

ISLAM IN FRANCE : THE SHAPING OF A RELIGIOUS MINORITY,

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Islam is now commonly considered to be the second largest religion in France behind Christianity. Accepting this demographic reality has never been easy for many French citizens. Too often discussions about Islam in France begin and end with a treatment of Muslims as a social problem. Too often the question is asked: Can Muslims fit into French society?. That question presupposes that Islamic values are inherently incompatible with western ones and that Muslims constitute a “dangerous class”.

The West has stereotyped Islam as a strange religion, completely different from Christianity or Judaism, even though it is now firmly established within most western countries. Western perceptions are still based upon “essentialized” images of a violent and changeless Islam, holdovers from the colonial past. Though inaccurate, they still provide the basis for Western understandings of those situations that involve Muslims. Samuel Huntington, for example, still posits a static vision of Islamic civilization and a unique Muslim psyche which compels conformity to Islamic Law in all places at all times – as though Muslims were a species unto themselves. His theoretical work, *Clash of Civilizations*, illustrates how easily such misperception leads to visions of Islam as the new threat in a post cold-war world. Thinking along the same lines that Huntington has articulated, Westerners generally attribute to Muslims in their midst the same potential for violence that has occurred in areas of major Muslim unrest. Events like the Salman Rushdie Affair and the Gulf War, along with claims that Islam opposes modernity and secularism, reinforce distrust of Islam even more.

The French Version of The Clash of Civilizations

The widespread misconception of Islam has its own particular version in France, where fears of a growing Muslim visibility have, since the 1980’s, unleashed French passions – especially in the form of racist murders in suburban housing projects. Currently there are approximately 4 million Muslims in France, half of whom are French citizens. Although they come in significant numbers from various Muslim countries like Turkey and Senegal, their vast majority have arrived from North Africa. These North Africans, although less culturally distinctive than some of their co-religionists, pose the greatest of challenges to France’s tradition of assimilation. Their difficulties with their countrymen derive from troubled French memories of colonialism in North Africa, during which period Muslims were not deemed citizens without first renouncing Islamic Law, even though they had already been granted French nationality (Algeria was a French department.) As a result, many French people, struggling with contradictory feelings of superiority and humiliation, anguish over the settlement of Muslims in France since the Algerian War of Independence. How ironic! History is repeating itself on the “upper” side of the Mediterranean with a twist: the same people who, as a ruling minority, once sought to constrain an Algerian majority on North African soil, now finds itself, as a governing majority, trying to assimilate an Algerian minority on its own French ground.

Rancor toward Islam runs yet higher because its arrival inflames old passions that have long simmered beneath the surface of “Laicite.” Laicite refers to the uneasy compromise that French people have made between the letter of the Law of Separation of State and Churches and its peculiar implementation within French culture. Quite paradoxically, when passed in 1905, the law’s primary intention was not to champion religious freedom *per se* in France. Rather it was to weaken Catholic influence by putting Catholicism on an equal footing with religious minorities within the public domain. Practically speaking, conformity to the law meant confining religious belief to the private sphere. Ideally speaking, conformity meant and still means extirpating homage to religious values from all spheres: personal, familial, social, cultural, and political. Through the decades, major religious groups – Christian and Jewish -- have made uneasy peace with laicite by relegating religious expression to private domains. Muslim settlement in France has disrupted that peace. It has introduced new confusion over boundaries between public and private space and led to renewed controversy over religious freedom and political tolerance. The "Islamic headscarf" affair of 1989 is the example par excellence of such

controversy. It entangled one Muslim girl who wore her hijab to school in a legal crusade that sought to liberalize interpretations of laicity by asserting her right to display a religious symbol in public. Since 1989, that crusade has repeatedly gained from the Council of State re-affirmation that the public display of a religious symbol -- *whatever it is* -- does not break the law. Each re-affirmation has highlighted the shallowness of French religious tolerance and inflamed animosity toward those Muslim newcomers who would edify a people who prides itself on Equality, Fraternity, and Liberty.

Mistunderstanding of religious display further increases French animosity for Islam. Displays that grow in conspicuousness are blindly interpreted as evidence for renewed religious fervor. When, in the early 1980's, immigrants built mosques, opened halal butcher shops, and claimed land for Muslim sections in cemeteries, the majority of the French people, scholars included, feared for a 'return of Islam'. In actuality, the Muslims in question were not becoming more observant. Having resolved upon permanent residence in France, they were simply changing their attitude in favor of greater participation in French society. Indeed, their earlier migrations were considered temporary by both French and North African political authorities, as well as the migrants themselves. They, the migrants, wanted only to save money to invest upon return home. They were never interested in becoming citizens of the nation that had colonized their country. Only after the early 1980's did they determine that return home was impossible. Only then did they begin regarding themselves as a part of French society and carving out within it their niche.

Failing to recognize cultural and social differences amongst Muslims, many French people have been misled by the coincidence of local increases in Islamic visibility and the rise of political Islam within the Arab and Muslim world. In their confusion, they wrongly associate peaceful French Islam with the wider movement of Islamic fundamentalism. They overlook transformations in Islamic identity occurring among Muslims recently born and/or educated in France. These are "new Muslims" who relate to Islam in remarkably modern terms -- who are secularizing Islam, much the same way their Christian peers have secularized Christianity. For them, Islam constitutes a cultural or ethical frame of reference, fairly detached from ritualistic practice.

