" who already existed in Europe in the form of extreme left groups. But in reality, these two theses are complementary, and cover different situations and factors.
- 60 See the report of the commission of inquiry by Ms. Sylvie Goy-Chavant: "Terrorist threat: for a just but firmer Republic." Report n°639 (2017-2018) of July 4, 2018, made on behalf of the French Senate survey commission: <http://www.senat.fr/notice-rapport/2017/r17-639-notice.html>
- 61 See France24 TV report: <https://www.france24.com/en/20170822-one-third-known-french-radicals-are-mentally-disturbed-minister>
- 62 *Fatwa* is an official statement or a legal opinion on a point of Islamic law (*Sharia*) given by a qualified jurist in response to a question asked by a private individual, judge or government. A jurist issuing fatwas is called a "*mufiti*", and the act of issuing fatwas is called "*ijfā*". Fatwas have played an important role throughout Islamic history, but the legal methodology of modern "*ijfā*" often diverges from pre-modern practice, particularly so in the West, due to the emergence of modern media which transformed the traditional way of "*ijfā*".
- 63 By "perceptual trends", one should understand trends of Islamism which may appear as normal and commonplace in some countries (such as the United States or Canada), but which are perceived as unusual or even intrusive trends in the French context, especially since the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris.
- 64 See William Scott. "The Pursuit of "Interests" in the French Revolution". https://www.jstor.org/stable/286648?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents
- 65 See the French Senate mission report of Nathalie Goulet and André Reichardt on Islam in France: <https://www.senat.fr/notice-rapport/2015/r15-757-notice.html>
- 66 See the MONTAIGNE Institute report: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/ressources/pdfs/publications/a-french-islam-is-possible-report.pdf>
- 67 The above-mentioned report by Nathalie Goulet and André Reichardt proposed to cut the cord with donor countries by channeling funds into a common pot through the "Foundation for Works of Islam in France", an organization created by Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin in 2005.
- 68 This possibility is inspired of the "Waqf", a dead hand, pious foundations established in Muslim countries.
- 69 The "Prefect" is the highest official representing the Government in each region or French territory.
- 70 See Franc Info report on these elections: https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/europeennes/union-des-democrates-musulmans-francais-quel-est-ce-parti-derriere-la-34e-liste-aux-europeennes_3437043.html
- 71 See the Brookings report: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/islam-in-france/>
- 72 See the Allegra report: <https://allegralaboratory.net/muslim-ngos-facing-covid-19-in-france-muhum/>
- 73 See Reuters report: <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUK303978682920110916>
- 74 See the French Government report on "2017–2018 Money laundering and terrorist financing risk." https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/locale/piece-jointe/2019/07/analyse_tracfin_2017anglais.pdf
- 75 French intelligence services recognize that terrorism financing, and foreign interference files often concern areas identified as being "in republican reconquest".
- 76 See RFI radio report: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20210201-french-parliament-opens-debate-on-draft-law-aimed-at-rooting-out-islamism>
- 77 See DW report: <https://www.dw.com/en/france-muslim-women-in-grenoble-defy-burkini-ban/a-49339375>
- 78 See *Le Figaro* report on 23/07/2021: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/gerald-darmanin-fait-destituer-deux-imams-aux-preches-inacceptables-20210723>

- 79 See Juliette Galonnier. “The Islam of Converts”. <https://booksandideas.net/The-Islam-of-Converts.html>
- 80 See RFI radio report: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20210626-gay-pride-moves-eastwards-to-the-paris-suburbs-to-better-reflect-lgbtqi-reality-france-intersectionality-banlieue>
- 81 See the NY Times report: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/03/world/europe/paris-attack-police.html>
- 82 See the BBC report: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34570187>
- 83 See France24 TV report: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210217-french-minister-warns-of-islamo-leftism-in-universities>
- 84 A report from the General Inspectorate of Justice sent to the courts on June 21, 2021 shows that institutions for the judicial protection of young people (PJJ) are subject to religious control, especially in closed educational centers. The issue of meals is at the center of the investigators’ concern. See Le Figaro report: « La protection judiciaire de la jeunesse en proie au séparatisme religieux »: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/la-protection-judiciaire-de-la-jeunesse-en-proie-au-separatisme-religieux-20210705>
- 85 See the report of *Le Parisien* newspaper: <https://www.leparisien.fr/info-paris-ile-de-france-oise/transports/le-communautarisme-gangrene-t-il-la-ratp-25-06-2019-8102655.php>
- 86 See the National Assembly report: https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_lois/115b2082_rapport-information
- 87 In her book “*Allah a-t-il sa place dans l’entreprise?*” (Does Allah have his place in the company?), one of the French specialists in Islamist radicalization, Dounia Bouzar, relates the case of a factory, in which practicing Muslims make the law, by imposing, for example, the stopping of machines when the Ramadan fast is broken, or even by imposing a call to prayer in certain workshops.
- 88 This is the case of AVS, an association dedicated to the control of ritual slaughter and halal certification, which has become a prime provider of two major French networks of supermarkets: Auchan and Leclerc.
- 89 The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJUE) was seized by two Muslim women living in Germany, one employee of a pharmacy, the other as a nursery employee. In its decision of July 15, 2021, it considered that: “The ban on the wearing of any visible expression of political, philosophical or religious convictions may be justified by the need for the employer to project an image of neutrality towards of customers or to avoid social conflicts.”
- 90 The Jean Jaurès Foundation Survey, published in September 2019 (FIGU survey), shows a doubling of the proportion of people declaring to participate in Friday prayers at the mosque: from 16% in 1989 to 38% in 2019. It also confirms a drop in alcohol consumption and greater consumption of “halal meat” in everyday life, causing tensions at school, with the demand for a “halal menu” for the children of Muslim families: 82% believe that “we should be able to eat halal in school canteens”.
- 91 See France24 TV report: <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20201030-islam-is-being-hyper-politicised-in-france-but-muslims-are-not-in-the-debate>
- 92 See Euronews report: <https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/12/handsoffmyhijab-online-criticism-grows-over-proposed-french-law-banning-hijab-for-children>
- 93 The survey carried out by the IFOP Institute among people of Muslim faith in France and published in September 2019 shows the evolution of the situation since 1989, date of the first “Veil Issue” in France. According to this survey, 27% of those questioned agree with the idea that “Sharia law should prevail over the laws of the Republic”. In 2016, the Montaigne Institute, in its report entitled “The Fabric of Islamism” (*La Fabrique de l’islamisme*) considered that 28% of Muslims in France “have adopted a system of values clearly opposed to the values of the French Republic”, but among them a significant difference exists between the French by birth (18%), those who are French by acquisition (26%), and foreigners residing in France (41%). Thus, it would seem that the demand for the supremacy of the Sharia is first brought by the persons newly established in France.
- 94 See for example, Jérôme Fourquet, *L’Archipel français*, 2019.
- 95 See Euronews report: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/01/28/french-firefighters-scuffle-with-police-during-protest-over-working-conditions>
- 96 The study carried out in 2016 by the Montaigne Institute, in its report entitled “A French Islam is Possible”, shows that the Muslim population is much younger than the rest of the French population, and that it has a very high geographic concentration which corresponds to the geography of immigration and reconstruction of France.
- 97 The situation of Muslims is aggravated by discrimination in employment and in social life as a whole. The “testing campaigns” in large French companies have confirmed that a first name that sounds Arabic or Muslim is considerably limiting, for the same position, the chances of landing a job interview. Besides, within Muslim families, graduates are the most discriminated against and the most active in promoting communitarian Islam.
- 98 See Bernard Rougier study on French Islamism: <http://crossasia-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/4472/>
- 99 The studies of some researchers have made it possible to uncover the existence of “Salafi-Jihadist enclaves” in France. See for example the study of Hugo Micheron (2020): *Le Jihadisme français : quartiers, Syrie, prisons, Paris*, Gallimard, 2020.
- 100 See RFI radio report: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20200218-France-Macron-Mulhouse-unveils-strategy-fight-Islamist-separatism>
- 101 This episode has been widely reported by the media. See France24 TV report on June 16, 2020: “French city of Dijon rocked by unrest blamed on Chechens seeking revenge.” <https://www.france24.com/en/20200616-french-city-of-dijon-rocked-by-unrest-blamed-on-chechens-seeking-revenge>

- 102 For historian Pierre Vermeren, specialist in the Maghrib, there would be in France “4 to 5 million Algerians and descendants, around 3 million Moroccans, 1 million Tunisians”. By extrapolating from the French National Institute of Statistics figures (INSEE), he estimates that 2.5 million over four generations residents in France are born in Morocco or descendants of people born in Morocco (See Pierre Vermeren, « Face à l’Islam de France, du déni à la paralysie », *L’Express*, 03/06/2014). In 2018, INSEE indicates that there were 1.9 million immigrants from the Maghreb in France, as well as 2.4 million direct descendants born in France to at least one Maghreb parent, i.e. 4.3 million in total.
- 103 The Christian Democratic Party (French: *Parti Chrétien Démocrate*, PCD) is a conservative Christian-democratic party in France, founded in 2001.
- 104 See Marianne Blidon (2018). “Reception and use of intersectionality. A reading from French perspective”, *Gender, Place & Culture, A Journal of Feminist Geography*, Volume 25, 2018, Issue 4, pages 591-602. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0966369X.2018.1457015>
- 105 See the Brookings report: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/05/01/islam-made-in-france-debating-the-reform-of-muslim-organizations-and-foreign-funding-for-religion/>
- 106 When France was criticized by some leaders of Western democracies (e.g. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada), this perception was reinforced, which gave an international echo to this reading of the situation of Muslims in France.
- 107 Cyrus S.H. Ho et al. (2018). *Terrorism and mental illness: a pragmatic approach for the clinician*, Cambridge University Press. See also for the French context: Hecker M. (2018). *137 Shades of terrorism: French jihadists Before Courts*, IFRI.
- 108 This trend was highlighted in the IFOP 2019 survey entitled “Muslims in France: 30 years after the Creil scarves issue” which concluded that: “the general evolution is not going in the direction of secularization but of a reaffirmation of identity and religion, manifested in particular in daily behavior” (Statement by Jérôme Fourquet, head of the survey).
- 109 See the Guardian report: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/08/french-town-bans-pork-free-meals-anti-muslim-beaucaire>
- 110 See Al Jazeera report: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/12/france-blames-children-missing-swimming-lessons-on-separatism>
- 111 In 2021, there has been two “pro-Burkini operations” conducted by Muslim women in the city of Grenoble, east of France. For the government officials, this was considered as a sign of “Islamist separatism.” See Le Figaro report on 16/07/2021.
- 112 This phenomenon reaches unprecedented level that some international sportswear (like Nike) companies have created collections specifically intended for Muslims.
- 113 In a report broadcast on France 2 in December 2017, a café in Sevran (Seine-Saint-Denis) was described as “forbidden to women”. See the article: https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/justice/cafe-interdit-aux-femmes-a-sevran-le-patron-va-porter-plainte-pour-diffamation-et-provocation-a-la-haine-raciale_2094625.html
- 114 See “A brief history of the Muslim veil” : <https://www.facinghistory.org/civic-dilemmas/brief-history-veil-islam>
- 115 See the BBC report: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13038095>
- 116 See Stéphane Mechoulane. “France bans the veil: what French republicanism has to say about it.” <https://www.bu.edu/ilj/files/2020/04/223-284.pdf>
- 117 See France24 TV report: <https://www.france24.com/en/20100331-paris-food-show-opens-its-doors-growing-halal-market>
- 118 See Marie-Laure Boursin. “Prayer time: Between practice and experimentation.” https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_ETHN_174_0623--prayer-time-between-practice-and.htm
- 119 Moreover, the halal certification market is still opaque in France. See the book of Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le Marché halal ou l’invention d’une tradition* (The Halal Market of the Invention of a Tradition), Paris, Seuil, 2017.
- 120 See MEE report: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/french-think-tank-calls-halal-tax-muslims>
- 121 The main Islamic networks are : Ummaland, SalamYou, SalamWorld, TutLub, MuslimFace, TheShukran, Labayk, etc. See Federico Guerrini, ‘Sharia Friendly’ Social Networks For Muslims Are On The Rise, *Forbes Magazine*, March 30, 2016.
- 122 The case is known in France as “the Milla affair”. See the NYTimes’ report: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/07/world/europe/france-mila-online-abuse.html>
- 123 See IFGC report: https://institute.global/sites/default/files/inline-files/IGC_War%20of%20Keywords_23.08.17_0.pdf
- 124 For instance, the request of wearing the burkini (bathing veil) in the name of secularism (religious neutrality of the State), or in the name of feminism (freedom of women to dress as they wish). See for example the case of a veiled football coach in Échirolles or the wearing of the burkini in swimming pools in Grenoble. See Le Figaro, 25/02/2019: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/a-grenoble-un-coup-de-force-pour-faire-entrer-le-burkini-a-la-piscine-20190522>
- 125 See the Daily Sabah report: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/eu-affairs/erdogan-slams-france-for-anti-muslim-policies-says-macron-needs-mental-treatment>
- 126 See the INSEE “Trajectories and Origins’ survey”. <https://teo-english.site.ined.fr/>
- 127 See the report of France Culture radio: <https://www.franceculture.fr/societe/a-sciences-po-grenoble-laffaire-des-affiches-contre-des-profs-supposes-islamophobes-a-laisse-des>
- 128 See the Libération newspaper report: https://www.liberation.fr/france/2020/11/27/le-collectif-contre-l-islamophobie-en-france-prefere-l-autodissolution-a-la-dissolution_1807024/