Whether disinterested academic researcher or concerned French citizen, once one sidesteps misconceptions about Islam, he faces a single basic question: When and on what terms should followers of Islam be definitively accepted as a legitimate religious minority within France? That question cannot be approached simplistically -- as though Muslims constitute a single homogenous group. Muslims in France show extreme social and cultural heterogeneity. They identify differently with Islam according to their national origin, age, gender and social background. Nor can change within Muslim groups be understood independent of changes occurring within France itself. Dramatic forces at work upon French society may, in some cases, actually influence Muslim community more than its own internal dynamics. Muslims are not, for example, immune to legal and political allegations that they have disrupted the cultural status quo. Such charges force them to develop secular resources for an ideological battle in the courts, the schools, the press, and the streets that distracts them from their own religious priorities. Hence, the rise of Islam in France and, more broadly speaking, within the democratic context, might be better understood as a consequence of Muslims' self-perception as a religious minority within a plural society, rather than as the outcome of international fundamentalist influences. To their newly perceived status as religious minority, Muslims have demonstrated three major responses which may be characterized as follows: ethnic, secularized, and fundamentalist.

When Islam is embedded in ethnicity*

For first generation North African immigrants in France, religious identity and national identity have become one and the same. Algerians, for example, who have settled in France not only conceive of themselves as

Muslims who practice according to Algerian custom. They also reaffirm whatever particular meaning Islam has gained in the course of Algerian history. Thus, generally speaking, no first generation North African immigrant can contemplate his religion without remembering a painful time when preservation of Islam played a crucial role in his nation's struggle against French domination. No wonder these North Africans were so slow to acknowledge the permanence of their resettlement in the land of their former oppressor. Instead, they postponed, in so many cases, reunion on French soil with family they had left¹. For the same reason, they were reluctant to acquire French nationality, viewing that acquisition as a betrayal of their nation's prior struggle against colonialism. Even today, elder North African Muslims entertain hopes to return permanently to their homelands, even though their rare attempts to do so have generally failed. Their ongoing adherence to Islam is still one of their primary bulwarks against assimilation, made all the easier by the thoroughness with which Islam pervades daily life, demanding continuous distinction between *haram*(forbidden) and *halal* (permitted), whether through, for example, dietary rules, separation between men and women in public spaces, or establishment of mosques.

Because religious identity is so closely tied to national identity for North Africans, ethnic differences set Muslim communities apart from and at odds with one another. Thus, fragmentation along ethnic lines stands as the major obstacle to their unification into a single coherent religious minority in France². Mosques, which should exclusively be emblematic sites of religious unity, function equally as ethnically-oriented centers which provide social and financial assistance, education to children, and ethnic and national linkages back to countries of origin. As a result, separate mosques stand within the same neighborhood for North Africans and Turks – amongst others --even though neither ritualistic nor religious difference distinguishes them. Once one recognizes the toll that fragmentation exacts upon the Islamic community, he must ask: How can religious unity be achieved without sacrificing ethnic diversity and the cultural richness that accompanies it? That question takes on crucial political importance the moment that representative institutions become necessary both to satisfy religious needs and to safeguard civil rights.

Islam as a Political issue

Despite lack of any original intent to organize themselves into a unified community, Muslims were actually taking a first step toward collective organization in France when they set up places of prayer (*masjids*). Later came demands for recognizable mosques that would symbolize the definitive presence of Islam in French society. As of now, only five mosques stand -- those in Paris, Mantes-la-Jolie, Evry, Lille, and Lyon -- for more than 4 million Muslims, because efforts to build have aroused such fierce resistance. Petitions for construction were routinely ignored or refused by town mayors. Civil rights were even denied: in 1989 in Charvieu-Chavagneux, when the municipality knocked down a building without consideration for the Muslim prayer room located within; in 1990 in Libercourt, when the mayor called for a local referendum on the construction of a mosque – in clear violation of French Law which forbids local votes on religious matters.

The political attitude towards Islam in France is, however, gradually moving away from hostility for two major reasons. Firstly, the peaceful operation of the major mosques built during the past decade has defused fears in the political arena that such meeting places pose threats to public order. Politicians and sometimes citizenry are ready to accept these mosques as part of the French landscape. The Home Minister himself played a prominent

¹ A comparison between Algerian and Portuguese migrants reveals that Portuguese migrants gathered their families together in less than twenty years, whereas Algerians took almost half a century. For a long time, Algerian migration was exclusively composed of single men. Only at the beginning of the 1960's did families begin arriving in France. *Belkacem Hifi, L'immigration algérienne en France, Origines et Perspectives de non retour*, Paris, L'Harmattan, CIEM, 1985.

² Jocelyne Cesari, *Etre Musulman en France, associations, militants et mosques*, Paris, Karthala, 1994.

role in opening ceremonies in 1994 for the new mosque of Lyon. Moreover, the efforts of astute mosque leaders to foster communication and understanding are paying off. Free meals to the poor during the month of Ramadan and conferences and debates involving intellectuals, journalists, and politicians – to cite two examples -- have opened mosques to the non-Muslim world. No wonder the committee board of Lyon and mosque leaders in other cities, such as Evry and Lille, are now recognized in local political negotiations.

Secondly, panic over the imagined rise of home-grown Muslim extremism has convinced politicians and bureaucrats of a need to improve rapport with their nation's Muslim population. After the headscarf affair of 1989, which opened political eyes to Islam's growing appeal to French-born Muslim youth, came the death of Khaled Kelkal in 1995. This young natural-born citizen of Algerian extraction was pursued and killed by police for his suspected part in a terrorist bombing campaign in Paris. His death raised the specter of alienated Muslim youth in run-down suburbs, turning to violent Islamist groups that result in a rebel subculture. Caught up in the swell of public fear, politicians have been pursuing their new policy guidelines and improved relationships with Islamic leaders in the hopes that France will maintain the political loyalty of its young Muslims.