- 129 See Euronews report: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/10/19/france-beheading-minister-wants-to-dissolve-islamic-ngos-after-murder-of-teacher-samuel-pa>
- 130 The imam of this mosque is accused by the authorities of engaging in “anti-Western proselytism” and has declared that France is “populated by disbelievers”. See the report in the newspaper *Le Point* 13/07/2021: “*Seine-Saint-Denis : la préfecture épingle une nouvelle mosquée*”.
- 131 See John Rosenthal. “Houellebecq’s Submission: Islam and France’s Malaise”. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43555285?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents
- 132 See the report of *Valeurs Actuelles* magazine (23/07/2021) about the Mayor of the city of Metz, east France: <https://www.valeursactuelles.com/regions/grand-est/moselle/metz/faits-divers/le-maire-lr-de-metz-appelle-a-se-mobilier-pour-la-construction-de-la-grande-mosquee/>
- 133 See Le Figaro report : <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/le-parlement-adopte-definitivement-le-projet-de-loi-contre-le-separatisme-20210723>

**A CONSEQUENCE ANALYSIS: IMPACT ON SOCIETY
IN FRANCE, CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS, ACTORS
AND TRENDS**

By Professor Serge Sur

A CONSEQUENCE ANALYSIS: IMPACT ON SOCIETY IN FRANCE, CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS, ACTORS AND TRENDS

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The relations between France and Islam are ancient. They were first international. They were marked in part by a structural hostility as soon as religious differences between countries and societies dominated political relations, especially in the Middle Ages. This societal opposition did not prevent episodic rapprochements later on, depending on the competition between states. This is how France and the Ottoman Empire were able to have the Austrian Empire as a common adversary in the 16th century. France, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, supported the emancipation of the Arab-Muslim world from the Ottoman Empire, particularly in Egypt. Then these relations became colonial, France controlling during the nineteenth century and early twenty-first century the Maghreb, Algeria attached to the metropolis and Morocco and Tunisia as protectorates. To this were added various countries of sub-Saharan Africa with a majority or partial Muslim population.

During this colonial period, which ended in the 1950s and 1960s, few Muslims stayed in the metropolis, and in the territories under domination, local religions were respected. Efforts to convert to Christianity, and especially to Catholicism, were more concerned with animism than with Islam, and the Christians associated with colonization were most often of European origin. Many of them left the new states resulting from decolonization, the most spectacular migration being that of the European community in Algeria, with nearly a million people leaving the country within a few months of independence, leaving their belongings behind. This was the first cleavage, and the first trauma for French society, that the resentment that was born in part of the population because of this violent rupture between the two societies. Since then, relations between France and Algeria have been only partially appeased and the conditions under which Algeria gained its independence remain a very present unspoken fact in France, and conversely widely exploited in Algeria.

Colonial populations, especially young men, were called upon by France to contribute to the two world wars, 1914-1918 and 1939-1945. The liberation of the country in 1944-1945 was, for the French participation, led by an army from Africa, North Africa and West Africa for a lesser part. The fighting soldiers paid a heavy price, and the nation's recognition was limited. It was in the Italian and French campaigns of 1943-1944 that various military and political cadres were formed who later turned against France and campaigned for decolonization. Many of them were Muslims, and Islam was used in particular in Algeria to give a national consciousness to an Algerian identity that did not exist before French colonization. Thus, France and its colonies appeared as two watertight worlds, subordinate but with no prospect of rapprochement. History then separated them. The French influence is translated by the French-speaking world and a state model, but the customs and religion have always remained profoundly different.

Aristide Briand (1862-1932), a statesman of the early 20th century, author of the law on the separation of Church and State in 1905, which is the foundation of French secularism, to which we will return, could say that France was a Muslim power. This claim had no impact on the French metropolitan society. Simply, a mosque was authorized in Paris as a sign of recognition of the sacrifices made by Muslim soldiers from overseas during the First World War. This great mosque of Paris remains as an official institution, now under Algerian control. Since the second half of the twentieth century and especially since decolonization, colonial contacts between France

and Islam have gradually been replaced by societal contacts, due to the arrival in metropolitan France of many immigrants, many of them Muslim. Several waves followed one another, first from the Maghreb, then to a lesser extent from Black Africa, and since the beginning of the 21st century from many other parts of the world. Not all of these recent immigrants are Muslim, but many are.

France is today a country that incorporates a significant number of inhabitants of immigrant origin, of various generations and backgrounds. Their motivations have been and are varied, as well as their status. There are many difficulties in analyzing this phenomenon. Two of them will be highlighted here. The first is the difficulty of obtaining reliable figures. French law prohibits the use of ethnic or religious statistics, in the name of equality between all individuals and the principle of non-discrimination between races, sexes, religions, etc. There are certainly evaluations, surveys and cross-checks, but their credibility is uncertain. The French situation is very different from that of other countries, especially European ones, where such statistics are legal, where even taxpayers can be asked to indicate their religious affiliation in the context of public financing of religions. French secularism forbids such practices. This deliberate official ignorance can be detrimental to the knowledge of the importance of the phenomenon; it also feeds self-serving approximations and hostile fantasies.

In addition, there is often confusion between immigration and Islam, whereas immigrants come from very diverse backgrounds, and moreover, cultural reference to Islam does not imply religious conviction or practice. Also, several generations of inhabitants of immigrant origin coexist, which leads to different degrees of assimilation or integration - we will come back to these concepts. Or should we distinguish between those who come from former French colonies, most often French-speaking and already familiar with the national culture, and the others, non-French-speaking and totally non-native. In addition, numbers and figures, even if they are accurate, do not give a clear picture of the reality of the consequences of a Muslim presence on the territory. In this case, the qualitative dimensions must prevail over the concern with numbers. Thus, a few hundred radicalized Islamists capable of turning to terrorism are more significant and have more impact on French society, as on any other civil society, than a few million Muslims practicing their religion peacefully and privately.

Thus, the relations between France and Islam have historically unfolded on three levels: international, colonial, and societal. This last register is today the most important. It has internalized the previous ones. Hostility, domination, influence are now above all internal issues. The other two have not disappeared, however. Thus, the conflicts in the Middle East weigh on French political debates, and colonization has left a legacy among immigrant Muslim populations that sometimes feeds decolonialist theses. Decolonialism, the idea that there is a living legacy of discrimination against groups from former colonies in French society and legal system, goes far beyond Islam. The European slave trade, for example, was independent of it, and Arab-Muslim societies have long practiced it with regard to sub-Saharan Africa. But long memories are mixed with current conflicts, emotions and passions often prevail over rational historical analysis.

The same is true of the reactions provoked by the presence of a growing fraction of the Muslim population in the Republic. For all that, this fraction is not homogeneous. In addition to religious divisions within Islam – Shiites, Sunnis, and among the latter Salafists or Muslim Brothers – which do not concern us here, we must take into account differences in national or regional origin of the people concerned and their tendency to group together in distinct communities, whether they are of Maghrebi, Turkish, Afghan, Syrian, Chechen origin, from the Indian subcontinent, or from sub-Saharan Africa, the Sahel or the Horn of Africa. These groups do not mix or are even in rivalry with each other, and national or ethnic conflicts may oppose them, without a common religious reference making their tensions disappear. Public opinion often tends to take these populations of immigrant origin as a block, especially in a critical approach, when this is not the case. There are also other differences that have to do with the degree of integration into the national fabric. It is

easier for Muslims from the former French empire, who are often French-speaking, to adapt to French society than for purely non-native people who have neither a past nor a common language with their host country.

It is therefore the societal impact that is to be considered here above all. The historical trilogy – international, colonial, societal – is replaced by a declination of the societal dimension, with its political and legal extensions. This declension will organize the analyses that follow. They will focus successively on the progressive constitution of Muslim communities in France, on the challenges posed by the growing penetration of Islam in the country and on the reactions it provokes. The challenges are societal, the reactions are legal and political. On the societal level, this presence has generated and nourishes a diffuse malaise, an identity crisis for some, a problem of adaptation for others. A number of behaviors related to Islam, even if they concern only a part of these communities, are experienced as societal irritants, challenging French societal values. The State is therefore expected to adopt public policies that defend and promote the country's cultural identity and uphold the principle of unity and indivisibility of the Republic proclaimed by the Constitution. The compatibility between Islam and the Republic is then under debate and several theses are supported on this subject. The secularity of the Republic, another constitutional principle, internalizes the controversy insofar as various conceptions can be retained. Faced with these increasingly sharp political dividing lines, public policies often appear improvised and wavering.

FORMATION OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

10. It is only in the last fifteen years that French society has been questioning its identity. Under President Sarkozy (2007-2012), a Ministry of National Identity was created, the very existence of which gave rise to controversy that has not been overcome. Islam is only one of the factors of this questioning. Among others, the construction of Europe, calling for some to go beyond the nation state in the name of a common European citizenship, in a logic inspired by Jürgen Habermas; the American cultural domination, integrating national particularisms into a globalized mix; the weakening of the political decision-making capacity of national authorities within the framework of the liberalization of international economic and financial exchanges; in a word, the increased dependence of individuals on decisions over which they have no control, whether it be their cultural environment, their jobs, or the collective orientation of the country... In this context, partly elusive, the growing presence of Islam and its signs in the public space is a sensitive issue that allows a part of the population to polarize a whole series of diffuse concerns about its own identity and self-control. However, in this growing presence, we must distinguish different categories of Muslims, according to the waves of immigration from which they come on the one hand, and their different statuses on the other.

DIFFERENT GENERATIONS OF MUSLIMS

With all the relativity that must be brought to such quantitative evaluations, it is estimated that by 2020 the foreign population in France would be around 5 million, or 7.4% of the total population. Immigrants would be around 6.7 million, or 10%. 2.5 million of them would have French nationality, or 37%. 40% of foreigners come from Africa and 35% from European Union countries. According to the *Observatoire de la laïcité*, a public advisory commission that has now disappeared, Muslims represent 4.2 million people, or 6% of the population. The number of mosques would be around 2,500, compared to the 40,000 churches in the country. 50% of these Muslims are French by birth, 26% are foreigners and 24% are naturalized. There are 846,000 Algerian residents, the first community of almost exclusive Muslim membership. It should be noted that the perception of the Muslim presence in France in the public opinion is very different and largely overestimated, many thinking it closer to 25% than to 6%. This distortion is in itself a sign of the societal unease caused by Islam.

If we attempt to refine these rough statistics, we must do so on a qualitative rather than quantitative level. In this respect, a distinction can be made between first-time arrivals, those who entered the country with another nationality, and their descendants, who in principle were born French on the basis of the *droit du sol* (*jus soli*), which is dominant in the French system for granting nationality. For these first-time arrivals, the reasons for their arrival have historically evolved, representing roughly several successive waves. It is true that France has always been, to varying degrees, a country of immigration, but until the end of the Second World War, this immigration was mainly of European origin and became part of the national fabric fairly quickly, so that it did not raise any collective difficulties, beyond individual or regional friction. Since the end of the Second World War, however, this immigration has been dominated by non-European arrivals, often from Africa, whose Islam is a considerable religious and cultural dimension. At first, no attention was paid to this, considering that religion was an individual and private matter. From a certain threshold of presence and grouping, the question became collective and public.

If we come back to the successive waves of Muslim immigration to France, the first of them was prompted by the State itself, when it called for workers who could contribute to the reconstruction of the country after the war, likely to occupy low-skilled jobs to which the French were not attracted, jobs that were also low-paid. These were mostly young, isolated men, living in homes that were quickly built on the outskirts of the cities. Although employers welcomed this immigration, it was sometimes contested by the workers' unions, who felt that it had an impact on wages. The growing numbers of immigrants and the social isolation they experienced led to a second wave of immigration with the decision by President Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981) to facilitate family reunification. Immigrants were then able to bring in their families, which allowed them to gradually build up their own society. Questions of housing, employment, and way of life then multiplied, aggravated by the rapid emergence of economic crises linked to the massive increase in oil prices (oil crises of 1973 and 1979). The economic benefits of the presence of cheap immigrant workers tended to be replaced by a social deficit linked to the assistance provided to families in need.