Moreover, now that authorities have set aside their ideological objections to accepting Islam, they recognize the practical need for new Islamic institutions. As Islam takes root in French soil, its institutional requirements increase. The same Muslims who used to view themselves as "travelers" within an alien society cannot, in what is now their new homeland, justify compromising religious practice out of pragmatic necessity. Beyond mosque construction, communal activities such as distribution of *halal* meat and allocation of Muslim sections within local cemeteries require their dealings with French authorities. With Islam, institutionally speaking, in infancy – i.e., lacking a civil authority at the national level – the French government has found itself awaiting the emergence of a unified Muslim organization. Recognizing this power vacuum, North African states exploited historical ties to France and strove for influence over Franco-Muslims for their own political gain. For decades, their efforts were supported by successive French governments, who viewed their influence as a safeguard against radical Islam.³ Now that Muslim community is becoming recognized as a bona fide component within French society, official attitudes have changed. Authorities resent activism by North African states as an interference within French domestic affairs and construe it as counterproductive to any effective organization of Muslim community. In their own move toward greater activism, the French government created The Council of Reflection on Islam in France in 1990 (CORIF). This council, which met under the supervision of the Home Minister, gathered leaders from major Islamic associations all over France: e.g., the French Federation of French Muslims (Fédération Française des Musulmans de France); the Federation of Islamic associations from Africa, Comoros and West Indies (Fédération des associations islamiques d'Afrique, des Comores et des Antilles); as well as lesser known Turkish associations. Because ethnic differences have predisposed many Muslim leaders, loosely speaking, to confuse defense of ethnic solidarity with defense of Islam, council representatives fell victim to infighting on non-religious grounds. As a result, the council was permanently suspended, even though it has never been officially dissolved. The resolve of the French government, however, to curb North African hegemony over Franco-Muslims remains stronger than ever.

³ Because Algeria, as part of colonial France, provided the vanguard for North African emigration, it has sought the dominant role in this competition for influence. The history and operation of the Paris Mosque, which has been under Algerian control since 1982, illustrates Algeria's ongoing entanglement within Franco-Muslim community and French diplomatic affairs. At the end of World War I, French authorities built a mosque in Paris in tribute to those colonial Muslim troops who had fought for France. Construction was supervised by a company in Algiers that could fulfill Islamic requirements for financing and managing holy places through funds, free from loan-derived interest. Algeria rapidly seized control of the project, despite initial contributions by Morocco and Tunisia. Independence in 1962 began a conflict between Algeria and France for mosque ownership that still continues. Although Algeria dramatically strengthened its claims for ownership in 1982 when they successfully installed an Algerian citizen as mosque rector, civil war in Algeria throughout the past six years has diminished its concern with the Paris mosque.

In December 1999, the Minister of Interior, Jean-Pierre Chevènement has decided start out a new attempt in order to organize French Islam. But prior to any consultation process or project, the major Muslim associations, mosques and religious authorities have been required by the Minister to sign a declaration which is a sort of reminder of obligations and rights of Muslims according to the Constitution and the 1905 Law of separation of State and Church. This initiative has been unanimously criticized by the main leaders of the Muslim community as a suspicion on the civic loyalty of Muslims and therefore considered as humiliating.

The privatization of Islam

Within the academy, an initial total disregard for Islam has given way to a misunderstanding which resonates with the xenophobic distrust that has pervaded French society-at-large. Remarkable as it now seems, sociologists during the 1960's and 1970's actually studied North African immigration without even acknowledging the Muslim heritage of the immigrants concerned⁴. Having finally taken notice, these sociologists and their colleagues in political science⁵ have misconstrued the increasing visibility of Muslims and their institutions as a sign that Islam is a phenomenon unto itself, impervious to those powerful secularizing⁶ forces that have been shaping French life for generations. Few voices have been heard to the contrary, affirming that Muslims are -- just like everybody else -- subject to the laws that characterize socio-political change⁷. Few voices⁸ have stated that the traditional Islamic devotion of parents is giving way to ever more individualized⁹ and privatized¹⁰ expressions of religiosity by their children.

For Muslim immigrants, settlement in France has essentially meant exilic isolation from natural modes of transmission that has resulted in a cultural gap between parents and children. That gap is more pronounced for North Africans than for any other migrant group in France¹¹. Limited in means as members of the French

⁴ For an inventory see DUBET (F). *L'immigration : qu'en savons-nous ? un bilan des connaissances*. Paris. La Documentation Française. 1989

See also

Allal(T), Buffard(J.P), Marie(M), Reggazola (T), *Situations migratoires*, Paris, Galilée, 1977.

Minces(J), *Les travailleurs étrangers en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1973.

SAYAD (A) : "Les trois âges de l'émigration algérienne en France" in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no15, juin 1977, pp 59-76

Talha(L), *Le salariat immigré dans la crise*, Paris CNRS, 1989.

⁵ Kepel (G), *Les banlieues de l'islam*, Paris, Seuil, 1987.

Krieger-Krynicky (A), *Les musulmans en France, Religion et Culture*, Paris, Maisonneuve-Larose, 1985

⁶ Secularization is the movement toward a social order whose ideologies, practices, and institutions derive from values held without religious justification and reference. Carried to its logical conclusion, it would result in the total disappearance of religious influence from social life. See major theories of secularization :

⁷ Dassetto(F), Bastenier(A), *L'islam transplanté*, Anvers, éd EPO, 1984

Etienne(B), *La France et l'islam*, Paris, Hachette, 1989.

Cesari(J), *Etre Musulman en France, Associations, Militants et Mosquées*, Paris, Karthala, 1994.

⁸ Cesari(J), *Musulmans et Républicains, les Jeunes, L'islam et la France*, Brussels, Complexe, 1998.

⁹ Individualization refers to the appropriation of rights to personal choice in matters of religious belief and practice. Its logical outcome is a shift away from authoritative traditions – in both interpretation and practice – toward idiosyncratic constructions of religious life-style. It transforms institutionalized religion into a common well from which each person draws with his own vessel for his own purposes in accord with his own needs.

¹⁰ Privatization refers to the restriction of religious practice to the private sphere and the relegation of religious values and rules to a secondary and compartmentalized role in the conduct of daily life.

¹¹ Helene Malewska-Peyre, *Crise d'identité et déviance chez les jeunes immigrés*, Paris, La Documentation Française, 1982.

working class, these parents have lost crucial battles against dominant French educational, cultural, and social institutions in their struggle to inculcate the cultural values of their home countries. Most notable amongst their defeats has been the abandonment of Arabic language, in response to which a “vernacular” Islam, (not only in France, but also in Europe,) has arisen, whose sermons, literature, and public presentations are conveyed in various languages. Indeed, second generation North African Muslims have usually received precious little religious education either within or outside the family. At home, they were exposed to minimal Islamic observance by parents who, thinking themselves to be only temporary residents within France, compromised and neglected Islamic prescriptions. Nor did any Koranic schools exist when these 25 to 35 year-olds were growing up. (The situation is different now because those Islamic associations that emerged in the 1980’s have developed numerous Koranic programs of study.) Last but not least, exile has broken the collective chain of transmission within rural North African communities, where religious instruction is provided by extended family, as well as parents.

As it is true for a majority of French people of Christian background, many young Muslims are now relating to Islam as “consumers.” They are choosing which rules and tenets of their religion to embrace and which to dismiss. Their freedom to choose continually provokes questions of purpose; they demand personal meaning as a prerequisite to religious observance. On a philosophical level, they search within Islam -- especially with better education and greater upward mobility -- for ethical and moral values to guide the course of their lives. Drawing a distinction between those who merely believe and those whose belief leads to practice, they have broadened the term, “believer. ” For them, it includes those who, like themselves, acknowledge the legitimacy of Islamic rules and values without observing. This redefinition of believer allows them to remain a bona fide part of their parents’ community. It facilitates their participation in Islamic holidays, feasts, and commemorations for life-cycle events, such as births, marriages and deaths, without feelings of shame, guilt, or conflict. Exactly as they have done for themselves, they permit their children – i.e., France’s third Muslim generation – the right to decide their own level of observance.

Individualization of Islam, however, does not proceed without limits. It remains constrained by two traditional factors: the practice of circumcision and the prohibition against intermarriage for females. In the first case: even though not amongst the “five pillars of Islam,” the circumcision of children endures even for the most assimilated of Muslims as an ultimate connection to their Islamic origins. In the second case: because Islamic law assigns name and religion to children on the basis of patrilineal descent, women who marry non-Muslims do more than violate Islamic law. They dishonor their families, set themselves up for crises of personal identity, and cut their children off from family, community, and origin. Therefore, Muslim women who achieve personal autonomy through professional advancement are more likely to choose discreet sexual relationship and cohabitation with non-Muslim men than civil marriage.¹²

Islam as a social movement

To the surprise of many French sociologists of religion who once considered secularization to be the inevitable outcome of individual choice, a number of young Franco-Muslims are choosing strict religious observance, rather than wholesale abandonment of Muslim attachments, as an expression of personal autonomy. Although their involvement with Islam is a very recent phenomenon and they still constitute a fairly small minority, their numbers are growing. Their practice of Islam, however, does not simply represent a spiritual return to the religion of their fathers. Preferring to distance themselves from parental practices that seem more superstitious than informed, they pursue what they call the ‘real Islam’.

¹² By contrast, despite the reluctance that young Muslim men voice toward mixed marriages on grounds of cultural incompatibility, latest national statistics indicate that the number of marriages across religious boundaries is growing far faster for them than for their female counterparts. See Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, *Les couples franco-maghebains en France*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1990.

Sometimes, they undertake study on their own; in other cases, they appeal for help and instruction to intellectuals and students from Arab countries, (many of whom are members of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as the MIT of Rached Ghannouchi in Tunisia or the Algerian Islamist movements. (Despite their political activism in their own countries, these intellectuals and students tend not to use Islam as a means of political propagandizing amongst young Muslims in France. Rather their main concern is preservation of Islam among new generations who might otherwise be assimilated into Western culture.) Some of these newly religious young adults are finding in Islam a credible alternative to marginalized lives, resulting from unemployment, drugs, alcohol, and delinquency. Others, who question the value of progress and modernity – especially among the educated and successful -- are discovering a sense of belonging they cannot achieve within a society whose schools, political parties, trade unions, and professions have failed to provide a collective sense of common good.