For the following waves, the economy has largely contributed and still contributes to migratory flows from developing countries, and for France from its former African colonial empire, which is largely Muslim. The absence of birth control in these countries, their strong demographic growth, and their employment difficulties are all incentives to emigrate, often with the support of the countries of origin, which thus get rid of an overabundant population. The benefit for them is twofold, since in addition to demographic relaxation, there are transfers of goods and money from the immigrants to their country of birth, out of family, village or tribal solidarity. There may even be a political benefit, the constitution of a community diaspora that will constitute a lobby within the host country. Turkish nationals are particularly active in this sense, and Moroccan emigrants, for example, retain their original nationality, even if they are naturalized. Thus, communities that are more or less closed in on themselves tend to be formed on the basis of national or regional origin. This does not facilitate harmony within the national community, nor even between the different communities of immigrant origin. It has sometimes been observed that grouped immigrants refuse to be separated, demand and obtain housing in close proximity, and thus reinforce a tendency to fragmentation of the social body.

This fact is often found with other flows, linked to the political convulsions of the contemporary world. Conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia during the first decades of the 21st century brought massive immigration to Europe via the Mediterranean. This has resulted in humanitarian disasters, the organization of human trafficking by smugglers, and the difficulties of welcoming exogenous populations, more external than the previous ones to the countries where they entered. Their reception was contrasted even within the European Union, with Germany, for example, willingly opening its borders while others, including the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, closed them, and the transit countries sought to get rid of the arrivals. France adopted a position that was somewhat intermediate, open in the name of its principles of welcoming the disadvantaged but lacking the means to house and employ them. Public opinion was sensitive to

the distress of the arrivals, families and children, but quickly lost interest in their fate and they sometimes fed new shantytowns or urban wandering, or were even grouped together in makeshift facilities. Their presence then became a social irritant, either because of their abandonment, which led to crime and drug addiction, or because they were taken in charge by militant NGOs that were willingly provocative.

In addition to these first arrivals of successive waves, the presence of the following generations, the second, third and even fourth generation, is gradually becoming the majority. One might have thought that this succession of generations was a solution because individuals born in France were destined to blend into the national melting pot, because of their education and social mixing. This is how immigration was regularly absorbed in France, in the logic of the melting pot that also characterized the identity of the United States. It is clear that this model is now in crisis, and that many of the new generations tend to recognize themselves on the basis of new solidarities and new oppositions. This is manifested by multiple signs: the location of groups of young people in “sensitive neighborhoods” in the outlying suburbs; confrontations between ethnic gangs of various immigrant origins; a criminal economy, largely based on drug trafficking; rejection of all public or private authority, with the family no more ensuring individual and collective discipline than the school. These phenomena are not quantitatively in the majority, but they maintain a societal climate marked by a perception of growing physical and cultural insecurity. Islam dominates this cultural insecurity, because it has become a common value ensuring the solidarity and identity of part of these new generations.

This progressive sedimentation of a Muslim immigration of varied origin does not prevent it from being perceived as a block by a large part of the population, as constituting a homogeneous societal, cultural and even political cleavage. This does not correspond to reality, but perceptions are in themselves social and political data. On the other hand, several explanations minimize the importance of Islam as the origin of these cleavages, and make it a consequence rather than a cause. Among them, the deficiency of the State, which has parked immigrant populations in ghettos, left distressed suburbs abandoned, progressively withdrawing public services, neglecting public education, restricting police presence. Or the compromises of politicians, especially local ones, who buy social peace and electoral support from these populations by discreetly tolerating Islamist religious excesses. We often see a contradiction between a public discourse denouncing radical Islamism and a tolerant or even objectively complicit local practice. The explanation that receives the most support is undoubtedly economic and social in nature. If immigrants are provided with work, housing, and a peaceful family life, they will naturally tend to integrate into the general population and their particularities will be a private matter. But this is anticipating public policies, and we will come back to this.

In other respects, and particularly in legal terms, Muslims in France have a wide variety of statuses, as do immigrants and their descendants in general. Many of them are *nationals by birth*, and they tend to become the majority as the generations pass. Official nationality does not, however, determine an intimate sense of belonging since it has not been chosen but favored by legislation. Children born of foreign parents must undoubtedly express their will, but this is far from always implying a real feeling of belonging. Thus, many young French Muslims of more or less distant Algerian origin maintain a cultural and emotional link with a country that many of them do not know. Very symbolic was the holding, in 2001, of a soccer match between France and Algeria in Saint Denis, near Paris. In the presence of the President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, and the Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, the Marseillaise, the national anthem, was vigorously whistled by a young audience, mostly French but of Algerian origin. The president then left the stadium and the prime minister remained in place, which is considered one of the reasons for his failure in the following presidential elections in 2002. Then, the Algerian team’s defeat in the match led to the invasion of the stadium by a hostile crowd and the forced interruption of the match. This event, which was widely publicized in the media, clearly underlined the failure of the French state and society to deal with an immigration out of control.

The phenomenon is further exacerbated by the existence of many *dual nationals*. French legislation accepts this status quite generously, which creates advantages for its holders, since they can move freely between the countries concerned, conduct business there, sometimes benefit from the possibility of fulfilling their military obligations in the country of their choice, avoid double taxation. This situation, for example, hinders legal proceedings when the other country serves as a refuge for criminals who cannot be extradited. In addition, some Muslim countries, such as Morocco, do not recognize nationalities other than their own, so that a dual French-Moroccan national is only Moroccan in the eyes of Morocco. This situation can only contribute to the dilution of a sense of national belonging among its beneficiaries, since multinationality favors an opportunistic and purely material use of passports. On the side of the original nationals, it also contributes to the perception of a structural difference between sedentary mononationals and nomadic bi- or multinationals.

Another status is that of *foreigners*. They may be residents, holding an official card in this sense, which allows them to obtain the rights of nationals, except for political rights. A particular category is that of *refugees* who have been granted the right of asylum. This is recognized by national authorities following specific jurisdictional procedures. Holders of this right have special protection and are not subject to deportation even if they commit crimes, since withdrawal of the right to asylum remains an exceptional sanction. Access to this right also depends on European Union standards on the Schengen area. In France, it is granted in an increasingly restricted manner according to the number of applicants. Here again, Muslims are not the only ones involved, but they represent a significant contingent. In principle, asylum is granted to victims of persecution or discrimination, notably for political, racial or religious reasons. It is known that, in practice, the procedure is often circumvented by the applicants, whose motives are more economic. This situation, which is not well received by the public, leads the public authorities to remain passive and to pay little attention to the fate of rejected applicants, the vast majority of whom remain in France illegally. In addition, many of them have entered the country illegally, which adds to the perception of a country that does not control its public space sufficiently.

Two situations remain. Firstly that of *undocumented migrants*, de facto stateless, who cannot be expelled to any host country, and who have often destroyed the documents that identify them. They raise a problem that is all the more delicate because many of them work and find networks that support them, for economic reasons – employers – or humanitarian reasons – NGOs. The question of their regularization is regularly raised, which would lead to rewarding delinquents. Here again, it is an element of the political divide between the left and the right, even if the theme has declined as the majority of public opinion has become increasingly hostile to immigration. The other situation, which is often a special case of the previous one, is that of *isolated minors*. They benefit from stronger humanitarian and social protection, even though they are often left to their own devices and prey to multiple traffickers, who use their immunity for their own activities. The first difficulty is to know if they are really minors, which is often doubtful, but the tests that make it possible to determine this – bone growth in particular – have had to be relativized in the face of humanitarian protests and a decision by the Constitutional Council. The arrival of these minors or those who claim to be minors on the territory sometimes corresponds to a migratory strategy of sending families and/or smugglers who are looking for holes in a system that is increasingly reducing reception.

ISLAM AS A SOCIETAL IRRITANT

The religious prescriptions of Islam are complex and sometimes spectacular. They are of recent importation into French society. They can surprise and arouse incomprehension or even rejection. This is all the more true since France is a country that proclaims the secularity of the State – a principle to which we shall return – and whose freedoms have been won, since the Revolution of 1789, against the Catholic Church. Assimilating religion and constraint is therefore a national reflex, and since the struggle waged by the Republic against the Church in the 19th and early

20th centuries, the State has sought to make religion as inconspicuous as possible in the public space. It has tended to consider, and a good part of public opinion with it, that if all beliefs should be respected and freely practiced, they belong to private life. The visibility or even the conspicuous nature of Muslim practices therefore offends this sensitivity. On the other hand, the faithful of Islam often find it difficult to understand this situation. They often consider themselves discriminated against by a criticism of their practices which becomes in their eyes a criticism of their religion. The irritation is thus reciprocal, with multiple sources, not to mention that they are sometimes used in a provocative way. Alongside these religious practices under debate, there are also more or less serious attacks on public order, ranging from misdemeanors to crimes of a terrorist nature with a religious basis.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN DEBATE

Without claiming to draw up an exhaustive list, we can note the most significant ones, those that have provoked controversy and sometimes led to legislative or judicial responses to regulate or even prohibit them.

The *veil and its derivatives* are at the same time the most visible, the most frequent and the oldest in the public debate, since it dates back to the last decades of the 20th century. The controversies are not closed and reappear episodically according to new variants or uses. The simple veil consists for Muslim women to cover their hair in all places and circumstances. The very existence of a religious requirement in this matter is debated but proclaimed by the wearers and their supporters. Opponents see it as a sign of submission of women, a manifestation of their inferiority contrary to the principles of equality between the sexes, a challenge to the republican law, especially since the wearing of the veil can be forced and not free. The most opposed to the veil are Muslim women who come from countries where it is compulsory and responds to social pressure. One measures the difficulty: if women are free, why forbid them to dress as they please? But there are doubts about the real freedom of women in certain neighborhoods where religious pressure is strong, and especially male. The question was first raised in schools, and the veil was prohibited in public schools for schoolgirls. However, it is authorized in universities for female students, who are of age. In the public space, it is accepted, but not for public service employees, in the name of the neutrality of the State. It is however accepted for accompanying school outings. A question was raised about voting places. On this subject, the law prohibits the veil for the presidents of the office, who represent the State, but not for the assessors, who are designated by the candidates. However, this situation is contested and is still being debated. In private workplaces, internal regulations set the rules. All of these issues have been and continue to be the subject of controversies. According to recent opinion polls, the wearing of the veil in the public space divides the French along a right-left axis. However, the youngest categories of the population are less and less opposed to it.

Derivatives of the veil are the *niqab* or *burqa*, which involve a complete mask over the face, accompanied by a kind of tarpaulin covering the entire body and leaving only a narrow slit for the eyes. They concern only a few particularly rigorous currents of Islam. Irritation has been particularly strong with this practice, which seems to reflect a rejection of others, a hostile isolation, a refusal to communicate with them. It took a special law to prohibit them, based on security considerations rather than secularism: one should not indeed mask one's face in the public space. However, this prohibition is far from being fully respected, firstly because it does not apply to foreigners, and secondly because the police are often reluctant to issue fines so as not to provoke reactions that would disturb public order. Sometimes used in a deliberately provocative way, the practice remains marginal. The same is true of another derivative, the *burkini*, which covers the entire body with a rubberized girdle when swimming in the sea or pool. In recent years, the appearance of burkinis on beaches or in swimming pools has provoked hostile reactions, with various municipalities issuing bans. Generally speaking, these decrees have been annulled for lack of legal basis, in the name of individual freedom. It is only when hostile reactions lead to disturbances that the mayor's police power can justify a ban, as has happened in Corsica. For swimming pools, the question depends on

their internal regulations. The appearance of burkinis is most often of a provocative nature, to test society's resistance to this practice.

The construction of *mosques* is another element of debate. Their number is increasing, and their financing is sometimes provided by foreign institutions or states. The risk of cultural or political pressure on their part arouses suspicion, whether it be from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Algeria or Morocco, among other Muslim countries. Indirect techniques of French public financing are also used by local authorities, which subsidize associations rather than cults. The financing of these places of worship is a bone of contention that has not yet been resolved. One controversy was particularly acute in Alsace, where the city of Strasbourg was planning to partially finance a huge mosque belonging to an association of Turkish origin. It had to give up in the face of protests, including from the government. This is all the more true since, rightly or wrongly, mosques are often considered as instances of Islamist proselytizing, if not as hotbeds for terrorism. Given the growing number of practicing Muslims in France, mosques tend to multiply or expand. This leads to a kind of contradiction: if mosques are a cause for concern, their absence leads the faithful to *street prayers*, which are particularly visible and contrary to the freedom of movement of passers-by. This religious ostentation offends, all the more so as it does not correspond to any recognized national tradition, as can be the case of public Catholic demonstrations. It is sometimes experienced locally as a provocation and this practice has been denounced by the Front National, which has become Rassemblement National, remaining however a party at the extreme right of the French political spectrum.