Besides those who return to Islam as a religious devotion exist others whose Islamisation represents a sublime exercise of personal choice such as their parents could never in their wildest dreams have contemplated. Through a collective identification that can stand minimally supported by practice, these young Muslims are choosing to validate and support a heritage whose practices they may not realize through their own daily conduct. They logically enough invoke their Islam in protest against those undesirable social conditions that have been exacerbated by post-colonial discrimination. For them, it is the most promising of options, following the failure¹³ of collective actions¹⁴ for civil rights and antiracist movements of the 1980's such as the "Beur" movement¹⁵. Their Islamic involvement enables them to work in the secular domain toward social change through associations which emphasize education as a major vehicle toward religious, as well as personal, growth. Hence, they open neighborhood meeting places, rather than mosques, where they provide tutoring and cultural enrichment to school-age children, encouragement toward voter-registration for disenfranchised young adults, and lectures open to all community members alike on civic matters, as well as Islamic issues.

¹³ Those failed movements began with protest, public disorder, and reactive violence against racist murders and what they, second generation Franco-Maghrebians, perceived as police racism. The political support which met these protestors helped to change the direction and meaning of their collective action. It resulted in significant public funding from France's socialist government, which catalyzed the formation of local associations by these protestors. The aid these associations received not only indirectly legitimated the permanent settlement of North African migrants in France. It also helped establish a fragile young Muslim elite -- those recipients of publicly-funded jobs in social service who, independent of professional qualification, were ill-prepared for their newly awarded opportunities for social advancement.

Of all government programs, The Social Action Fund (Fonds d'Action sociale), which was created in 1958 to facilitate housing and social integration for Algerian migrants, now serves as the major conduit for financial support to North African associations. It remains an important partner to large municipalities which find themselves formulating ethnically connoted urban policies.

¹⁴ In full cognizance of public guidelines for financial allocation, young North Africans originally developed plans of action that emphasized ethnic origin over religious identification. Their collective presentation as members of an ethnic minority, however, in no way meant that ethnicity was a predominant factor in their daily lives or their social interactions.

¹⁵ "Beur" is a slang expression in French, meaning Arab.

The French Dictionnary Robert, 1999 gives the following definition : " Personne nee en France de parents immigrés maghrebins" (Person born in France from North African immigrant parents). (Dictionnaire de la langue française, noms communs, Paris, 1999). In the 1980s, second generation of North African migrants used to define themselves as "beurs" in the public space through different mobilizations and organizations.

Independent of their specifics of Islamic identification, young French Muslims appear to have forged a new conception of citizenship. By disentangling political and national identifications, they have reconciled loyalties that still stand in mutual contradiction in their parents' eyes. They accept French political values, such as liberty and democracy, while discounting certain periods in French history, such as the colonial past under which their parents suffered. Politically speaking, they identify themselves locally; they include themselves within the communities in which they were born and raised, while downplaying their French nationality. Nor do these young Franco-Muslims necessarily define themselves as Arab. They may, in fact, criticize political circumstances in their parents' countries of origin as freely as they do within French society. They are often called overly westernized by relatives in North Africa who misunderstand their individualized religious observance and their political outspokenness against North African regimes. Such criticism distances them still further from feelings of global Arab membership.

Nevertheless, young French Muslims do remain to varying degrees, in accord with their own personal histories of discrimination, prone to episodes of collective identification that blend Arab with Muslim. At a minimum, all have experienced pejoratives based upon the socio-economic status of their ethnicity and faced categorization as foreigners, despite French nationality by birth. Such discrimination promotes a sympathetic identification with other Muslims, both Arab and non-Arab, who have been similarly oppressed – whether in France, in country of origin, or within the world-wide Muslim community. The greater the degree of injustice perceived, the more likely they are to rise in staunch defense of Muslim victims, Arab or not. During the Gulf war, it was particularly visible, when French Muslims voiced strong solidarity with the Iraqi people, despite their fears they might be suspected of disloyalty toward France¹⁶. Currently it involves solidarity with struggles in areas like Palestine, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

Through their redefinition of citizenship, young French Muslims are participating in changing French politics, which has classically permitted only public interest groups based upon non-ethnic and non-cultural origins¹⁷. Their activities with emphasis upon culture and ethnicity predominate amongst similar ventures within other minority groups, such as Jews, Corsicans, Armenians, Basques, and Britannies. Taken as a whole, these activities are catalyzing a transfer of political identification from national level to local level.

Grassroot Young Muslims organizations

The most significant development lies in the propagation of new forms of citizenship, emphasizing the civil, rather than the civic, dimension. The civic dimension of citizenship is grounded in the allegiance to centralized, universal political institutions and to public authorities. It is expressed most often through institutionalized channels, such as voting, but also through activism in parties and unions. Civil citizenship is a more local form of participation, rooted in "non-political" themes and places: the neighborhood, academic failure, crime...and

¹⁶ Jocelyne Cesari : "La guerre du Golfe et les Arabes de France" *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, no hors série, Paris, 1991, pp 125-129

¹⁷ For example, during the 1989 local elections, the leaders of an association called FRANCE PLUS managed to place candidates on different slates. They argued that persons of North African origin should hold elected office as representatives for a legitimate component of French society. They negotiated their rosters with different political parties, ranging from left to right (excepting, of course, the National Front.). Leaders of other North African associations created their own rosters through alliances with various minorities (e.g., women, and non-Muslim migrant groups.)

The leaders of FRANCE PLUS also created autonomous electoral rolls for the parliamentary elections of March, 1993, based exclusively on ethnic criteria. Their efforts were not successful; their candidates won only 1 or 2% of the vote.