Mosques are run by *imams*, Muslim religious dignitaries. In practice, they are very diverse in terms of their origins and tendencies, with no real hierarchy. A significant number of them are foreigners, non-French speakers, or even paid by a foreign state – such as Turkey. Some are radicalized and their preaching can inflame their followers. The control that is exercised over them is limited; it is exercised over a community that is fairly closed in on itself. The internal functioning of the mosques is rather opaque, and in principle concerns above all the faithful. Two subjects are open to debate, without it really developing. On the one hand, the training of imams: it is sometimes suggested that they be trained in France, possibly with a corresponding diploma, which would imply action by the State. However, the separation of the Churches and the State complicates the situation, since the State cannot interfere in the functioning of a religion, except in the case of public order. On the other hand, the activity of imams can be in question, insofar as they incite to civil disobedience, to the contempt of laws and to religious radicalization. It is all the more difficult to verify this since the preaching does not take place in French but in Arabic. Should it be banned? Should mosques considered radicalized be closed? Right-wing movements are calling for this. It may have happened that foreign imams were expelled and mosques closed, but these are complex decisions. Generally speaking, these questions concern the organization of the Muslim religion in France, to which we will return.

Another irritant arises from the constraints that Islam claims to impose in *places of education*, especially secondary education. Many young students contest certain teachings as contrary to their faith, whether it be the creation of the world, the physical sciences, or certain points in history, including anti-Semitism and the Shoah. These refusals can also concern physical education, especially for girls. The result is de facto censorship, self-censorship by teachers in the name of public peace. Often hidden, this self-censorship is episodically publicized. Teachers resist risk exposing themselves to violent reactions, of which the beheading of Professor Samuel Paty in October 2020 was a paroxysmal example. In this regard, we note the caution and modesty of the state's reactions. Still in educational institutions, the question of *food in school canteens* is also a subject of debate, with some rejecting all consumption of pork and even demanding halal food. The tendency is rather to submit, even if certain sectors of opinion are bristling at these demands in the name of equality between pupils. The justification given by the academic authorities is that these students often come from poor families and that it is in their school that they are assured of a decent diet. In this way, the religious constraint is circumvented while being submitted to it. A

radical form of religious education consists in creating *Muslim schools*, which tends to develop, and some of them escape the control of the State. Religious affirmation is sometimes coupled with national affiliation, especially on the part of Turkey. The Milli Görüş association, linked to Turkish Islamist movements, undertakes not only to build mosques but also educational institutions. Again, these projects are contested and encourage the fragmentation of the societal and national body.

Other contested practices concern *religious practice in the workplaces*. This concerns, for example, the demand by faithful Muslims for places reserved for prayer and the time needed to do so. The recurrent constraints of Ramadan do not facilitate professional activity. For students, it may be the request not to take exams on Fridays. In other activities, it will be the refusal to be near women, to greet them, to shake their hands, to occupy seats that they have used, especially in transports. In hospitals, the demand that Muslim women not be treated by men, or even the refusal of certain examinations. These demands are usually very much in the minority and rarely accepted, even if they are sometimes supported by some trade unions, which are subject to Islamic entryism. They can lead to forms of violence in the event of refusal, and hospital staff in particular can be affected. These behaviors are generally contrary to the law or the regulations of the companies concerned. In most cases, their management tries not to publicize them and to submit them to amicable solutions, even to the detriment of regularity. They are as many pressures exerted, generally knowingly, by radical groups in order to test the societal reactions and the capacity of resistance of non-Muslims. This leads to more serious attacks on public order.

VIOLETIONS OF PUBLIC ORDER

We are dealing here with behavior that is unlawful and that may constitute increasingly serious violations of public order. In this gradation, some of them concern private life and are related to morals contrary to republican laws, while others are dictated by beliefs based on absolute obedience to revealed religious prescriptions and which spill over into the public life of non-believers as well. They are based on the idea of the superiority of supposedly divine commandments, the Sharia, which is a kind of constitution of Islam, over the laws of the Republic. They can range from pressure and threats to proscribe or impose certain behaviors on everyone to terrorist actions. They characterize a violent Islamist minority, highly publicized, which polarizes the attention of public opinion, feeds its hostility, constitutes an element of social and political cleavage, a deep division, not only between Muslims and others, but also among non-Muslims. What concerns the private life is first of all internal to the Muslim communities, the infringements of the public order overflow largely towards the outside.

Many of these internal behaviors of communities of believers or people of Muslim culture concern the *situation of women*. However, its singularity tends to decrease with the passage of generations. We know that the republican law is based on equality between women and men, in private, public and professional life. It is far from being the case that reality corresponds to the legal objectives, but the dynamic is largely in that direction. The situation is different in predominantly Islamic societies, whose mores and laws are different. They imply in various ways particular constraints for women, even their submission, and in any case a different treatment between the two sexes. These customs are maintained in France in certain environments and certain neighborhoods where Muslim traditions predominate. Women are not welcome in cafés or bars, and street harassment is commonplace. On the other hand, there is a demand for separate hours reserved for women in public swimming pools. Social pressure is exerted in a diffuse way to lead to the invisibility of women in the public space, which is a form of illicit discrimination, tolerated in practice in its daily practice, except for a few symbolic cases quickly removed from the public debate. Those who denounce these practices are most often women from Muslim countries where these practices are legal, but they are hardly listened to.

Other situations are more specific and more serious. Thus the practice of *excision* still exists in France, more or less underground. It is the subject of a complex debate, with some people defending it in

the name of sociological relativism and others observing that if circumcision is tolerated, excision cannot be condemned. These genital mutilations with religious justification thus reinforce each other and are exceptions to the common law. On the other hand, the requirement of a *certificate of virginity* for girls before marriage is clearly discriminatory and is now condemned by French law. The same is true of forced marriages. It is very difficult to know their number, which is very high in the world. They are based on initial violence and lead to rape and violence, even murder when some women want to free themselves from their chains. “*Honor killings*” go as far as the murder of girls who have affairs or want to marry people of another religion or even another ethnic group. To this can be added *polygamy*, which is not recognized and is even illegal, but is tolerated in the name of equality between the children of these multiple marriages.

All these behaviors are illegal but often invisible. They are morally condemned, at least in principle. However, respect for privacy means that these situations are not combated effectively enough. This respect may to some extent explain why they remain unknown and only come to light through mediatized violence. Many battered women do not manage to register their complaints at police stations, and measures to remove violent husbands are not respected. This is a situation that does not only concern Muslims, even if it is more widespread in these circles, and well beyond militant Islamism. The relative indifference towards them is then the result of a latent apartheid which is a form of racism, when one considers that these populations should sort out their own problems. It should be noted, however, that feminist movements are very discreet on this subject and show little solidarity with the women victims, since the fight against racism seems to them to be a priority and implies that one should not stigmatize the morals of visible minorities. This would reinforce the positions of the extreme right, supported in France by the Front, which has become the Rassemblement National. Thus racism and anti-racism converge to make the phenomenon invisible or to minimize it. As for public action, it is more declaratory than concrete. The fight against violence against women is the subject of government speeches with little effect, of public communication rather than real measures.

The question of alleged *anti-Muslim “blasphemy”* has complex links with public order. On the one hand, it is the basis of a demanding, active and even violent claim against the freedom to criticize the Muslim religion, or even to express oneself freely about it, in the name of a public order to be modified and imposed. On the other hand, the manifestations of this intolerance are contrary to positive public order, including criminal law, and can range from misdemeanors to crimes, but the concrete public reactions remain on the whole weak. The claim is based on the condemnation of blasphemy, which applies to all criticism of Islam. One should not confuse an abstract criticism, which can be applied to all religions, with the personal, collective or individual questioning of believers, which is reprehensible. Blasphemy is not recognized by French law, unlike other laws, such as Austrian law, which punishes the “denigration of a religion” of such a nature as to shock believers. The French constitution proclaims and protects freedom of opinion and expression. Among the public manifestations of opposition to this freedom, we find the banning of the representation of Mahomet, a play by Voltaire, the denunciation in social networks of positions hostile to Islam, the collective denunciation of an Islamophobia that should be condemned. One goes as far as murder. Two contemporary examples of these phenomena can be cited.

The first is the *Mila case*, which concerns a young girl, a lesbian, who expressed on a private site her detestation of Islam, as of any other religion. She suffered massive and anonymous harassment through social networks, including a number of death threats. Since then, she has had to live under police protection and her studies as well as her life itself are compromised by these pressures, in conditions that may remind us of the Salman Rushdie affair, the object of a Shiite Islamist fatwa a few decades ago and who suffered a kind of social death. One can observe on this subject that the public reactions were very modest, the Minister of Justice having even at first condemned Mila, before retracting, while the president of the Republic has more recently, in 2020, reaffirmed the freedom of expression and opposed the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, eradicator of

the blasphemy. But the few Internet users we could identify who harassed Mila received only light sentences. Most of them were first-time offenders and not always Muslim. They pleaded that their behavior was playful or reckless, while during the trial the social networking harassment continued. More generally, some Catholic circles are not far from sympathizing with the demand for the condemnation of blasphemy, and one notes on this level the sacred union of religions. The same observation could be made after the massacre of journalists from the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* by two Muslim fundamentalists in 2015: unofficially, practicing Catholics felt that the Mohammed cartoons were an unnecessary and dangerous provocation.

The case of *Samuel Paty*, a teacher who was beheaded in October 2020 by an Islamist for having presented cartoons of Mohammed in class to illustrate freedom of expression, is another paroxysmal example of the fight against so-called blasphemy and the weakness of the support that was given to him. Almost disowned by the Ministry of National Education for carelessness, his murder gave rise to public ceremonies and fiery speeches before falling into deep oblivion. A few attempts to name schools after him in order to honor his memory have come to nothing because of the opposition, real or supposed, of pupils or their parents and because of the desire to avoid any attitude that might be perceived as provocative. We can also mention in this context the situation of two teachers, one from Toulouse, the other from the Paris area, who had to leave their establishments for the same reasons, and the increasing questioning of teachers by pupils who assert the superiority of the Sharia. Other occasional assassinations of police officers, gendarmes, anonymous passers-by have met the same fate: a strong episodic mediation and an instantaneous strong emotion, followed by a move on to something else. There is even a tendency to present the terrorists not as Islamists but as unbalanced. This emotional or psychiatric treatment of terrorist acts is indicative of the uncertainty and weakness of the State in the face of Islamist movements, an attitude to which we shall return.

Islamist terrorism is older and broader than the issue of so-called blasphemy. It is based on other motives and has more general objectives. It goes back to the end of the 20th century, it was Iranian in 1986, Algerian in 1995 with the GIA (Algerian Islamist Group). It was national with Mohamed Merah in 2012, trained notably in Afghanistan and murderer of seven people including Jewish children and two French Muslim soldiers. The 2015 murder of journalists from *Charlie Hebdo*, a satirical weekly, by two young French Islamists is another manifestation of this. It manifested itself above all in mass terrorism linked to Daesh or other Islamist movements, which claim responsibility for it, in 1995 and 1996. It was first in Paris at the *Bataclan* attack with more than 100 dead on November 13, 2015, and then another attack in Nice on July 14, 2016, with more than 80 dead. The first was carried out by an organized group from Belgium, the second by an apparently isolated individual. These attacks are part of a context of international Islamic terrorism, emanating first from Al Qaeda, then from Daesh, following the attacks of September 11, 2001, which destroyed the World Trade Center in New York and damaged the Pentagon in Washington, with several thousand victims.

The general objective of this jihad, in which various Western converts participate, is on the one hand to liberate the land of Islam from the infidel Western presence, and on the other hand to expand this land of Islam by forced conversion of the unbelieving populations, or else to destroy them. More recently, following the failure of Daesh and the international fight against terrorism, terrorists have reverted to smaller, scattered attacks, targeted or not. Terrorism remains nonetheless conscious and organized and its international dimension is present. In France, it is based on the ideological import of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which feeds a specific anti-Semitism against Europe's largest Jewish community. French interventions against Daesh in Syria and against Islamic movements in the Sahel have made France a target of choice. Beyond occasional attacks, it strives to exert a hold on the Muslim community and to impose its law on it. However, Muslims as well as non-Muslims are victims of these attacks. It represents a security threat that has been present for several decades, it is at the origin of exceptional measures that have tended to be incorporated into the common law, giving rise to debates in the country. Among them, the question of repatriation

of French citizens who left to fight with Daesh in Syria and their families. Should the fighters be tried in France or on the spot? Should the women and children be repatriated? The majority position and that of the public authorities is that all these people should remain in their current places of detention. Returns are only made on an individual and discreet basis.