The term, Franco-Maghrébins, defined as "French coming from North Africa," was born of these political campaigns. It was used in an effort to access political and financial resources on an ethnic basis. That effort, however, was unsuccessful, mainly because it required too many political compromises.

now Islam. Relationships among individuals, as well as the recognition of diverse groups within the social body, form an important part of "civility." Civility is there founded on the recognition of diversity within civil society as a conglomeration of different groups, which nevertheless have a common attachment to the social order. The civil does not, however, indicate the private. It may also carry a public dimension. Grassroots organizations, for example, work to prevent marginality and exclusion by discouraging apathy and political inertia. They also attempt to negotiate dual commitments to Islam and to the national collectivity. In other words, the separation of citizenship and membership in ethnic and religious groups is no longer salient, despite the fact that this premise lies at the core of the contract between individuals and the political community.

This new form of collective action is a consequence of the paradoxical and contradictory condition of today's young people, which sets them up as "illegitimate children of France". The 'Beur' movement was consumed by this tension, often leading to ambivalent options. In this sense, there are similarities between the two trends. In both cases, organizations arise from the shared interests of young people who live in the same neighborhood, but now they come together on the basis of a precise criterion: Islam. This bypasses the strategic difficulties of the former secular organizations, which hesitated between social and ethnic self-identification. Despite the fact that their founders shared North African origins, these organizations emphasized the social constraints that resulted from exclusion, rather than ethnic origins and culture.

The chief purpose of these "Beur" organizations was to encourage young people's social interaction in the local environment. They initiated a dynamic of mobilization centered on neighborhood ties, with the goal not of "changing lives," but of providing consumer goods and leisure activities and helping to fight against symptoms of social exclusion such as addiction and crime. The leaders of today's "Islamic" organizations share the same preoccupations. But, unlike the former, they are not torn between political action and social engagement. They have deliberately opted for the second, and this makes them more autonomous and less dependent on public funds than their secular predecessors. This is why, aside from any process of professionalization or political recognition, the volunteer work that had disappeared from urban political action is once again a prominent trend.

The difference lies in the way they position themselves outside the local context. In effect, broader solidarities are at work, which transcend the local and allow a sense of identification with all Muslims. They demonstrate a certain fluidity, as well as a desire to avoid rivalries and competition for preeminence between organizations. Their members understand events taking place in the main centers of Islam, as well as at home. Thus, from one organization to the next, our interviewees had been warned of our visits. This is why these groups' attempts to organize at the national level may in the long run have a better chance of succeeding, unlike similar efforts of the Beur movement.

Efforts at National Leadership

These new local Islamic organization establish both new sites and new forms of action, which have little to do with the competition between representatives of "official Islam" to take the lead in organizing the "second religion of France." It even appears that the gap is widening between some representatives of official Islam and these new Muslims. For example, representatives of the Grande Mosque in Lyon have little relationship with and even less influence over local Muslim youth groups. These organizations implement their own structures and methods of action. They rely particularly on audio and video cassettes, lectures, and the distribution of brochures and publications. These materials are circulated throughout France, and members of Muslim organizations from all over the country come to know and recognize each other. National forms of organization contribute to this fluidity of thought, ideas and persons.

Sometimes this mobilization occurs by means of proselytism. This is the case with *Tabligh wa Da'wa*, better known in France as Faith and Practice. This movement, founded in India in 1927 by Mawlana Muhammad

Ilyas, seeks to disseminate Islam and the respect for Qu'ranic law in its literal interpretation. It adheres to six principles: profession of faith, prayer, the knowledge and commemoration of God, respect for all other believers, and sincerity. The members of *Tabligh*, who renounce all political activity, particularly in Europe, are organized in national sections composed of several subdivisions within each territory. A branch of *Tabligh* has existed in France since 1972. Its activities take place in the mosques it controls, and in many other settings, through missionary activities. These efforts put into practice a major principle of *Tabligh*: devoting one's time to spreading the faith. These small outings in the member's immediate environment should be distinguished from pilgrimages, which take members throughout France and Europe.

Although this movement is gaining adherents, most of the young individuals engaged into Muslim activities did not come to Islam by this means. The forms of discourse and action of UOIF (Union of Islamic Organizations of France) are much more effective. Transplanted intellectuals, most of them Tunisian, founded this organization in 1983. They had close ties with the Islamic Tendency Movement, which later became known as Ennahda, founded by Rached Ghanouchi (exiled in London). Some of them came from North Africa for university studies, and then remained in France to work and start families. They began to make connections with the immigrant world, which had until then been unfamiliar to them, during the first "headscarf affair" of 1989. Since then, they have undertaken a series of efforts to organize a French Muslim minority. Professors, students and businessmen, the leaders of the movement are part of the emerging Muslim French elite. They promote the strict observance of Islam, as well as openness toward other cultural and religious sectors of French society. Since the organization's founding, most of the original leaders have retired. When the administrative council was modified in December of 1995, a new group of leaders surfaced, most of Moroccan origin and living in Bordeaux. Today, the UOIF claims 200 local organizations of different statuses: active (50), friends (50), and sympathizers (100).

UOIF functions on both the national and regional levels. On the national level, the General Assembly elects an executive bureau, which then elects a president. On the regional level, member organizations elect twelve city delegates, who choose a regional representative. Since 1994, regional conferences have occurred in Aquitaine and the South East region of France. The organization's most significant accomplishment is its annual congress in the outskirts of Paris, which features different lectures and roundtables. This event attracts several thousand young people from all over France, who gather for three days for both festivities and studying. Its other important achievement has been the founding of an Islamic university institute. UOIF leaders were among the first to understand the critical importance of training imams in France. They founded the European Institute of Human Sciences, including an institute for imams and Islamic educators. With about 80 students--the majority of them French--it has not yet shown itself capable of producing religious leaders in France, chiefly because public authorities often view it with mistrust. In 1997, the institute's first graduating class of imams included only four people, of which one was a woman. In addition, the institute conducts yearly summer seminars for those unable to pursue the complete program of study.

Outside the training of Islamic leadership, educating Muslim youths is UOIF's chief priority. For this purpose, the organization created French Muslim Youth (JMF) in 1992. This group's members are men and women between the ages of 18 and 30. Its leaders are young men, students or upwardly mobile professionals. Their operation is decentralized. Today there are six federations grouping together sections in Paris (Dreux, Evreux, Montfermeil), as well as Lille, Nantes, St. Nazaire, Cholet and Marseille. They see themselves more as a consciousness-raising movement than as providers of services. They do, however, organize conferences (at the local level) and forums (at the regional level), where guest lecturers speak on assorted subjects. In 1996, one of this forum addressed the theme, "Young People and Belief." Several UOIF members lectured. More than 300 young people, with an average age of twenty, gathered at this forum. They crowded into the conference room

to hear the remarks of Hassan Iqouissen, the first president of JMF and a history student from Lille. A change in leadership occurred over the summer of 1996 in JMF, when a sociology student from Nantes, Farid Abdelkrim, became president.

The JMF section in central France held a forum entitled "The Islam We Need" on March 29, 30 and 31, 1997. It brought together about 5000 participants. The lecturers included a representative from the Education League and a manager from the secretariat of the Episcopacy for Relations with Islam (SRI). This is how the new president of JMF described the organization:

"Through the word of God, we try to build a future here. But although JMF claims to take the word of God as its main point of reference, that does not mean that we privilege God's law over the law of the republic. To be a good Muslim, one must be a good citizen. We are in France, not Bangladesh or the United States. There are specific circumstances the Muslim must take into consideration, because he has decided to live here. We must not resort to simplistic formulas: 'I don't give a damn about France.' We cannot live on the margins of French society. The main objective of JMF is to educate, through lectures, publications and seminars. From this standpoint, JMF has a civilizing influence. I am deeply convinced that I can bring something more to my society. I have been given a mission, a role. We should not see this in terms of proselytism but in terms of relationships with people and means of remedying the problems that plague our society."

Other organizations, targeting specific categories such as students and women, exist as well. The Islamic Students' union of France, which changed its name to Muslim Students of France in 1996, has headquarters in Bordeaux. The older French Association of Islamic Students (AEIF), founded in 1963 by Professor Hamidullah, drew its original membership from foreigners studying in France. Since then, some young people of immigrant origin have joined the organization. The League of Muslim Women, a satellite organization of the OUIF, is a premiere women's group.

All of these groups use the same sort of language. Their discourse emphasized education as a means of attaining the true Islam. This education must be reconciled with integration into French society. Members seek to maintain their dignity and to study Islam without becoming detached from French society. Members also should not feel obligated to cut themselves off from Muslims who are less observant, as leaders try to explain.

The organizations' activities in suburban housing projects bear some analogy to the young Catholic workers movements of the 1940s and 1950s, which attempted to save distance their members from the influence of Marxist ideology through similar methods of evangelism: preserving religious values by educating members in the workplace. Today, housing projects rather than factories form the setting for such efforts. Still, they share the aim of strengthening individuals and groups through faith. Today, however, the challenge lies in resisting social disenfranchisement, not the pull of a competing ideology such as Marxism.

Moreover, this new collective action in the name of Islam is different in that it draws from models and references unfamiliar to the West. Most of the members looked to the Muslim Brothers movement and its founding figures, such as Hassan al-Banna, to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts. Therefore, it is important to take stock of the fact that the Muslim Brothers' doctrine is gaining ground in Europe, without leading to political disorder.. It should be viewed more as a return to the sources of the organizational doctrines of Hassan El Banna, before they took a political turn in Egypt and throughout the Muslim world. From this perspective, its dissemination in Europe does not respond to the same logic as it does in the Arab world. In this context, it answers the need for familiarity with Islam, reviving the spirit of reform that marked the Muslim world during the nineteenth century and situating the question of modernity at the heart of this renewal.

The New Islamic Landscape of France

The Islamic landscape in France is divided between two poles. The first represents the different ethnic and national currents that claim to promote Islam. The second is situated in a more universalist perspective, inspired by the Muslim Brothers' doctrine. It is also important to take note of the vast movement of brotherhoods and mystic groups, but it attracts few young Muslims of Arab origin.

The ethnic-national side of the spectrum includes the Mosque de Paris, whose history and intrigues have been endlessly examined, as well as the mosques of Evry and Mantes la Jolie. Other important organizations, which appeared during the early 1980s, are characterized by the national origins of the people or groups they represent. The National Federation of French Muslims (FNMF) was founded in December of 1985 by a French Muslim convert. It has established itself as the main rival of the Mosque de Paris, promoting a French Islam freed from the influence of countries of origin. Daniel Youssouf Leclerc, who served as director of the organization during the first "headscarf affair" of 1989, espoused this view charismatically. According to the federation's directors, it has more than 500 local associations; this claim is difficult to verify. During 1995, Moroccans came to dominate its leadership, when Mohamed Bechari became president.

National Tendency-Islamic Union, founded in France in 1981, recruits mostly from the Turkish population. It is connected with the Welfare Party (Refah) and to Milli Gorus, both of an Islamist bent. The Islamic Association of France appeared in 1984. Most of its members, as well, are of Turkish descent, and it is considered the French wing of the radical Islamic groups in Germany directed by Hamaladdin Hocaoglu or "Kaplan," the former Mufti of Adana. Finally, the Federation of Islamic Associations of Africa, the Comoros and the Antilles (FIACA) or the Coordination of Muslim Associations of the Countries of Asia and the Indian Ocean, have been previously mentioned.