In a more marginal and diffuse way, because it is not limited to Muslims nor is it general as far as they are concerned, one can note a *tendency of minority communities to exercise their own police force*, or even to attack public authorities if their demands are not met. This is the case for the Roma community, among others. This can lead to clashes of an ethnic nature that are not linked to religion, and gang phenomena contribute to civil violence. These gang clashes are often linked to criminal activities, not terrorist but economic, especially involving drug trafficking. The resulting profits are, however, likely to contribute to the financing of terrorism, which the possession of weapons protecting various types of trafficking can also fuel. The religious and more specifically Muslim dimension is more widely present. A recent significant incident, in 2020, pitted Chechen gangs against Muslim groups in the city of Dijon, and calm was restored after religious mediation, in this case by imams. The state is thus deprived of control over its own soil in the name of a kind of personal right. Basically, the latent claim is then that of a special status according to religions, as if this personal right were to prevail over territorial law. It is a contemporary and inverted variant of the Capitulations regime which maintained the personal right of Christians in the Ottoman Empire. All these phenomena are signs of the weakening of the authority of the State and a challenge to its unity.

UNCERTAINTIES AND WAVERING IN PUBLIC POLICIES

Faced with these diffuse elements of societal irritation, which sometimes give rise to crises of varying intensity, what are the reactions of the public authorities and, more broadly, of political society, including its media and intellectual component? We can first ask ourselves about the attitude of organized political groups, which on the one hand capture and echo public opinion, and on the other hand try to inform, train and mobilize it. In this respect, while the existence of a growing Islamic minority is divisive, the public debate is hardly organized. It is animated by the extremes, and then tends to be summarily translated by the opposition of simplistic slogans, which denounce Islamo-leftism on one side and Islamophobia on the other. In a more organized way, the more moderate formations argue around the principle of secularism and the place it leaves to religions in public life and space. As for the fight against radical Islamism, the open or hidden support of terrorism, it is universally approved as long as it is carried out by law. It is the exceptional measures against terrorism, or the legal reforms aiming at fighting radical Islamism that are then in question. In general, it can be observed that these debates are most often biased, are not frankly open and that a certain hypocrisy dominates them. One fears being accused of racism if one attacks minorities, of inhumanity if one challenges the reception of immigrants, of fascism if one advocates coercive measures. The question of Islam tends to be mixed with those of immigration and racism.

A DEBATE DRIVEN BY THE EXTREMES AND TEMPERED BY THE MODERATES

In the configuration of French political forces, one can roughly distinguish six currents. The extreme left, at the heart of which is *la France insoumise* (LFI) led by Mr. Mélenchon, with some satellites. The far right, on the other hand, is dominated by the Front National, which has become the *Rassemblement National* (RN), led by Ms. Le Pen, with the proximity of a few personalities. Both are competing for a popular electorate and are accused of populism by their opponents. They have intellectual relays, clearly more so for LFI than for RN. It remains difficult to claim to be a member of the Rassemblement National, which is struggling to escape demonization. It is often presented as nostalgic for fascism and as a paragon of an authoritarian regime. However, the themes it supports have a growing echo in public opinion, and are sometimes taken up by its

opponents. It has had varying electoral fortunes depending on the polls, but it is one of the leading French political formations, even though the electoral system strongly limits its representation. LFI has not experienced the same opprobrium, but its electoral influence is tending to diminish. Between the two, more moderate formations. On the right, *Les Républicains*, distant heirs of Gaullism and Giscardism. On the left, the *Parti Socialiste* (PS), heir to Mitterrandism, which has in fact become social-democratic but divided within it. To this must be added the *mouvement écologiste*, poorly organized and divided, but whose electoral popularity is growing. At the center, with the intention of reducing these oppositions, fragmenting them and absorbing them into a centrism without borders, is the recently formed *la République en marche* (LaREM), which supports President Macron. It has a majority in the National Assembly with the support of the center-right *Mouvement Démocrate* (MODEM). All of these organized political formations are facing growing skepticism among the public, which is reflected in the steady rise in abstentions during elections.

These data are necessary if we want to present the divergences of the political forces on the question of Islam in the Republic or in relation to the Republic. The LFI is generally in favor of a broad tolerance of the morals and practices of the Muslim community, without however affirming it strongly, rather in a defensive way against the reproaches that may be addressed to it. For ideological reasons first, internationalism which advocates the welcoming and respect of other cultures, social solidarity which supports a population which is mostly poor, under-educated and under-employed, anti-racism which denounces discrimination. For electoral reasons, LFI finds a reservoir of votes in these communities. The RN, on the other hand, is hostile to uncontrolled immigration, considers that it is a source of insecurity and civil violence, rejects the mores of Islam and questions the compatibility of this religion with national identity and Republican principles. Electorally, this discourse appeals to a population that fears the competition of low wages, considers itself wronged by the various aids provided to the newcomers, which it finances, and lives in regions or neighborhoods increasingly abandoned by the public services in the face of their insecurity and the trafficking of all kinds that takes place there with growing latitude. The clashes between rival youth gangs, the recurrent riots in various suburbs against the police reinforce the concern, and the RN supports the forces of order when LFI denounces police violence. The RN castigates the Islamo-leftism of LFI and LFI the Islamophobia of the RN and the right.

As for the moderate parties, *Les Républicains*, *LaREM* and the *PS*, their attitude is more equivocal. Generally speaking, this is a debate that they do not address head-on, but which they undergo on the occasion of crises, and which they try to resolve rather than solve. As they are dominant on the electoral as well as the parliamentary level, they orient public action in a much more reactive than active way, minimizing the difficulties, responding only in an ad hoc manner and without a general plan to the problems raised by Islam. Postures, speeches, rhetoric, often prevail over measures, or the latter only follow them in a limited and partial way. Thus, a speech by President Macron on “religious separatism”, following the assassination of Samuel Paty in 2020, seemed to announce strong decisions against radical Islamism, but the law that followed was much more modest. Clearly, the president and his majority prefer to talk about something else. For *Les Républicains*, who represent the classical right, they often adopt a rhetoric close to the RN without supporting its program. Some may feel a certain embarrassment insofar as they are of Catholic tradition and therefore, like the Church, in solidarity with other religions against unbelief. Like Muslims, for example, they are hostile to marriage for all, to medically assisted procreation for all, and the presence of religion in the public space does not bother them. Moreover, local elected officials are sometimes led to complacency towards religious people who facilitate social peace and constitute an electoral reservoir. It is the same for the elected representatives of the *PS*, who also have other reasons for tolerance. Internationalist, anti-racist, solidarity-based, it does not intend to participate in the stigmatization of a minority under trial, but it defends secularism in principle – secularism around which the debate focuses when it takes place and which opposes various tendencies within it.

SECULARISM (LAÏCITÉ), A DISPUTED AND AMBIGUOUS PRINCIPLE

In France, secularism (Laïcité) has always been a struggle. It was imposed at the beginning of the 20th century with the 1905 law separating Church and State. At that time, it was based on a rupture of the Concordat of 1801 with the Holy See, which gave the Catholic Church mainly a public status. This provided for state control over the appointment of bishops and recognized that Catholicism was the religion of the majority of French people. The nascent Third Republic led a long fight against the Church's hold on institutions, loosening its stranglehold on morals by legalizing divorce, for example. The separation in 1905 accompanied the growing secularization of civil society. However, the Concordat was maintained in Alsace-Moselle following the return of these three departments to France after 1918, and benefits Catholics, Protestants and Jews, but not Muslims. Secularism implies the neutrality of the State with respect to religions and the respect of beliefs, considered as individual affairs. Consequently, the State does not subsidize any religion. However, it remains the owner of certain religious buildings, including cathedrals, and is responsible for their maintenance. This secularism has undergone various attenuations in the second part of the 20th century, particularly with regard to education. The Debré law in 1959 allowed the public financing of religious schools, placed under public contract in return for the respect of school neutrality. The fighting secularism of the beginning of the 20th century was succeeded, as far as Christianity was concerned, by an appeasing secularism, and various subsequent laws allowed the development of Catholic education, often in competition with public education.

Secularism (Laïcité) is a constitutional principle laid down in Article 1 of the French Constitution of 1958, and recognized by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. It is part of France's "constitutional identity" as defined by the Constitutional Council and of its "national identity" as defined in article 3 bis of the 2007 Lisbon Treaty establishing the European Union. However, the French legal corpus relating to secularism was essentially aimed at Catholicism, and is now facing new difficulties with the rise of Islam in the population. Catholicism, as well as Protestantism and Judaism, make a clear distinction between religious commandments and civil law, and accept perfectly well to comply with the laws of the State, as long as the latter respects individual beliefs and does not hinder the exercise of worship in appropriate places. But Islam, with the Sharia, is more than a transcendent religion that distinguishes between heaven and earth. It is also a civil constitution which involves constraints in daily life. They can clash with the laws of the state. Thus, Islam allows polygamy and, as we have seen, implies a series of discriminations against women which are in contradiction with the principle of equality between the sexes. It also has a proselytizing vocation that leads it to a public assertion of its claims and goes so far as to justify violence against unbelievers and Jihad, the holy war against them – hence terrorism. One will obviously not confuse the wearing of the veil with assassinations, but from benign behavior to criminal behavior, a whole range of behaviors linked to Islam are as many challenges to laws or morals – and to secularism.

After having been consecrated in this way in France, secularism (Laïcité) found itself confronted with Islam. Vast debates arose from this, and several conceptions of secularism clashed, which only partially overlap with the right-left division because they are also the subject of a debate inside themselves and between intellectuals. To summarize, three opposing theses can be distinguished. The first is demanding, the second is relativistic. The third is supported in particular by President Emmanuel Macron. It is basically a variant of the second. The two main conceptions can be summarized by an image due to a philosopher, Pierre-Henri Tavoillot: society is like a saloon in a Western. One can enter it by leaving one's weapons in the checkroom, or one can keep them inside. In the first case, peace between consumers is guaranteed, in the second, the risk of conflict is accentuated. The demanding conception of secularism therefore considers that religion, a private matter, has no place in public life and that its manifestations must be kept as far away as possible. The law of the State is the rule that all must respect in the public space. The relativist conception considers that secularism implies the indifference of the State towards religions, but also the respect

of beliefs, whose manifestations are consequently licit as long as they do not harm public order. This thesis, which criticizes the “secularists”, is discreetly supported by the Catholic hierarchy. The opposition between the two conceptions was concretized by the attitude of the *Observatoire de la Laïcité* (Observatory of Secularism), an advisory commission to the government, established in 2013 and dissolved in 2021. Its officials clearly rallied to the relativist conception, and were accused of excessive tolerance, even complacency, towards claims and conduct inspired by Islamism. It was abolished in the wake of these controversies and replaced by another body, the *Comité interministériel de laïcité*, which is subject to closer government control.

But has the demanding conception triumphed? Nothing is less certain, judging by the position of the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron. He has declared that if the State is secular, society is not. This opinion, which comes from the centrist “at the same time”, a search for a synthesis between the right and the left, is in fact close to the relativist conception. It justifies the refusal of religious signs in public services, but accepts, for example, that school outings financed by public authorities be accompanied by veiled women. It tolerates a certain amount of public financing of mosques, through subsidies to “cultural” and not “religious” associations. It is eminently open to legal criticism, since Article 1 of the Constitution states that “France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social republic... It respects all beliefs”. It follows that the republic cannot be limited to the public authorities, to the organs of the State, but includes the whole nation, the civil society as a whole, all free and equal citizens. To reason otherwise is to justify communitarianism, the cohabitation of groups that differ in their morals, or even their laws. It also leads to denying the indivisibility of the Republic. But communitarianism, an Anglo-Saxon model where one belongs to a group as much as one is an individual, or even first of all to a group, is a model that leads to a de facto apartheid, that is to say to the negation of all republican principles. This second conception, a principle of dissolution of national unity, is taken up by a private organization, the *Vigie de la Laïcité*, where the former leaders of the dissolved *Observatoire de la Laïcité* meet. The controversy is therefore far from over. Very symptomatic is the fact that, in an attempt to combat the excesses of Islamism, the government has tabled a bill against “separatism” – not against communitarianism.

UNFINISHED LEGAL BUSINESS

France is a state governed by the rule of law, and it claims to be so. As a result, public action with regard to Islam, whether to regulate it or to combat radical Islamism, of which terrorism is the tip of the iceberg, requires the law. A number of specific texts have been adopted within this framework since the beginning of the 21st century and the irruption of mass terrorism. It has struck the country, as well as the United States and various other Western European countries, but in France has taken on a particular lethality. It is still on the agenda, even if its dimension has regressed, more fragmented and restricted than the attacks of the *Bataclan* in 2015 or Nice in 2016. Basically, the legal dimensions are declined on three registers. Organizing Muslim worship is the most ambitious, the one that could correspond to an organized design, to a public policy followed with constancy – but its results are far from sufficient. Fighting terrorism, essentially Islamist terrorism, which has led to the multiplication of exceptional texts that seem to constitute punctual responses to particular attacks, without succeeding in eradicating it – but no one has yet succeeded in doing so on the international level. Finally, and more recently, in a legislative effort, to give the State instruments to fight against “separatism”, that is to say, attempts to constitute in France entities separate from the national community, with their own morals, their own educational systems, a culture and a religion that challenge the Republic and reject its laws – an effort that is underway and whose success cannot be anticipated.

Attempts to *organize the Muslim* religion have come up against various difficulties and have only partially succeeded. Three manifestations of this can be noted, which can also be three stages. The first is the creation in 2003, under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, of the *Conseil français du culte musulman* (CFCM). This is a French association governed by the law of 1901 which defines the status of associations. It is placed under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior,

and its vocation is to represent the Muslims of France to the state authorities for questions relating to religious practice, allowing them to be regulated. It is completed by regional bodies and various associations including those representing mosques. The choice of the status of the law of 1901 differs from the status of religious associations provided for by a law of 1905, which on the other hand concerns the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish cults, and allows for greater public control. The CFCM also has various federations that are grouped together on a foreign basis, with Algeria, Morocco and Turkey standing out. The concrete fragmentation of religions continues, and the various efforts undertaken since then to strengthen the weight of the state, to restrict that of foreign states and to better train imams at the national level have had only limited results. Representation within the CFCM initially led to Algerian domination, which was followed by Turkish domination.

A second manifestation, specific to the presidency of Emmanuel Macron, is the definition of a *Charte des principes de l'islam de France*, or “Charter of the principles of Islam in France”, proposed by the CFCM and approved by the public authorities in 2021. It affirms the compatibility between Islam and the Republic, falls within the framework of the secularism of the State – with all the ambiguity that the concept entails –, equality between men and women and condemns the instrumentalization of Islam for political purposes. It recognizes the freedom of conscience and castigates acts hostile to Muslims. It provides for the creation of a National Council of Imams in charge of labeling them. This Charter has not been approved by all the federations concerned, especially those of Turkish origin, who see it as an element of discrimination against Muslims. In fact, they do not want to break their ties with Turkey, which openly uses them as a means of pressure on the Western countries where they are established. The principle and content of the Charter are in line with the aftermath of an attack in October 2020, the beheading by a Chechen refugee of a teacher, Samuel Paty, who had commented to his students on the cartoons of Mohammed published by the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. Among these consequences, the law “reinforcing republican principles”, known as the law against separatism, to which we will return.

A third, more discreet, older manifestation concerns Muslim worship within the armed forces. The armed forces, especially the army, have a significant percentage of Muslims, more than 10%, a higher proportion than in the general population. Since the army is now a professional army, enlisting is an opportunity open to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and with limited schooling. They find a social environment in the army and can acquire professional training. Soldiers, both men and women, were given the opportunity to practice their religion. Since the end of the 19th century, there have been Catholic, Protestant and Jewish chaplains, priests, pastors and rabbis, but it is only since 2006 that a network of Muslim chaplains has been organized. They currently represent 17% of the total, with about 40 members. The army has had the will to promote harmony between the various religions of its personnel, to avoid any discrimination and to integrate the various faithful into a single body. This is not an exception to secularism, but a sign that it is not a negation of religions, since it respects all beliefs. Worship within the army is all the more important because the lives of soldiers are more exposed than those of civilians.

The *fight against terrorism* is a long-standing one, whereas the development of mass Islamist terrorism is spectacularly evident at the beginning of the 21st century. A special court of assizes was established in 1986 to try the perpetrators. It has national jurisdiction and is composed solely of professional judges, without a jury. It tries about ten cases per year. Its judgments can be appealed to a court of the same type. It is only one particular case of a set of texts concerning terrorism, including the creation of anti-terrorist judges, whose action has proved to be effective. These texts have multiplied since 2001, and constitute as many punctual responses to a phenomenon that we have not yet managed to eradicate. The law is only one of the instruments used to fight against it, but in a State governed by the rule of law, everything must go through it. It channels police and intelligence measures and other actions, especially financial ones, allowing the surveillance of radical Islamist networks. These measures have an international dimension in addition to their internal component.

The *international dimension* is based first of all on Security Council resolutions that define a complete program to fight terrorism, in fact Islamist terrorism, after the attacks of 11 September 2001. Resolution 1373 of 28 September 2001 provides a framework for action by all States in this area, requiring them to introduce a series of measures into their domestic law and to cooperate with each other to prevent and suppress terrorist acts, with the obligation to report to the Security Council on the measures taken. Resolution 1540 of 28 April 2004 has a more specific purpose, the prevention of the acquisition by terrorist movements of weapons of mass destruction, biological, chemical and nuclear. France applies them in the framework of the European Union. The international dimension then concerns armed actions undertaken in accordance with international law, with or without the authorization of the Security Council, against terrorist movements. Thus, France intervened militarily in Mali in 2013, with the Council's approval, to protect that country against the threat of a takeover by Islamist movements. It also intervened in Syria, without this agreement, against terrorist movements considered responsible or complicit in the attacks of 2015 and 2016. France relied on self-defense recognized by the United Nations Charter. In this context, France has refused, through the voice of its Minister of Foreign Affairs, to repatriate French citizens who fought alongside Daesh and were detained in Syria or Iraq, including women and children, with some exceptions, which gives rise to some controversy. In general, the international fight against terrorism has not yet found an effective strategy and the threat is by no means declining.

As regards the *internal dimension*, as has been said, there are many texts aimed at preventing or repressing terrorism. They constitute a specific and derogatory law that can infringe on public freedoms. It is therefore criticized by human rights defenders and by left-wing parties, without giving rise to a real split within French society. The state of emergency, a temporary situation provided for by law, was succeeded in 2017 by a permanent legislative regime for internal security and the fight against terrorism, reinforced in 2021 by a law on the prevention of terrorism and intelligence. In this respect, we can mention the establishment of an "S" file, for "State security", a file that is a component of the file of wanted persons. It lists, among others, radicalized Muslims who may present a danger to public order. There are several thousand of them. The people concerned are not informed, nor are the authorities of the local communities where they reside, notably the mayors – this is because innocence is always presumed and no concrete consequences result for those on the S file, except possibly for covert surveillance. The effectiveness of this registration is doubtful, because it is sometimes discovered that the authors of attacks were registered without this having prevented their action – but we do not know the number of crimes that it was able to prevent. In the same spirit, we have tried to prevent people from leaving for the jihad with Daesh, with limited results. A program of de-radicalization has been prepared, but it has failed, and repression has shown its limits when we see that prisons are hotbeds of proselytizing for radical Islamism. The multiplication of texts and measures, most often reactive, is not a sign of success.

The law reinforcing the respect of the principles of the Republic, the latest one, adopted in 2021, is at the confluence of the organization of the Muslim religion and the fight against terrorism. It is mediately called the law against separatism. Before it has even been voted on, it has been a triple failure. First of all, it is a failure compared to all the previous texts, since they could not prevent either the development of political Islamism, or the terrorist attacks of which it is the cradle, as the assassination of Samuel Paty testifies. Then the project failed because it followed a much firmer speech by the President of the Republic against "religious separatism", delivered after the assassination on October 2, 2020. He announced strong measures. The text no longer bears this title and proposes in a more modest way to reinforce respect for republican principles, by proposing some modifications to the laws on cults. It is in this context that the Charter of Secularism is situated, negotiated with Muslim associations and not imposed, and whose at least partial failure has been noted. Third, it is a programmed failure for the future, since radical Islam will not disappear by virtue of this law whose communication dimension is at least as important as its substance. It is clear that the fight against Islamism is complex. On the one hand, we intend

to satisfy the growing part of the public opinion which is indignant about its manifestations and the weakness of the State towards it. On the other hand, it is feared that such a law will appear as a stigmatization of all Muslims, whose solidarity with an extremist fraction must be avoided.

In addition, the constraints of the rule of law, and in particular the control of the Constitutional Council, do not allow a religion to be singled out at the risk of being discriminated against, and it is well known that radical movements claim public freedoms in order to better fight them. The principle of non-discrimination, which tends to substitute collective rights and equality between groups for individual equality, facilitates their task. It is noteworthy that, even before the law was passed, two Islamist associations considered to be radical were dissolved in accordance with the common law on associations, but it is characteristic that an Identitarian association considered to be extreme right-wing was dissolved at the same time. Among the provisions of the law, a better control of associations, the prohibition of virginity certificates, the reinforcement of compulsory schooling by limiting home schooling, an increased fight against forced marriages, the possibility of closing down more quickly establishments convinced of Islamic proselytizing, a closer monitoring of sports federations. All of this creates new obligations only at the margin, reminds us of existing ones and may lead to more rapid punishment of breaches. Very symptomatic is the fact that the government rejected a Senate amendment banning the wearing of the burkini. It is a question of “reinforcing”, not extending. It is also about fighting against “separatism” and not against communitarianism, which could be implicitly justified a contrario. The result is no clarification of the government’s conception of secularism, which is still floating. One must conclude that, whatever the meaning one gives to it, more than ever secularism is a struggle.

It is clear that these issues will play an important role in the French presidential campaign that is taking shape for 2022, insofar as it will not be hampered by the Covid pandemic. There is a tendency for the parliamentary right and its declared candidates to become more radical on this issue, taking up the theme of the *Rassemblement National*. The limitation of immigration, a moratorium on this subject, the imposition of quotas, are proposals that largely cover the growing concern of public opinion with regard to Islam and its practices. However, we must note a shift in the terms of the debate. Under the influence of American society and practices, a cultural and ethnic communitarianism is tending to impose itself in the public debate, and religion is no longer the main issue. This indigenism speaks of “decolonialism” to justify the claims of immigrant minorities against the former colonizers and the “white” majority, who are also blamed for a slavery-like past. “Racialism” is claimed to assert the autonomous dignity of black populations, which is a fruit of the *Black Lives Matter* movement in the United States. Anti-racism then runs the risk of turning into an inverted racism. In this context, religion is only a partial dimension of resentments and struggles against discriminations suffered or perceived by all ethnic minorities. Islam and indigenism can be allies. They can also be competitors or even adversaries: the Arab-Muslims were also slavers. However, it should be noted that Islam has not had an electoral outlet in France and that the candidates who claim to be Islamists remain marginal. Islamic currents are hardly interested in electoral competitions, any more than in democracy. It is likely that the same will be true for racialist and decolonialist movements, which tend to strengthen their opponents.

SOURCES:

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STRATEGY OPTIONS OF THE FRENCH STATE
By Professor Yves Boyer

STRATEGY OPTIONS OF THE FRENCH STATE

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*“We are at war with an enemy that is an external and internal enemy.
We are not at war with a religion but with an ideology, the Islamist ideology”*

Gérald Darmanin
France’s Interior Minister
October 30, 2020

For Gérald Darmanin, this ideology represents “a form of 21st century fascism” which “wants to impose its cultural codes, its way of life, its way of managing emotions through terror”. Faced with the anxiety and anger of the French population, Gérald Darmanin warned that this “war” would undoubtedly be long. “When we are at war we must understand, unfortunately, that there have been and will be other events like these [terrorist attacks] absolutely despicable attacks”, he explained. Darmanin also stressed that the threat has increased after “extremely strong calls for hatred from certain foreign leaders”. The minister referred to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s remarks against Emmanuel Macron.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The question of Islam has thus become extremely complex in France and undoubtedly in other European countries that welcome immigrant populations part of which are of Muslim faith being Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian, Malian, etc. They bring a way of worshiping largely related to the country of their origin and, also, a particular form of identity, the example of the Turkish community is significant in this respect. Each community wishes and aspires to be granted a place in the organization of Islam in France. For the time being, national and theological currents that run through them have not made it possible to create a satisfactory situation that would allow their various representatives to find a role similar at the national level as leaders of other confessions, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish, which maintain a rich and constant dialogue, sometimes difficult but pacified, with national and local political authorities.

It is obviously not the religious practice linked to the Muslim cult that the peaceful believers observe which pose problems but the extremist vision that a tiny minority has of it which comes to disturb the democratic game either by practices contrary – in the case of France – to the values of the Republic or, from an even larger minority, of individuals who use Islamism to try to destabilize the country. This is an objective that they will not achieve.

Nowadays it is clearer that French authorities are pursuing a dual strategy to address and struggle against democratic dysfunctions that a deviant practice of Islam for political purposes could bring. It consists, on the one hand of intensifying and hardening the “kinetic” fight against terrorism of Islamist origin notably by reinforcing surveillance, intelligence and international cooperation and, on the other hand, in combating the “separatism” which could end up creating enclaves in certain French suburbs where the values of the Republic would not only be ignored but scorned. This imperative is now explicitly mentioned and described, whereas for a long time the authorities obliterated this question so as not to single out certain urban areas where this issue is acutely present.

This question of “separatism” is, indeed, no longer disregarded as being divisive and possibly discriminatory. Political authorities and many local actors such as mayors have acquired a more

global vision on the potential danger that a tiny fraction of Muslim communities in France no longer feel obliged to integrate into French society and respect the rules of “living together”. In this respect political leaders were more than convinced to act in view of “separatist” behaviours but also of polls showing that a significant fraction of the French youth of Arab-Muslim origin placed the observance of the *Sharia* before the laws of the Republic. For a long time, a kind of “ostrich policy” prevailed among political parties and the ruling class including the executive branch negates such perspectives. They only saw the issues through a social grid: unemployment and relative poverty were enough to explain community isolationism (*le repli communautaire*) particularly from the immigrant population of Muslim origin. They thus hide their face from the political consequences of all kinds deriving from the creation of entire neighbourhoods on the outskirts of large cities where a high proportion of immigrants have settled.

The answers to these dysfunctions that could be observed in various suburbs with a high proportion of immigrants were then dealt with a considerable influx of investments decided as well by the right as the left of the French political spectrum. This was followed by a series of “Plans for the City [*Plans pour la ville*]” from 1977 to 2017 whose expected results have not matched the initial ambitions. In forty years, there has been a succession of plans, with the results of pouring money into housing, employment or fight against school failure of young people. In 1999, for example, then Prime minister Lionel Jospin and his government defended an “urban renewal and solidarity program”: 20 billion francs were invested over six years to prevent the creation of “ghettos”. In 2001, a second “Jospin” plan was launched: 5.4 billion additional euros over five years were made available. In 2005, a “national urban renewal program” (PNRU) was launched, which provided funds for the renovation of the social rental housing stock, with the destruction of dilapidated housing and the construction of new buildings, at a cost of 46.5 billion euros over ten years, etc.

It is true that these plans have made life easier for the people living in these peripheral neighbourhoods, but in no way have they put an end to a *de facto* divide between “*les cités*” from other urban areas. The “*cités*” is a catch-all word used to designate, in the form of an euphemism, areas where a huge immigrant population live. If these phenomena cannot be stopped, they will drift towards the creation of territories “outside the rules of the Republic” where the underground economy, largely based on drug trafficking has flourished, undermining social stability as well as on a much smaller scale a form of Muslim irredentism opening the way to Islamists ready to take advantage of this deleterious context in the so-called “lost territories of the Republic”.

At first, the “*plans pour la ville*” and other measures that aimed at facilitating the integration of their inhabitants, translated the embarrassment of the French political class to recognize the existence, within the predominantly Muslim immigrant population, of a very small agitating fringe, refusing the integration and very often imposing its laws to a population that only asks to work and integrate. In reality, this problem has been growing for the last fifteen years. The State has responded with financial measures intended, among other things, to buy social peace, hypocritically hoping for better days. The State (executive and legislative branches) was further mobilized by the terrorist threat and the numerous attacks which resulted from it, in particular the tragedy of the Bataclan in Paris (November 2015, 90 deaths), of which the current trial of the actors and supporters of the terrorists is taking place in Paris with a very strong media coverage.

If the terrorist threat has not ceased, the repressive and intelligence arsenal seems to have acquired a certain efficiency even if the worst is still to be feared. The authorities are now more than ever under the pressure of a demand from a larger segment of the population, focusing on the issue of “*séparatisme* [separatism]”. Behind this term lie numerous aspects touching on religiously based hatred spread on social networks, behaviours affecting gender equality, refusal to subscribe to Republican values, etc. The latter are now strongly recalled in all schools in France especially at the occasion of commemorative ceremonies held in memory of the murders of innocent people during terrorist attacks. In all French schools, the teacher Samuel Paty, murdered by a Chechen terrorist, is being remembered for having reminded in a course of civic education tolerance with regard to

criticisms targeting all religions, including Islam, and as such showing some of the cartoons of Mohammed published in the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. In October 2021, during the annual tribute to Paty, a hundred incidents were observed in schools and colleges in France (France has more than 61,000 high schools and colleges). Although inadmissible, these incidents are still very small and have systemically led to legal proceedings.

It is in this context that the priorities of the French public authorities appear pretty clear:

- Fighting through military means and covert actions against terrorism inside and outside the country remains priority number one, using national means and by strengthening international cooperation.
- Fighting against internal “separatism” has now been established as priority number two. This new “front”, to use the warlike language now used by public authorities to refer to terrorism and Islamism, shows that the government and the main political parties intend to broaden the fight against terrorism by incorporating strong measures aimed at eradicating some of its sources: religious hatred, asocial behaviour, especially drug trafficking as one of the means of financing terrorist acts, refusal of equality between men and women, the perverse use of social networks where Islamist influencers are rampant, etc.

FIGHTING TERRORISM OF ISLAMISTS ORIGIN: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES ON THE EXTERNAL FRONT

Islamism has various and complex roots, notably the internal evolution that most Muslim countries are experiencing where people are paying a high tribute to terrorist attacks. Some of them are under severe strain. Demographic pressures, economic underdevelopment, an alarmingly high rate of youth, exclusion from world economic exchanges could be actively exploited by Islamist fundamentalists. There is indeed a very dangerous explosive cocktail that may lead to unbridled rise of radical Islam with dramatic political consequences on the stability of that region and on European security. A number of states are proving less and less capable of handling the development needs of their populations and the complexity of implementing measures to avoid the emergence of centrifugal forces. These states are characterized by internal disorganization, inter-ethnic or religious conflicts, insufficient economic development and a corrupt ruling class. Groups that feel excluded from aid or investment flows may indeed be led to assert their ethnic or religious identity even more strongly and to set themselves up against any symbol of globalization that can provoke “waves of international deregulation” and in reaction be used by Islamists to exacerbate local populations at odds with Western values. Within these states, “grey zones” can develop that are no longer controlled by the central government and can provide safe havens for mafias and terrorist groups to thrive. It is for this reason that France is conducting military operations in the Sahel – Operation *Serval* and then Operation *Barkhane* – where it is backed by a number of its European Union partners in the *Takuba* task force, which brings together the special forces. In the world of Emmanuel Macron¹³⁵, “*Our presence there has been requested by the states. It is in support of the sovereignty of these states and we are fighting against a common enemy that has also struck us on our territory, whose agenda is international and which has made the Sabel its main growth ground, threatening the stability of the whole of West Africa. This enemy, of course, is Islamist terrorism and we have very clearly identified the target of the IS-GS [Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (IS-GS)]¹³⁶, which is our main enemy on which we have focused during this period. Indeed, the agenda of the GSIM [Support Group for Islam and Muslims], affiliated to Al Qaeda, and of the IS-GS, is not simply Kidal or Bamako, but to strike further afield, tomorrow, Abidjan, Dakar, other horizons and to continue to prosper. And I would like to remind that the main victims of this terrorism are the civilian populations of the Sabel States and then the Sabelian soldiers and our soldiers*”.

To prevent worst case scenarios the European Union is trying to exert a stabilizing effect on the Arab Muslim world in order to buy time in the hope that the present chaotic situation may be sooner

rather than later improved. In its Mediterranean policy, the EU – of which France is an active advocate – comprising political stability and security; financial and economic developments; social, cultural and human collaboration – expressed an implicit reluctance to see an excessive American involvement. The messy situation that plagued Iraq reinforced that feeling as stated by then French defence Minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie: “*we have a different sensibility vis-à-vis the Arab-Muslim world, whereas the Americans are intent on resolutely facing the new challenges to security, especially after 9/11... we should be listening more to the Arab-Muslim world: the sense of injustice and humiliation is really very widespread. It is being used by terrorist networks. So, it’s up to us to show consideration for its civilization which is very old; understanding for its problems which are very real; determination to resolve collectively the Israel-Arab conflict; and resolve to help the Arab world enter modernity. We must help moderate Muslims counter the rise in a radical Islam which has come about through the bankruptcy of many states and the exploitation that’s been made of this by power-hungry fanatics. That is our common responsibility to meet together, but each with our own cards as this is a complex and sensitive problem*”¹⁵⁷. It would be a mistake to attribute such attitude to any kind of anti-Americanism. It is related to historical experience of the Europeans about the real complexities in dealing with what general de Gaulle used to call “*l’Orient compliqué*” (the intricate Eastern).

The difficult walk toward modernity in the Maghreb and the Mashriq has turned this area in a high-risk zone. Current stability is very fragile and largely dependent upon the existence of authoritarian regime implicitly backed by western powers despite their commitment in favour of human rights. To choose the lesser of two evils is indeed derogatory to principles. The other alternative is running the risk of letting Islamic fundamentalism regimes become a political reality and spread from Morocco to Egypt with the associated danger of dramatic turbulence in the whole Mediterranean basin with huge destabilizing consequences for France.

In a way, as already mentioned, European powers are buying time, notably through developing comprehensive programs of cooperation and development such as the common EU strategy in the Mediterranean. This is done in the hope that financial efforts, cooperation will stabilize socially and then politically the countries of the south of the Mediterranean basin. The road towards that goal is paved with many uncertainties. Widespread corruption, growing pauperization, demographic watershed, illiteracy, and Islamic “help” movements in the Maghreb-Mashriq which find there a very favourable ground for prospering.

SURVEILLANCE: REINFORCING NATIONAL MEANS FOR COLLECTING INFORMATION

In France and more generally in Europe, the military factor in fighting terrorism remains very limited, except today in the Sahel. There are in fact at least few domains where the military are active, which is particularly the case of surveillance. As a strategic priority, surveillance is about homeland security and takes different forms. In a very traditional form, since almost 25 years, French armed forces have been participating to the reinforcement of security throughout France in the framework of the governmental plan of vigilance called *Vigipirate*. In this framework, the French army’s Operation *Sentinelle* (launched in response to the attacks in Paris in January 2015), which is being deployed on national territory to counter the terrorist threat, is reducing its strength from 7,000 to 3,000 soldiers as a consequence of a change in the alert level of the *Vigipirate* plan, which was downgraded to “risk of attack” last March. Surveillance of maritime borders, is also part of vigilance against terrorism, it is first based on semaphores. On the whole coastline, 59 semaphores are operational, notably on the Mediterranean coastline. Defeating terrorism from the sea is also a priority. Indeed, in the last 30 years more than 120 hostile actions have been carried out against maritime shipping from economically motivated terrorists and from and politically driven terrorists (beginning in 1986 with the passenger liner *Achille Lauro* up until the attack, in October 2002, against the French-flagged crude oil carrier, the *Limburg*, off the coast of Yemen). Then passive and active measures can be implemented by military forces to combat maritime terrorism.

Surveillance is also about monitoring terrorists' activities. Another strategic priority of the French government in this matter are the developments and the entry into service of CSO and CERES, six satellites dedicated to intelligence. In 2018, CSO-1 satellite was launched on board a *Soyuz* launcher followed by two others (CSO-2 launched in January 2021; CSO-3 in 2022) with a particular focus on Africa and the Middle East (which does not preclude surveillance worldwide). They provide an image quality unparalleled in Europe, allowing intelligence services (and armed forces) to access a greater level of detail in a given geographical zone, a significant added value for intelligence and targeting activities. Such capabilities reinforce the strategic choice of the French. A strategy that amounts to "mowing the lawn", according to an expression in vogue among the strategists of the war in the Sahel and which consists of systematically going after the leaders of terrorist networks and organizations present in the Sahel to kill them. Bilateral agreements have been signed with several European countries (Germany, Sweden and Belgium notably) with a drawing right consisting for each of them to buy a certain number of times of CSO satellites. In addition to imagery, military space listening is being reinforced since this year with three CERES satellites (*Capacité d'Écoute et de Renseignement Electromagnétique Spatiale*), for the interception, characterisation and localisation of electromagnetic emissions (radar and telecommunications, including mafia and terrorists networks) around the world, with a view to producing electromagnetic intelligence over areas inaccessible to land, sea and airborne sensors. This space-based capability is unique in Europe. These means are in addition to the mission of the ship *Dupuy de Lôme*, which consists in collecting intelligence for the DGSE (*Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure*) and the DRM (*Direction du Renseignement Militaire*). Its interception, listening, direction finding and analysis of radio communication (COMINT) and radar (ELINT) emissions are capable of processing the most recent forms of emissions and modern communications in HF, VUHF and satellite. In addition, France has electromagnetic sensors installed on the surface of the globe, in metropolitan France and in its overseas dependencies. It thus covers, in a wide range, the monitoring and interception of radio communication emissions including those of terrorists' network.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Fighting terrorism is a tricky issue and remains largely marked by secrecy, making analysis a very difficult task to grapple with. This is a matter of high confidentiality in a scene where shadows matter as much as light. People involved in that business will certainly not expose to the open the nature, the purpose, the scope, the channels and the depth of their cooperation. To such opacity, one has to add the very nature of what is at stake. It is about using the means offered by international cooperation for exchanging very sensitive information and acting in order to identify, deter, prevent and act against terrorism. The nature of the threat has had many consequences to begin with, blurring traditional patterns of cooperation organized in concentric circles.

The first level of cooperation against terrorism is within the EU where the recognition of the need to deepen cooperation has been initially the result of the trans-border activities of terrorist cells. As early as in 1975, the European Council decided to organise an internal security group called Trevi (Terrorism Radicalism, Extremism, Violence, and Internationalism) to deepen police cooperation notably in relation with extremism, radicalism and terrorism at that time identified with the *Rote Armee Fraction* in the FRG, Red brigades in Italy and *Action Directe* in France. 9/11 has considerably modified the EU perspective in fighting terrorism with the adoption on September 21, 2001, of a Plan of Action to Combat Terrorism encompassing legislative measures, the strengthening of operational cooperation among security services, police and customs, the improvement of the effectiveness of information systems with new functions added to the Schengen Information System (SIS). In addition:

- *Europol* has seen its anti-terrorist activities significantly increased with the establishment of a counter-terrorist task force.
- A European Arrest Warrant has been agreed.
- Eurojust has been created in order to develop judiciary co-operation within the EU.

- Cooperation agreements have been signed with the US such as by example in April 2004 the agreement to strengthen maritime container security.
- Various action plans like the “EU Plan of Action on Combating Terrorism” have been endorsed in accordance with UNSC resolution 1372 of 2001 which established the Counter-Terrorism Committee, made up of all 15 members of the Security Council.
- Following the terrorist attacks in Madrid on 11 March 2004, the position of an EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator in charge of coordinating counter-terrorism and monitoring the implementation of the EU counter-terrorism strategy has been created. Last July, succeeding Gilles de Kerchove, Ilkka Salmi – former Director of the Situation Centre of the European Union (EU SITCEN – was appointed as EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator for a five-year term of office.

As recently stated by the Interior Minister of EU countries: *“Over the past two decades, we have continuously strengthened the security structures and legal framework in the Member States and at EU level. We have further developed the role of Europol, Eurojust and Frontex. We have improved the exchange of information and the use of European databases and information systems, and we have deepened police and judicial cooperation. The EU has recently adopted powerful legislative instruments, notably in the field of firearms, terrorism financing and criminal law. Further efforts and resources are needed to fully implement the adopted legislation and to enforce what has been agreed so far”*¹³⁸.

Cooperation within the EU may, however, be limited by some factors such as differences, for judicial reasons, in the organization of the legal systems and in the strategic conceptions of the threat. The French already were confronted with Islamist terrorism in the 1980s, which led them, since 1986, to put the legal system at the centre of the struggle against terrorist activities. This has led to the development of a pro-active policy, which means doing away with the distinctions between prosecution and prevention as carried out by the intelligence services. According to Jean-Louis Bruguière, a former renown judge in charge of anti-terrorism: *“the advantage of this is that the legal system is more credible and less contested. By working more closely with the secret services the legal system is reinforced. Our system is much more flexible as it is civil law rather than common law. The source of the law are legal texts, not jurisprudence of previous decisions. We don’t have to bow to legal precedents, as in the UK or US, which prevents their system from evolving.”*

The second level in the fight against terrorism is world-wide cooperation. International cooperation is structured by solidarity and political alliances, this dimension has taken various forms, highlighting the existence of a sort of “cooperation ladder”, the degrees of which would depend on the trust and expertise gathered: exchanges of analyses, transmission of raw information, preparation of joint assessments, setting up of joint research operations, setting up of permanent structures. With the rise of common threats, particularly the proliferation of terrorist attack, this cooperation has undergone a profound evolution since 9/11. What was previously a very controlled exception for operational staff and analysts has become the working norm, as there is no longer any terrorist threat that could concern only one democratic or undemocratic state. In the domestic order intelligence is based on carefully framed legal rights, whereas in the international order it is based on the calculated transgression of national norms. It leads, for example, to violating the secrecy of communications or to establishing clandestine relations with actors in the international game. It can be argued that clandestine intelligence operations have traditionally involved a constant violation of all rules and allow cooperation with states which are considered in other domains as enemies. The use of intelligence to participate in the protection of these interests is thus part of an apparently traditional political conception of the state and of international society.

Since terrorism can take different facets: biological terrorism (anthrax in the USA), chemical terrorism (Aum Shinrikyo attack in the Tokyo subway with Sarin gas in March 1995) or conventional terrorism using explosives combined with suicide attacks to maximize the precision of that attack; narco-terrorism or even cyber-terrorism. Such concerns plague all states on the planet which are no longer reluctant to cooperate to prevent attacks. There is no front, terrorism is at home everywhere

on the global village, no country in the world can consider itself immune. There is indeed a growing cross-national link among different organizations which may involve combinations of military training, funding and technology transfer.

This international cooperation is made more and more on an ad hoc basis and essentially bilateral. Even countries with political divergences may be led to exchange pertinent intelligence information and develop cooperation. More generally, one is witnessing the multiplication of bilateral or multilateral contacts among security and intelligence services throughout the world. This sort of gathering now encompasses meetings between many different internal security services, such as example the Japanese Public Service Investigation Agency (KOANCHO) with DGSI, etc.... Discussions encompass not only terrorism but also organized crime which represents a growing challenge for many states. International meetings are also places where countries at odds on many topics still gathered to talk about international terrorism. The global fight against terrorism thus calls for new ad hoc cooperation, sometimes far away from the traditional channels inherited from the cold war. To be efficient, such cooperation presupposes many mechanisms tailored to the need, particularly in allowing rapid reaction for transmitting urgent and very sensitive information within the right decision time.

FIGHTING TERRORISM OF ISLAMISTS' ORIGIN: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES ON THE INTERNAL FRONT

Terrorism represents a high risk not only for the reason of the casualties and the destruction it inflicts on innocent people but, also because it could affect in certain circumstances the social pact existing within democratic countries where multiculturalism is expected to become part of a new covenant. If the state, at the national level, appears to guarantee safety and security, its authority could be defied by groups seeking revenge from terror attacks allegedly attributed to members of minorities that may be in return subject to violent reactions. Consequently, if security of the homeland has to be assured, this is also in order to protect social and political stability in countries susceptible to being the victim of indiscriminate attacks. Here lies one of the very challenges to nations, compelling them to use every means at their disposal in fighting terrorism. It is all the more important to avoid "separatism" because of the possibility of Islam becoming a kind of scapegoat, as the terrorists seek to do in order to set citizens against each other. It is in this very specific internal context that terrorist attacks took place, in France and elsewhere, which are all the more disturbing because they did not give rise to any justification other than expressing the revenge of religious fanatics "against the enemies of Islam".

Strengthening vigilance against terrorism of Islamist origin and prevention of separatism at home

At the occasion of a speech on "Islamist separatism" delivered in Les Mureaux city (Yvelines) on 2 October 2020, the head of state, Emmanuel Macron, defended the idea of tackling "radical Islamism" while fighting against its "breeding ground", the "ghettoization" of certain territories in the French republic. This toughening policy is now and very recently implemented through a number of measures. As example, after the entry into force of the law "reinforcing the respect of the principles of the Republic" which provides for a broadening of the grounds for closing places of worship where hate speech is being made, about 100 mosques have been inspected last winter. Suspected of "separatism", a third of them have been closed, a small number regarding the 2500 Muslim places of worship existing in France. The goal is to be sufficiently effective in monitoring potential violent actions in order to arrest any individual preparing an attack.

One should stress the importance now given to regional actors for an increased vigilance against Islamism and "separatism". There is a real inflection of policy consisting in giving delegations from the state (Ministry of Interior) represented at the local level (the *département*¹³⁹) by the prefect (*le préfet*) a determining role in fighting separatism, a potential breeding ground for Islamic terrorism.

The law of October 30, 2017, strengthening internal security and the fight against terrorism was reinforced by the law of August 2021 (*LOI n° 2021-1109 du 24 août 2021 confortant le respect des principes de la République*) which gave the prefects a vast array of means. In his *département*, he has jurisdiction to establish protection perimeters on the model of the “protection or security zones” of the state of emergency. This perimeter is reserved for places or events subject to a risk of terrorist acts because of their very nature or the extent of their frequentation, which make them prime targets. He may proceed with administrative closure, for a period not exceeding six months, of places of worship for apology or provocation to terrorism. With the authorization of a judge, he may order the search of any place where there are serious reasons to believe that it is frequented by people suspected of terrorism. This visit may be accompanied by the seizure of documents, objects or data.

Regarding the fight against Islamists radicalisation, the prefects are on the front line with the CLIRs (cells for combating Islamism and community withdrawal). The CLIR is a multidisciplinary team, placed under their authority and whose aim is to coordinate the action of all local actors likely to contribute to the fight against Islamism and community isolationism. The CLIRs mobilise all departmental services under their chairmanship and in close coordination with the public prosecutor; they also involve, depending on the issues identified, external partners (elected representatives, social landlords, transport operators, etc.). The CLIRs also coordinate permanently with the departmental evaluation groups (GED) and the cells for the prevention of radicalisation and for the support of families (CPRAF) and regularly rely on the departmental anti-fraud operational committees (CODAF) or the regional intervention groups (GIR). The missions of the CLIR) are especially:

- to establish a diagnosis of the state of Islamism and community withdrawal in the department. A shared cartography is drawn up, allowing a cross-cutting approach and a broader vision;
- to centralize and share information on the phenomena of Islamism and community isolationism;
- to undertake checks on the basis of the information gathered under the authority of the justice system and within the framework of general or special administrative police powers;
- to propose a support strategy or alternative offers to enable a return to republican values and principles, in conjunction with elected representatives, local authorities and partner associations.

Departmental monitoring cells for the prevention of radicalisation and support for families (CPRAF) have the dual objective of, on the one hand, supporting families who report one of its members and, on the other hand, taking charge, in a multidisciplinary preventive perspective, of people reported as being in the process of radicalisation.

Information from the prefecture are given to the mayor on the presence of a radicalised person working in a sensitive service of the town hall (kindergarten, school canteen, etc.).

In addition, the law of 24 August 2021 on reinforcing respect for republican principles allows for the control over local authority acts that seriously infringe secularism or neutrality in a public service (canteens, sports facilities, etc.). The prefect will be able to refer the act and request its suspension from the administrative judge, who will have 48 hours to decide. Endowment funds, a financing tool for patronage, will be better controlled by the prefects. The tax authorities will be able to check that only associations that meet the conditions laid down by law can benefit from the generosity of the public and issue tax receipts. The conditions for the creation and management of associations administering a place of worship initially provided for by the 1905 law are reviewed with the aim of protecting them from the influence of likely radical groups. Similarly, their accounting obligations are consolidated. If certain donations exceeding 10,000 euros are made, they must be declared, and the prefect may oppose them.

CONCLUSION

A growing awareness of the risks of radicalization and separatism linked to an extremist reading of Islam has led the French authorities to reassess their objectives and means of action to deal with it. This is, indeed, for the French President a radical change of attitude from a period of relative denial, of reluctance of acting at the risk of discriminating against a particular population. Such evolution results from a combination of many factors. The continuation of terrorist attacks, the deterioration of the security situation in different “*quartiers*” and the development of the underground economy in certain suburbs creating a favourable breeding ground that can be exploited by Islamists and coax indoctrinated individuals into violent actions. The policy now followed by the state is to broaden the fight against Islamist terrorism by attacking separatist drifts and community isolationism at home. This choice corresponds to an aspiration widely shared by French public opinion worried about the communitarian drifts, the social ravages of the underground economy and the Islamist propaganda which can seduce “lost youths” of the underprivileged districts and whose integration in the national community is not properly achieved.

“Today we live side by side. I fear that tomorrow we will live face to face” declared a strong supporter of president Macron, Gérard Collomb, in a speech delivered when, in 2018, he left the post of Interior Minister. Referring to the situation of sensitive neighbourhoods, he added: *“It is rather the law of the strongest that imposes itself, of drug dealers, of radical Islamists, which has taken the place of the Republic”*. The message of Collomb and of many other political actors seems to have percolated to the level of the highest authorities of the State. From now on, the republican reconquest is launched, its chances of success are linked to different factors and one of the most essential is that all the national and local political forces are committed – with very little opposition –, to such policy.

SOURCES:

- 135 Statement by Mr Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic, on the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, in Paris, 16 February 2021.
- 136 French forces killed the leader of the jihadist group Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (EIGS), Adnan Abu Walid Al-Sahrawi, on the night of Wednesday 15 to Thursday 16 September 2021. A historical figure of Daech, al Sahraoui was an “authoritarian, brutal emir, and creator of the Islamic branch in the Sahel in 2015,” according to Bernard Emié, the director of the DGSE. The bearer of a violent jihadist ideology, al Sahraoui was the mastermind of the terrorist organization, responsible for numerous massacres in the Sahel’s tri-border area (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso).
- 137 Michèle Alliot-Marie, “Renewing the Transatlantic Partnership”, speech at the CSIS, Washington, January 16, 2004
- 138 *Déclaration commune des ministres de l’intérieur de l’UE sur les attentats terroristes perpétrés récemment en Europe*, November 20, 2020.
- 139 France is divided into 101 « départements » where the State is represented by a « préfet » who governs all the state actions in his administrative circonscription. There are overseas « départements »: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, Iles de la Réunion and Mayott.

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