On the fundamentalist side of the spectrum are UOIF, UJM and JMF, as well as independent organizations such as the Addawa mosque, founded in 1967 in Paris. It has gradually gained a reputation as one of the important cites of Islam in the capital and beyond. Its renown is mostly due to the personality of its superintendent, an intellectual of Algerian descent, who earned a degree in history at the Sorbonne. He has encouraged open-mindedness and exchange through the activities of a cultural center, which regularly organizes conferences bringing together academics and representatives of non-Muslim religious traditions. These conferences bring together sometimes-conflicting points of view on different social subjects. He also manages a publishing company, Confluent, which produces audio and video cassettes and books. Plans to renovate and expand the mosque, which currently accommodates more than 3000 people, have been approved by neighborhood officials but await the mayor's approval. He was put into House arrest in Folembray in November of 1993, when Algerian Islamist networks in France were being dismantled. This unjustified measure prompted the creation of an extensive support committee.

A bomb exploded in front of the mosque on March 17, 1997. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. According to Superintendent Larbi Kechat, the police had long hoped to search the mosque. They arrived quickly after the attack and stayed for hours. Since then, an investigation has continued, and the mosque's directors have filed suit.

Between these two poles, which could be labeled "fundamentalist" and "traditionalist," the beginnings of a liberal Islam are developing. Soheib Bencheikh represents this new trend. Mufti of Marseille and son of the deceased Sheikh Abbas, who was Superintendent of the Mosque de Paris from 1982 to 1989, he has spoken widely on *laïcité* and Islamic reform. He gained renown in the non-Muslim community, especially in the media. Bencheikh does not hesitate to consider all Muslim law dependent on historical and cultural context, and thus subject to constant revision: "Every generation, every group inhabiting a region, reads into the Qu'ran its own concerns and aspirations...Many Qu'ranic verses urge Muslims to renew their understanding, and above

all not settle for the results their ancestors produced." ¹⁸. Building on this argument, Bencheikh argues that many prescriptions are not applicable in modern societies, particularly veiling: "Muslims must let each other know that in Islam, the injunction to fortify oneself with science and knowledge is more important than the injunction to wear the veil wherever the two are opposed. This is the case, right or wrong, in the public schools, where education clearly takes precedence over the veil. This is the very spirit of Islam. It is the logic at the core of Islamic law." This sort of argument is paradoxical, in that it refers to a certain reality of French Islam, when in fact many of these Muslims do not identify with an overly liberal interpretation of Tradition. In other words, even if secularized Muslims do not actually respect the Law, they still prefer to have authorities who articulate it.

The issue of pluralism

French citizenry now finds its Islamic presence large enough to threaten its ideal for public life – the balance it has struck amongst its three major pillars: unity, respect for religious pluralism, and liberty of consciousness. As a result, Frenchmen are rethinking their basic notion of pluralism. Pluralism can no longer mean equal opportunity in socio-economic advancement for deprived groups. Instead, it must refer to political balance between need for recognizing ethnic and cultural differences at the institutional level and need for maintaining political and cultural cohesion throughout the nation. Neither French politicians nor citizenry are prepared to address the implications of pluralism so defined. Most Frenchman still hang French unity upon a loyalty to Nation and State elevated above all others. They fear the consequences of any national debate on pluralism which might, by dividing the nation along lines of irreconcilable ideological difference, strengthen the National Front political party, which has already preyed upon racism and xenophobia to mobilize support in favor of a white and Catholic France.

Pluralism, however, is not a phenomenon isolated within French national boundaries; it interfaces with transnationalism. Franco-Muslims necessarily maintain solidarities and linkages with Islamic cultures and movements beyond France. If not for education and training in foreign Muslim countries, few leaders would exist at all within the French Muslim community—given their limited resources for clerical study within France.¹⁹

While transnational dimensions to Islamic membership are generally seen by French society to be exclusively sources of political risk and international instability, the reality is otherwise. Religion, in general, and Islam, in particular, can facilitate social integration -- the modern imagination's difficulty perceiving religion as a vehicle for cooperation and progress notwithstanding. Allegiance to Islam is indeed allowing French-born Muslims to integrate into French society in a way their parents cannot. It is providing them with a collective narrative that celebrates the triumph of a tradition throughout the ages, thereby healing the colonial wounds that their parents bear in memory . It is also renewing their commitments on an abstract level to humanitarian values and on a pragmatic level toward making France a better place for Muslims and others alike. Only when secular citizens accomplish for themselves theoretically what France's new Muslims have accomplished for themselves practically – reconciliation between religion and modernity – will they appreciate how Franco-Muslims are creating a new civic-mindedness through Islamic identification that may benefit the national community-at-large.

¹⁸ Bencheikh, Souhab, *Marianne et le Prophete. L'islam dans la laicite francaise*, Paris, Grasset, 1998.

¹⁹ As a consequence, however, of their training abroad, they are often ill-prepared to address the specific needs of Franco-Muslims who live as a minority. Within the small circle of Islamic elite in Europe, however, an innovative reflection on the adaptation of the Islamic Law (*Shari'a*) to minority conditions is just now starting. These scholars are highlighting the flexibility of the Law and demonstrating its compatibility with secular and democratic rules.

* This part has already been published in Alisdair Rogers and Steven Vertovec (ed) (1998), *Muslim European Youth, reproducing Ethnicity, Religion, Culture*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd.