

## MUSLIM CITIZENS!

After the January 2015 Paris attacks: French Muslims and France's republican model

### **Abstract**

The 2015 killings in Paris reignited the republicanism vs. multiculturalism debate. Many responses to the events were founded on the assumption of a radical incompatibility between France's republican model and the aspirations of its Muslim population. This assumption corresponds to a tendency in postcolonial studies to draw a sharp dividing line between Western values and the 'Other'. The article offers a different configuration of the issue. I argue in favour of a pluralist 'transformative republicanism' founded on the French revolution's radical phase, against an 'institutional republicanism' which always used multiculturalism as a way to segment populations. I claim that among France's minorities, including their Muslim component, many endorse this view. Key to the distinction between institutional and transformative republicanism is our understanding of *laïcité*.

### **Introduction. *Charlie Hebdo* and the republican vs. multiculturalism debate**

The January 2015 killings in Paris<sup>1</sup> have reignited the ongoing debate between republicanism and multiculturalism, whose terms have been aptly synthesized by Cécile Laborde.<sup>2</sup> Republicans uphold the conception of liberty enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789, which demands that individuals be respected 'sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion':

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term 'January 2015 Paris killings' rather than, say, 'Charlie Hebdo killings', is important. A narrow focus on Charlie Hebdo mechanically leads to putting the cartoons at the heart of the analysis. Yet the killing of four Jews should remind us that the motivation of the killers cannot be reduced to their outrage at Charlie Hebdo's cartoons. If we insert the January 2015 killings within the broader context of terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, Brussels in 2016 and, beyond Europe, in Tunisia, Turkey and many other countries, the notion that the cartoons were the prime motivation of the killers appears implausible to say the least. Furthermore, the Jihadist literature owned by the killers, provided by *Mediapart* and analysed by Romain Caillet, shows that the killings were not the knee-jerk reaction of offended souls but premeditated acts committed in cold blood with broader aims than to 'avenge the prophet' (to quote the killers' cry as they exited *Charlie Hebdo*'s office). Jihadists aim to divide society along religious lines: by committing crimes in the name of Islam, they hope to marginalize Muslims and thus radicalize them. See Pierre Puchot, 'Plongée dans les lectures des djihadistes des attentats de Paris', *Mediapart* (2015),

<http://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/170115/plongee-dans-les-lectures-des-djihadistes-des-attentats-de-paris>

[All the referenced online articles were accessed on 24 April 2016]

<sup>2</sup> Cécile Laborde, 'The Culture(s) of the Republic: Nationalism and Multiculturalism in French Republican Thought', in *Political Theory*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (Oct., 2001), p. 716-735.

Particular cultural attachments are contingent, rather than constitutive, attributes of individual identity, and human dignity lies in the ever-possible emancipation of the human mind from its cultural limitations... Not that individuals are thereby forbidden from cultivating particular bonds and loyalties. Rather... these attachments are constructed both as private... and as objects of choice – and therefore open to contestation, revision, and repudiation by individuals.<sup>3</sup>

Republican *fraternité* ‘is founded not on a common cultural identity but rather on a shared willingness to be an active member in a self-determining political community.’<sup>4</sup> Because ‘the bond of citizenship would be eroded if society were fragmented into a collection of identity groups’,<sup>5</sup> the State ‘should aim at the reduction of structural inequalities... rather than contribute to the entrenchment of cultural difference’.<sup>6</sup>

Republican principles have been severely criticized by multiculturalists who claim that ‘culture-blind universalism works as an ideological mystification that perpetuates existing structures of domination. Universalism is simply a new incarnation of postcolonial imperialism, which constructs Islam as the unassimilable “other” and conflates the self-determination of the autonomous subject with the subjectivity of the European white male. Far from being neutral, the French public sphere has always been eminently permeable to the values of the dominant religion, class, gender, and culture.’<sup>7</sup> The focus on France and Islam is recurrent in the republicanism vs multiculturalism debate. It is found, for instance, in the work of Tariq Modood:

The French conception of the ‘republic’ has integral to it a certain radical secularism, laïcité, marking the political triumph over clericalism. (...) Islam, with its claim to regulate public as well as private life, is therefore seen as an ideological foe and the Muslim presence as alien and potentially both culturally and politically inassimilable.<sup>8</sup>

Modood believes that the integration of Muslims in European countries requires the implementation of an ‘ethno-religious communitarianism’.<sup>9</sup> We are thus placed before an alternative: either the integration of Muslims, or the French conception of the republic. This alternative structured many articles published in the wake of the January 2015 killings. *Charlie Hebdo*’s cartoons were deemed characteristic expressions of France’s scorn for

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<sup>3</sup> Idem, p. 718-719.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, p. 719.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, p. 720.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, p. 719.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, p. 721.

<sup>8</sup> Tariq Modood, ‘Muslims, Religious Equality and Secularism’ (presentation at the conference on migration organized by the Centre d’Histoire Sociale du XXe Siècle, Université Paris I, 2005), p. 4, <http://chs.univ-paris1.fr/Collo/Migrations/Modood.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism and Integration: struggling with confusions* (Fiesole, Italy: European University Institute, 2011), p. 7, <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/mars/source/resources/references/others/38%20-%20Multiculturalisme%20and%20Integration%20-%20Modood%202011.pdf>

religion, and especially Islam; French anti-clericalism was traced back to its origins, with the French revolution leading to the Terror;<sup>10</sup> France's self-representation as the beacon of universal rights was denounced as a cover-up for imperialism and colonialism;<sup>11</sup> colonialism was said to have informed France's attitude towards its postcolonial immigration, which was subjected to a forced process of assimilation.<sup>12</sup> The Paris attacks were thus perceived as a symptom of the alienation of France's Muslim population, and as a sign that France should renounce universalism in favour of multiculturalism. My claim is that the opposition between Islam and republicanism is fallacious and that in the wake of the January 2015 killings, republican principles should be reasserted.

Firstly, I will argue that many French Muslims are not hostile to French republicanism. To the contrary, they have appropriated it, as can be shown from the use of references to the French Revolution by French colonial subjects and postcolonial citizens. Secondly, I will claim that a focus on religion as the determining factor in the behaviour of people of Muslim culture has led many analysts to overlook other factors such as the demand for social justice and equality, and to exaggerate France's 'Islam problem'. Thirdly, I will argue that the French State itself has tended to reduce the discourse of its post-colonial citizens to its religious dimension, thus contradicting its own principles and failing to address issues of equality and justice. Finally, I will conclude that the best way for France to address the structural conditions conducive to the flourishing of violent extremism is to be true to its republican principles, not renounce them.

### **1. The French revolution: an anticolonial perspective**

In *Colonialism in Question*, Frederick Cooper has deftly unravelled the consequences of the tendency, within postcolonial studies, to reduce the Enlightenment, democracy, liberalism and rationality to mere vehicles for colonial and postcolonial domination. The binary opposition between the West and the 'Other' leads to a 'double occlusion': 'First is the obscuring of European history, for the counterpart of reducing non-Western history to a lack of what the

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<sup>10</sup> Giles Fraser, 'France's much vaunted secularism is not the neutral space it claims to be', *The Guardian* (2015),

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2015/jan/16/france-much-vaunted-secularism-not-neutral-space-claims-to-be>

<sup>11</sup> Pankaj Mishra, 'After the Paris attacks: it's time for a new Enlightenment', *The Guardian* (2015),

<http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/jan/20/sp-after-paris-its-time-for-new-enlightenment>

<sup>12</sup> Francis Ghiles, 'If France is to build a new identity, it must address its apartheid', *The Guardian* (2015),

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/22/france-identity-prison-employment-french-society-muslims>

West had is to assume that the West actually had it.... Second is the occlusion of the history of the people who lived in colonies.’<sup>13</sup> Our understanding of the French Revolution is often affected by this double occlusion: it is reduced to a Western event whose principles would truly be consistent with colonialism. This postulate obscures the incoherence of colonial policies, which were far more oriented towards communitarian strategies of containment than ‘universalist’ strategies of assimilation. Secondly, it ignores the multidimensionality of the Revolution (a crucial part of which took place in Haiti) and colonized peoples’ ways of ‘deflecting, appropriating, or reinterpreting the teachings and preachings thrust upon them.’<sup>14</sup> The Revolution thus appears as a crucial site of contention: it provided a common discursive space for rival ideological claims.

France’s ‘civilizing mission’ was designed to justify colonialism in the eyes of French citizens by making it consistent with the universalist ideals inherited from the French revolution; colonialism would enlighten primitive peoples who would eventually become worthy of equal rights.<sup>15</sup> In practice, however, the French State quickly gave up on assimilationist policies and instead used religion as a means of keeping its colonial subjects under control.<sup>16</sup> So eager was the State to retain its control over Islam that when the law of separation of Church and State was voted in 1905, Islam was exempted from it.<sup>17</sup> The State’s instrumentalization of religion appeared clearly when, after the First World War, military veterans of North and Sub-Saharan African origins asserted that they had paid the ‘blood tax’ and deserved the full rights associated with French citizenship. In response, ‘the government tried to emphasize that colonial subjects were firmly immersed in their own cultures and that citizenship was not only inappropriate but detrimental to their cultural integrity.’<sup>18</sup> Instead of granting citizenship rights to its veterans, France built the Parisian Mosque. It is worth quoting from the inaugural speech, which contrasts strikingly with the Third Republic’s reputation for aggressive anticlericalism:

When the minaret that you are about to build will be erected, one more prayer will rise in the beautiful sky of Île de France, of which the Catholic towers of Notre-Dame will not be jealous.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), p. 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Gilles Manceron, *1885 : Le Tournant colonial de la République* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2006), p. 100-113

<sup>16</sup> Idem, p. 117-136. See also Franck Frégosi, *L’Islam dans la laïcité* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2010), p. 199-204.

<sup>17</sup> Franck Frégosi, *L’Islam dans la laïcité*, op. cit., p. 205-212.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation. Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Gilles Keppel, *Les Banlieues de l’Islam. Naissance d’une religion en France* (Paris: Editions

The construction of the Mosque fooled no one: it was mocked by Messali Hadj, the founding father of Algerian nationalism, as an ‘advertising mosque’ (*mosquée de réclame*), and the Ulema insistently demanded the application of the law of 1905.<sup>20</sup> When Messali later called for the establishment of an Algerian parliament, he declared that it was the only way for France to be true to the principles it had proclaimed and betrayed:

Only at that moment can we say that justice has been rendered to us; for in that way, we can effectively participate in the affairs of our country, and that day we will say that the democratic France of 1789, of 1848... will have realized a work of civilization in emancipating the Algerian people from exploitation, servitude, and injustice.<sup>21</sup>

Messali was addressing the first Algerian Muslim Congress in 1936, which had been modelled on the 1789 Estates-General. How can we make sense of the references to the French revolution that characterized not only Algerian nationalism but all anticolonial movements throughout the French Empire?

Firstly, it must be remembered that the meaning of the French revolution was contested even in France. Under the ‘July monarchy’ (1830-1848) and the Second Empire (1852-1870), Liberals cultivated the memories of 1789, which would become the reference point for the Third Republic (1870-1940); the nascent Socialist movement, on the other hand, referred back to 1793 - the Revolution’s most radical phase, whose emblematic figure was Robespierre. Secondly, even before the declaration of the Third Republic in 1871, work migrations already took place between France and the Maghreb, and René Gallissot emphasized the importance, for the politicization of Maghrebin workers, of their insertion within trade unions<sup>22</sup> (Messali himself had had this experience). Trade union movements also existed in the Maghreb, in which teachers played a prominent role.<sup>23</sup> These movements cherished the ideals of 1793, which can explain the radical tonality of the numerous references to the French Revolution in the discourses of anticolonial leaders such as Messali and Mohamed Bendjelloul, who attended French schools. This is not to say that French teachers were responsible for colonized peoples’ resistance. Quite the contrary: they generally believed in gradual emancipation via education – in other words, in France’s civilizing mission. The anticolonial interpretation of the Revolution was thus doubly subversive: its

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du Seuil, 1991), p. 71 (my translation).

<sup>20</sup> Franck Frégosi, *L’Islam dans la laïcité*, op. cit., p. 214-216.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Martin Evans, *Algeria. France’s Undeclared War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press) p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> René Gallissot, *Le Maghreb de traverse* (Paris: Editions Bouchene, 2000), p. 97-110

<sup>23</sup> Idem, p. 85-97.

reference to 1793 was subversive relative to the State, and its anticolonial use was subversive of the trade union movement itself.

Frederick Cooper's *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation* has shown the systematic use of the reference to the Revolution in anticolonial movements in Senegal, Ivory Coast and Madagascar. Perhaps teachers also played a part: anticolonial figures such as Leopold Senghor, Lamine Guèye (Senegal) and Aimé Césaire (Martinique) also attended French schools. In 1946, Léopold Senghor quoted the words of the decree of 16 pluviôse an II (1794) that had abolished slavery and called France to be true to 'the spirit, if not the terms, of the decree'.<sup>24</sup> Senghor and Guèye's popularity ensured the dissemination of the reference to the Revolution within colonized populations, and Cooper was impressed with Senegalese union leaders' mastery of the rhetoric of republican citizenship. He quotes from a letter to the Governor General from government workers in Dakar:

What we want is the total disappearance of racial prejudice, the application of republican principles that have made the grandeur of France.<sup>25</sup>

The reference to the Revolution was not merely rhetorical. Cooper's study of trade union movements showed that 'the concept of citizenship' was 'much more salient in French than British Africa',<sup>26</sup> which suggests that the reference to the Revolution also contributed to defining the nature of colonized peoples' demands. These were magnificently expressed in the discourse addressed by Aimé Césaire at the National Assembly the same year, demanding increased autonomy for Martinique (*départementalisation*). Only equality, he claimed, could save the Empire from insurrection:

On the day that these peoples have the sentiment that their hope is flouted one more time, and only on this day, will the situation become critical, because on that day, time and disillusion will have amassed, in the words of the famous Colonel Lawrence, ... 'dried-up souls ready to catch fire'. To this wildfire, let us prefer the great light that shines from the brazier you yourselves lit in 1789, which has never stopped hovering over peoples' horizons, because it brought all of them, regardless of their race and colour, ... the great message of fraternity.<sup>27</sup>

Césaire subtly offsets his warning regarding France's future with reverence for France's past. This rhetorical strategy should not deceive us: After C. L. R. James' *Black Jacobins* (1938), Césaire's *Toussaint Louverture* (1962) contributed to show that the Haitian Revolution had not been a mere externality of events happening in Europe, but an autonomous slave

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*, op. cit, p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation*, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>26</sup> Idem. p. ii.

<sup>27</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Écrits Politiques. Discours à l'Assemblée Nationale 1945–1983* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 2013), pp. 46–7 (my translation).

insurrection.<sup>28</sup> Césaire was decentralizing the Revolution, an operation whose consequences are still unfolding to this day.<sup>29</sup>

The long history of the politicization of France's colonized subjects enables us to enrich our perception of its postcolonial citizens. While every child schooled in France is of course exposed to the Revolution, its reception by descendants of colonized peoples must have been influenced by their specific histories. It should not, therefore, be reduced to a mere process of indoctrination from the State but understood as a complex, multidirectional phenomenon. A telling example is that of the 1983 Marche Pour l'Égalité et Contre le Racisme, which marked the emergence of so-called 'second generation immigrants' on the political stage. It was organized by youths of diverse origins, and while many – but not all – were of Muslim culture, religion featured nowhere in the manifesto of its organizers: it denounced police harassment, racist discrimination, economic and social hardship, and demanded equality of rights and opportunity.<sup>30</sup> Another case in point are the suburban riots of 2005 (or rather, in the words of their protagonists, 'revolts'). Again, the insurgents were of diverse origins and religions, and the cause of their anger was discriminations as well as social and geographical relegation.<sup>31</sup> The rapper Guy Achia reminisced last year on the revolts in telling words:

Our parents are Africans. Africans are respectful. Our African parents are always on time, always polite – very, very polite: 'yes sir, thank you ma'am'. But we are French ... French people are revolutionaries, we are never happy, we never agree, we always complain.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Frederick Cooper has stressed the centrality of the Haitian revolution to the history of colonialism, and argued that its neglect by postcolonial scholars was one of the causes of their tendency to adopt binary oppositions between the 'West' and the 'Other'. See *Colonialism in Question*, op. cit., p. 15-16 and 153-202. On the history of the Haitian revolution, see Laurent Dubois, *Les Esclaves de la République. L'histoire oubliée de la première émancipation. 1789-1794* (Paris: Editions Calmann-Levy, 1998) ; Yves Benot, *La Révolution Française et la fin des colonies* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1989) ; Jeremy Popkin, *You Are All Free. The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> On the relevance of the Haitian Revolution for current issues of identity in France, see Laurent Dubois, 'La République métissée : citizenship, colonialism, and the borders of French history', in *Cultural Studies*, 14 :1 (2000), p. 15-24.

<sup>30</sup> The manifesto of SOS Avenir Minguettes, the association which launched the Marche Pour l'Égalité et Contre le Racisme, can be found in Hajjat Abdellali, 'La Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme', in *Histoire des mouvements sociaux en France* (Paris: Editions La Découverte 2014) p. 671-680.

<sup>31</sup> On the 2005 *banlieues* riots, see Gérard Mauger, *Les Emeutes de 2005 : une révolte protopolitique* (Paris: Editions du Croquant, 2006) ; H. Lagrange and M. Oberti (dir.), *Émeutes urbaines et protestations. Une singularité française*, (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 2006), p. 108-114 ; Thomas Sauvadet, 'A La Recherche d'une émeute postcoloniale. Socio-ethnographie d'une émeute de novembre 2005', in *Mouvements HS/2011* (HS n° 1), p. 97-105; M. Kokoreff, P. Barron and O. Steinauer, *Comprendre les émeutes de novembre 2005 : l'exemple de Saint-Denis*, Rapport final, Centre d'analyse stratégique, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> 'Pour ceux qui ont fait de grosses études, y'a pas de travail', 2005–2015, *la révolte des quartiers* (4/4), [www.mediapart.fr/journal/documentaire/france/2005-2015-la-revolte-des-quartiers-44-pour-ceux-qui-ont-fait-de-grosses-etudes-ya-pas-de-travail](http://www.mediapart.fr/journal/documentaire/france/2005-2015-la-revolte-des-quartiers-44-pour-ceux-qui-ont-fait-de-grosses-etudes-ya-pas-de-travail).

His fellow rapper Hardy Paul concurs: ‘We’re in France, it’s a revolutionary country, it’s in its history.’<sup>33</sup> That such sentiments are shared by the Muslim component of France’s postcolonial population can be seen from their voting record. Not only do French Muslims vote overwhelmingly for the Parti Socialiste; the radical left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, whose 2012 presidential campaign was centred upon the reference to the Revolution and whose discourses were peppered with quotations from Robespierre, obtained twice as many votes from Muslim voters as from the general electorate (20% and 11%).<sup>34</sup> At a public meeting in Marseille before more than 100 000 people, Mélenchon celebrated France’s mixed ethnicities and boldly asserted that ‘there is no future for France without Arabs and Berbers’.<sup>35</sup> As a golden sun set on the sea, ululation could be heard rising from the crowd.

## **2. Representations of French Muslims: the religious bias in official and academic discourse**

The persistence of the reference to the Revolution in colonial and postcolonial discourses should help us nuance representations of immigrants that focus exclusively on religion. Robert Gidea’s history of post-1945 France, for instance, is structured by the opposition between France’s intolerance to minorities and immigrants’ religious aspirations. On the one hand, ‘the French refused to consider that anyone could be properly French if they were foreign in origin, spoke a different language, or threatened the idea of a secular state by demanding public recognition of their religion’<sup>36</sup>; on the other hand, ‘Islam provided a compensation for immigrants who found assimilation difficult or objectionable, and wished to assert the dignity and specificity of their community in the eyes of God if not in those of the French.’<sup>37</sup> Thus when Gidea discusses immigrant workers’ mobilizations in the 1970s, he exclusively mentions their religious demands.<sup>38</sup> Ignoring other demands common to immigrant and national workers, such as increased wages and improved working conditions,

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<sup>33</sup> Idem.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Le Vote des musulmans à l’élection présidentielle’, *Ifop focus* n° 67, [http://www.ifop.com/?option=com\\_publication&type=publication&id=482](http://www.ifop.com/?option=com_publication&type=publication&id=482)

<sup>35</sup> A synopsis of Mélenchon’s discourse, with a video link, was provided by the Huffington Post: ‘Mélenchon: revivez son meeting au Prado à Marseille’ (2012), [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xq4lbi\\_discours-jean-luc-melenchon-au-prado\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xq4lbi_discours-jean-luc-melenchon-au-prado_news)

<sup>36</sup> Robert Gidea, *France since 1945*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 133.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, p. 167.

<sup>38</sup> Idem. For analyses of the strikes that present religious demands as peripheral to social demands, see Choukri Hmed, ‘Contester une institution dans le cas d’une mobilisation improbable : la “grève des loyers” dans les foyers Sonacotra’, in *Sociétés contemporaines*, n° 65, and Laure Pitti, “‘Travailleurs de France, voilà notre nom”. Les mobilisations des ouvriers étrangers dans les usines et les foyers durant les années 1970’, in Boubeker Ahmed etHajjat Abdellali (dir.) (2008), *Histoire politique des immigrations (post) coloniales. France 1920-2008* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2008).

leads to overlooking the bonds that developed between them<sup>39</sup> expressed, for instance, in this statement made at a meeting of the Confédération Générale des Travailleurs (CGT), France's largest union:

Workers of Citroën, I thank you for being here. In the name of God we hope our demands will be satisfied, our dignity respected. In the name of God, we are all united, all brothers in this strike. God is on our side... We must fight in the name of God. It is freedom. Freedom and our rights. Come, my brothers. Long live the CGT, long live freedom, long live France.<sup>40</sup>

The insertion of immigrant workers in labour organizations was a complex process in the aftermath of the Algerian war, and in a context of economic crisis; nonetheless, it remained a crucial mode of integration.<sup>41</sup> Finally, it is difficult, within Gidea's picture of devout Muslims struggling against an intolerant power, to make sense of the response of the companies and the State, who were quick to grant immigrants their wishes, because religious demands were cheaper to satisfy than those concerning wages and safety.<sup>42</sup> Companies hoped that religious leaders would pacify their followers, and they did not mind dormitories and factories becoming the preserve of the *tabligh* or the Muslim Brotherhood. After the 1970s strikes, the government of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing developed a far-reaching plan to facilitate the practice of Islam in workplaces.<sup>43</sup>

The aim of the State was to defuse class tensions by implementing an 'Islam of social peace'.<sup>44</sup> Drawing analogies with Iran under Khomeini, it was willing to improve the lot of Muslims to conjure the Communist-Islamist threat; as a result, 'issues pertaining to labour and dominations exerted on subaltern groups were kept at a distance while the religious traits of immigrants seemed to be substituted to their professional and social identities'.<sup>45</sup> The strategy consisting in reconfiguring social issues into religious ones was not exclusive to the Right. The Socialist government of François Mitterrand reacted in the same way to the 1983 Marche Pour l'Égalité et Contre le Racisme. Religious issues featured nowhere in the Manifesto of its organizers, yet the government reinterpreted the marchers' cause as a cultural issue, and promoted multiculturalism instead of equality.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, even though the report of the

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<sup>39</sup> René Gallissot, Nadir Boumaza & Ghislaine Clément, *Ces Migrants qui font le prolétariat* (Paris: Librairie des Méridiens Klincksieck, 1994), p. 107-113.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Vincent Gay, 'Grèves saintes ou grèves ouvrières ? Le « problème musulman » dans les conflits de l'automobile, 1982-1983', in *Genèses* 1/2015 (n° 98), p. 110-130 (my translation).

<sup>41</sup> René Gallissot, Nadir Boumaza & Ghislaine Clément, *Ces Migrants qui font le prolétariat*, op. cit., p. 124-126.

<sup>42</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Les Banlieues de l'Islam*, op. cit., p. 135-136.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, p. 137-138.

<sup>44</sup> Idem, p. 139-145.

<sup>45</sup> Idem.

<sup>46</sup> Hajjat Abdellali, 'La Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme', op. cit., p. 671-680.

Direction Centrale des Renseignements Généraux (France's intelligence agency) had asserted that the 2005 riots were not religiously or ethnically motivated,<sup>47</sup> they were characterized by President Jacques Chirac as symptoms of an 'identity crisis' – a diagnosis uncritically validated by Tariq Modood.<sup>48</sup> Andrew Hussey's best-seller, *The French Intifada*,<sup>49</sup> contributed heavily to promulgating a religion-based analysis of the predicament of French post-colonial citizens.

There is a peculiar connivance between multiculturalist criticisms of France and the State's official discourse: both describe the French State as oblivious to religion, and minorities as exclusively concerned with religion. Kenan Malik, a severe critic of British multiculturalist policies,<sup>50</sup> has no such bias. 'In principle', he writes, 'the French authorities rejected the multiculturalist approach that Britain had adopted. In practice, however, they treated North African migrants and their descendants, in a very "multicultural" way – as a single community, and primarily as a "Muslim" community.'<sup>51</sup> The French State oscillates between instrumentalizing and demonizing Islam in ways that appeared particularly erratic in the year 2004.

The year began with a vibrant apology for multiculturalism from none other than then Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy. In *La République, les religions, l'espérance* (2004), he boasted of having nominated France's first Muslim prefect, and insisted that 'the school teacher could never replace the priest'<sup>52</sup> because only religion could fulfil humans' deepest aspirations. Ultimately, all religions contained a convergent message of hope which enabled them to coexist harmoniously: during a visit to Riyadh, Sarkozy went so far as to claim that France and Saudi Arabia shared the common aim of 'fighting against the decay of moral and spiritual values, against materialism and the excesses of individualism'.<sup>53</sup> These statements were the garments of a new Islam of social peace, and Sarkozy cynically recommended the promotion of religion in France's disenfranchised suburbs as a means of turning the youths

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<sup>47</sup> 'Selon les RG, les émeutes en banlieues n'étaient pas le fait de bandes organisées', in *Le Monde*, 07/12/2005,

[http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2005/12/07/selon-les-rg-les-emeutes-en-banlieue-n-etaient-pas-le-fait-de-bandes-organisees\\_718347\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2005/12/07/selon-les-rg-les-emeutes-en-banlieue-n-etaient-pas-le-fait-de-bandes-organisees_718347_3224.html)

<sup>48</sup> Tariq Modood, 'Post-immigration "difference" and integration. The case of Muslims in Western Europe. A report prepared for the British Academy in *New Paradigms in Public Policy*, British Academy Policy Center, 2012, p. 21,

[http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/triq\\_modood.pdf](http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/triq_modood.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Andrew Hussey, *The French Intifada* (London: Granta 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Kenan Malik, *Multiculturalism and its Discontents* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> Kenan Malik, 'Assimilationism Vs Multiculturalism', in *Pandaemonium*, 14 January 2015, <https://kenanmalik.wordpress.com/2015/01/12/assimilationism-vs-multiculturalism/>

<sup>52</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, *La République, les religions, l'espérance* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2004) p. 18.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted and analyzed in Jean-Luc Mélenchon, *Laïcité. Réponse au chanoine de Latran* (Paris: Editions Bruno Leprince, 2008), p. 42-44.

away from criminality and drugs.<sup>54</sup> Yet the same year saw the exacerbation of debates surrounding the hijab, perceived as a marker of extremism.<sup>55</sup> In a classic case of historical events occurring first as tragedy, then as farce, anxiety over France's postcolonial migrants seemed to lead to a repetition of the strategy of the French army in Algiers in 1954, analysed by Frantz Fanon: dividing the enemy by unveiling the women.<sup>56</sup> Sarkozy initially opposed the law but eventually aligned himself with his party's right wing and championed an infamous law that officially asserted the 'benefits' of colonization,<sup>57</sup> voted in February 2005. Meanwhile, the suburb riots had raised social issues that remain unresolved.

### **3. Misrepresentations of laïcité and the fabrication of France's aggressive secularism**

French postcolonial citizens have many reasons to be angry. To reduce their anger to religious motives induces a tendency to inflate an 'Islam problem' in France, so as to make the cause proportionate to the effect.<sup>58</sup> Hence the routine assertions that laïcité is an aggressive form of secularism. Contrary to widespread beliefs, laïcité is far from being restrictive of religious freedom. The law of separation of Church and State voted in 1905, which remains the legal basis of laïcité, declared the State neutral towards all religions: it does not fund nor 'recognize' any. This is often taken to mean that France denies the existence of communities because it only recognizes the individual as bearer of rights. While it is true that France only recognizes individuals, not groups, as bearers of *political* rights (the legislative power is only exercised by the National Assembly, whose members are not nominated by groups but voted in by individuals), the law guarantees the right of believers to form associations which enjoy all the legal rights pertaining to any other association: demonstrate, petition, go to court, appeal judicial decisions, and lobby the State.

The distinction between civil and political rights is ignored by Modood who writes that 'the French State confers institutional legal status on the Catholic and Protestant

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<sup>54</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, *La République, les religions, l'espérance*, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> On the islamophobic climate within which the laws of 2004 and 2009 were voted, see Pierre Tévanian, *Le Voile médiatique. Un Faux débat : 'l'affaire du foulard islamique'* (Paris: Editions Raison d'Agir, 2005), and Pierre Tévanian, *Dévoilements. Du Hijab à la burqa : les dessous d'une obsession française* (Paris: Editions Libertalia, 2012). John R. Bowen, *Why The French Don't Like Headscarves* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008) provides a detailed review of the debates on the veil but his interpretation is flawed by its ethnicist bias and frequent misunderstandings of French legal and institutional matters. It also opens on a deeply flawed account of the French revolution.

<sup>56</sup> Frantz Fanon, *L'An Cinq de la révolution Algérienne* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2011).

<sup>57</sup> 'La loi du 23 février 2005 : texte et réactions', in *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, 94-95 (2005), <http://chrhc.revues.org/1077>

<sup>58</sup> Abdelmalek Sayad has refuted the 'pseudo-scientific fallacy' of religious explanations of immigrants' behaviour in *L'Immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*, vol. 3 : *La Fabrication des identités culturelles* (Paris: Editions Raisons d'Agir, 2014), p. 124-142.

Churches and on the Jewish Consistory'.<sup>59</sup> Although the State interacts on a regular basis with the representative institutions of these religions, their institutional status is no different from that of any other association – say, the Fédération Française de Football. Whilst Modood's remark suggests that Islam is not treated on a par with other religions, the French State has actually spent decades trying to promote the constitution of a representative body of Muslims, which resulted in the formation of the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman in 2004.<sup>60</sup>

Another widespread misconception asserted by Modood is that 'French civil society does not carry signs or expressions of religion'.<sup>61</sup> If civil society is defined as the sum total of organizations and institutions that are independent from the State, the statement is false. It suggests that religion in France can only be expressed or practiced in one's bedroom, whereas it can actually be expressed or practiced anywhere. The only exception to freedom of religious expression concerns public servants, who should display no signs of religious affiliation when on duty because, as representatives of the State, they must be religiously neutral. Modood's error is rooted in a confusion between public *spaces* and the public *sphere*: laïcité does not forbid religious displays in civil *society* but to civil *servants* within the confines of public institutions.<sup>62</sup>

That laïcité gives believers ample scope to live as they choose and poses no obstacle to the blossoming of Islam in France was acknowledged by none other than Tariq Ramadan in *Muslims in France* (1999). Ramadan observed that 'Muslims living in France can observe the major Islamic practices. There is no ban on praying, paying *zakāt*, fasting or going on Pilgrimage to Makka. In several cities there may be some administrative problems in building mosques... but, in general, basic needs are provided for.'<sup>63</sup> Yet Ramadan noted that the French population of Muslim culture was hardly devout: only 15% to 20% had a daily religious practice. Contrary to Modood, Ramadan insisted that this was 'not due to some kind of government restriction or pressure'<sup>64</sup> and concluded that low rate of religious practice must therefore be due to 'reasons internal to the Muslim community itself'.<sup>65</sup> To grasp these

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<sup>59</sup> Tariq Modood, 'Multiculturalism and Muslims in Britain and France', in *Public Spirit*, 2013, para. 12, <http://www.publicspirit.org.uk/multiculturalism-and-muslims-in-britain-and-france/>

<sup>60</sup> A detailed account of the State's endeavour to 'insititutionalize' Islam can found in Franck Frégosi, *L'Islam dans la laïcité*, op. cit., p. 222-294.

<sup>61</sup> Tariq Modood, 'Muslims, Religious Equality and Secularism', op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Emile Poulat & Maurice Gelbart, *La Laïcité à la Française : scruter la loi de 1905* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Idem, p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Idem, p. 20.

<sup>65</sup> Idem, p. 20.

reasons, we need to insert Ramadan's remarks within the longer history of the practice of Islam by immigrants and postcolonial citizens.

#### 4. Republican Muslims

Ramadan was probably writing at the time when the practice of Islam was at its lowest since the great immigration wave from Africa to France after World War II, when France endeavoured to reconstitute its decimated workforce. In a concerted move with its major car, construction and agricultural companies, the State cynically targeted the populations it expected to be most 'docile'.<sup>66</sup> As a result, France's postcolonial immigration originated from rural areas and was dramatically unprepared for life in France. Far from attempting to assimilate immigrants, the State parked them out of sight to prevent their integration into the 'dangerous classes', hoping that 'if immigrants were allowed to stay true to the spirit of Islam, they would break away from the political left.'<sup>67</sup> There are no reliable statistics concerning the religious practice of 'first generation immigrants' who tended, both for lack of means and for fear of raising hostility, to practice Islam in private dwellings – this was the time of the 'Islam of the cellars'.<sup>68</sup> Their gradual integration within France's workers' movement enabled them, however, to demand conditions adequate to the practice of their faith: we have seen that this was a part (but not the whole) of immigrant workers' demands during the 1970s.

Religious demands are strikingly absent, however, from the Marche pour l'Egalité et le Racisme, and more broadly from the so-called *beur* movements of the 1980s, which mobilized younger people. In the 1990s, the trend changes again: French Muslims became more devout over the last twenty years<sup>69</sup> (for instance, between 1989 to 2009, attendance at Friday prayers has increased to 25% and observance of Ramadan from 60% to 71%<sup>70</sup>). Remarkably, however, this increase in religiosity has not been accompanied with any calls for the implementation of an 'ethno-religious communitarianism'. Studies show that French Muslims whose relations to their faith are very different, from highly secularized individuals for whom religion is nothing but a loose moral framework, to Muslims of strict observance

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<sup>66</sup> Interview of a headhunter, in the documentary film realized by Yamina Benguigui, *Mémoires d'immigrés* (Paris: Documentation Canal +, 1998), part 1: 'Les Pères'.

<sup>67</sup> Ralph Schor, 'L'opinion française et les immigrants nord-africains : l'image d'un sousprolétariat (1919-1939)', in *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 80 (2010), p. 244.

<sup>68</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Les Banlieues de l'Islam*, op. cit, p. 27-58.

<sup>69</sup> *Analyse : 1989-2009. Enquête sur l'implantation et l'évolution de l'Islam de France*, Ifop, Département Opinion et Stratégie d'Entreprise, August 2009.

[http://www.ifop.fr/media/pressdocument/48-1-document\\_file.pdf](http://www.ifop.fr/media/pressdocument/48-1-document_file.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Isabelle de Gaulmyn, 'Les Musulmans pratiquent plus qu'il y a vingt ans', *La Croix* (2009),

[http://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Actualite/Les-musulmans-pratiquent-plus-qu-il-y-a-vingt-ans-\\_NG\\_-2011-07-31-694668](http://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Actualite/Les-musulmans-pratiquent-plus-qu-il-y-a-vingt-ans-_NG_-2011-07-31-694668)

who aim to live every aspect of their life in conformity to religious precepts, have integrated France's form of secularism<sup>71</sup>:

[French Muslims] are sceptical about collective identities, conceiving them as essentializing and negative. This attitude corresponds to the classic republican differentiation between public and private spaces, which is dominant in the society in which they grew up. Their ethnicity (...) plays out in the public space not in terms of a "right to difference", but of the enforcement of equality and fundamental liberties; they do not wish to acquire more rights, but to enforce the republican pact.<sup>72</sup>

One would have expected French Muslims' commitment to the republican pact to be tested by the laws banning religious signs from schools (2004) and the burqa from public spaces (2009), which have raised concerns that the principles of *laïcité* were being perverted.<sup>73</sup> Judging from the testimonies of young girls impacted by the 2004 law published by Chouder, Latrèche and Tévanian in 2005, these laws did not, however, trigger an outright rejection of *laïcité* but a determination to reassert its original meaning. The girls demonstrated a remarkable capacity to articulate the place of religion within France's secular model. They did not reject the law as an application, but as a transgression of *laïcité*, which guarantees freedom of conscience and expressions of faith.<sup>74</sup> Two girls emphasized that they agreed with the requirement of religious neutrality for civil servants.<sup>75</sup> They did not demand the recognition of their difference, but the right to indifference: they wanted the scarf, sacred to them, to be no more than a piece of cloth in the eyes of others.

The debates on the headscarf were also an opportunity for the girls to reflect on the strategies that might help them fight prejudice. Many declared their will to get involved in politics which, one girl argued, could create conditions that would trivialize the veil. She believed that if Muslims and non-Muslims got together on issues of general interest, it would induce indifference towards religious identities by shifting the focus on 'issues over territories, natural resources, or capitalism'.<sup>76</sup> Non-Muslims would not be the sole beneficiaries of political socialization: Muslims, too, would learn to go beyond 'simplistic'

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<sup>71</sup> See Jocelyne Césari, *Musulmans et Républicains* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1998), Franck Frégosi, *L'Islam dans la laïcité*, op. cit., p. 111-177, Françoise Gaspard & Farah Khosrokhavar, *La République et le foulard* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2005) and Leyla Arslan, *Enfants d'Islam et de Marianne*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010), p. 271 (my translation).

<sup>72</sup> Leyla Arslan, *Enfants d'Islam et de Marianne*, op. cit., p. 271 (my translation).

<sup>73</sup> On whether the laws of 2004 and 2009 contradict the principles of *laïcité*, see Jean Baubérot, *La Laïcité falsifiée* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, Juin 2014) who argues that they do, and Henri Pena-Ruiz, *Qu'est-ce que la laïcité?* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2003) who argue that they do not.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Chouder, Latrèche & Tévanian, *Les Filles voilées parlent* (Paris; Editions de la Fabrique, 2008), p. 27 & 275.

<sup>75</sup> Idem, p. 39 & 52

<sup>76</sup> Idem, p. 93, 119 & 286

beliefs such as ‘there is a conspiracy against Islam’ or ‘Westerners dislike us because we are Muslims’.<sup>77</sup> One could hardly find a better application of France’s self-representation as a nation founded upon a social contract and united by the search for the common good.

The girls’ adherence to French republican principles was patent when they were asked what message they wished to address to French society. Many simply reasserted the Republic’s slogan: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.<sup>78</sup> French Muslims have never appeared more French than when opposing the French government: paradoxically, their reactions to restrictions imposed on their religious practices attest to their integration of French republican principles. This paradox raises some questions concerning the multiculturalist criticism of republicanism: the latter’s principles are decried as nothing but means for the majority to oppress minorities, yet French Muslims display a remarkable capacity to contest the majority’s action in the name of republican principles themselves. Republican principles, it appears, are therefore not the sole preserve of the ‘white European male’, and can even be used against him.

The practice of Islam in France seems to have gone through three phases: it was initially collectively practiced by ostracized immigrants, but largely given up by their children and eventually rediscovered by their children’s children. Gérard Noiriel’s pioneering work on immigration to France can help us make sense of this evolution. Noiriel has outlined a three-step integration process which applied to Belgian, Italian or Portuguese immigrants.<sup>79</sup> The first generation of immigrants, often viewed as threats by workers, tend to keep to themselves and live as communities in exile. Their children, on the other hand, are determined to merge in their new environment, often at the cost of denying their origins (hence, for instance, the frequent francization of names).<sup>80</sup> Eventually, the third generation, socially and economically integrated, rediscover its culture of origins. This rediscovery necessarily occurs within the parameters of the host society; it is thus not surprising that French Muslims’ return to religion

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<sup>77</sup> Idem, p. 286.

<sup>78</sup> Idem, p. 47, 119 & 305.

<sup>79</sup> Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset Français. Histoire de l’immigration XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006), p. 189-246.

<sup>80</sup> On the transition from the first to the second generation, the reference study is Abdelmalek Sayad, *La Double Absence. Des Illusions de l’émigré aux souffrances de l’immigré* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1999), especially chapter 11, p. 319-365. See also Abdelmalek Sayad, *L’Ecole et les enfants de l’immigration. Essais Critiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2014), especially ‘Intégration et laïcité’ in chapter 9, part 3, p. 198-202. Insight into the second generation’s painful process of distancing from their family can also be gained from so-called ‘*beur* literature’: see Mehdi Charif, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1988) and Leila Houari, *Leida de nulle part* (Paris: Editions de l’Harmattan, 1985). See also the study of *beur* cinema: Alec Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction. Voices from the North African Community in France* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1991).

would be shaped by France's secularist model, and that young French Muslims should be both intensely religious and resolutely republican.<sup>81</sup>

### 5. The social and economic causes of 'disintegration'

The crucial step in Noiriel's process is the successful integration of the second generation. Unfortunately, this step was often too high for immigrants of Muslim culture.<sup>82</sup> Sociologists have pointed to various factors in the 'disintegration'<sup>83</sup> of postcolonial populations, especially in the *banlieues*, emphasizing unemployment, poverty, discrimination, increasing ethnic and religious homogeneity, as well as the depoliticization resulting from the collapse of the Communist Party, trade unions and the labour movement. Many studies have shown how the *banlieues* are becoming counter-societies, caught in a desperately counter-productive logic of closing ranks against 'the world'.<sup>84</sup> In these circumstances, the rediscovery of Islam took ambivalent forms.

In some respects, Islam has acted as a structuring factor, helping dissocialized youths out of drugs and criminality.<sup>85</sup> The problem is that religion often compensates for the worst effects of 'disintegration' by creating other difficulties. The intensive and quasi-obsessive forms of practice promoted by pietistic movements such as the *tabligh* are often unsustainable for their members. For some, they will enable a salutary transition from dissocialization to integration;<sup>86</sup> others, disenchanted, will turn to more extreme forms of Islam, and enter the process of radicalization leading to terrorism.<sup>87</sup> If this analysis is correct, one should reverse the proposition that terrorism is caused by France's intolerance towards religious communities; rather, it flourishes because of the *de facto* communitarization of society resulting from social inequalities. It is France's failure to abide by its own principle of

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<sup>81</sup> For a positive account of postcolonial integration in France, see Christian Jelen, *Ils Feront de bons Français. Enquête sur l'assimilation des Maghrébins* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1991). On the rediscovery of Islam by the third generation, see Farad Khosrokhavar, *L'Islam des jeunes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).

<sup>82</sup> On the specific difficulties of integration in the postcolonial context, see Pascal Blanchard, 'La France entre deux immigrations', in Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel & Sandrine Lemaire (eds), *La Fracture postcoloniale* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2005) p. 177-186.

<sup>83</sup> Ahmed Djouder, *La Désintégration. Enfants d'immigré : les racines du malaise* (Paris: Editions Stock, 2006).

<sup>84</sup> Didier Lapeyronnie, *Ghetto Urbain. Ségrégation, violence, pauvreté en France aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 2008) and 'La Banlieue coloniale, ou la fracture coloniale dans les quartiers', in *La Fracture Coloniale*, op. cit., p. 213-222.

<sup>85</sup> Farad Khosrokhavar, *L'Islam des jeunes* (op. cit.), Dounia Bouzar, *L'Islam des banlieues. Les prédateurs musulmans, nouveaux travailleurs sociaux ?* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2001) Dounia Bouzar & Saïda Kada, *L'Une Voilée, l'autre pas* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 2003), p. 100-110.

<sup>86</sup> See Younes Amrani & Stéphane Beaud, *Pays de Malheur! Un jeune de cité écrit à un sociologue* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2005).

<sup>87</sup> Farad Khosrokhavar, *Radicalisation* (Paris: Edition des sciences de l'homme, 2014); Bernard Godard, *La Question Musulmane en France* (Paris: Editions Arthème Fayard, 2015), p. 225-243.

equality that has generated pockets of desperation; instead of regarding the January 2015 attacks as the proof of an essential incompatibility between Islam and the Republic, we should regard them as a symptom of the degradation of their historical compatibility.

France is home to many devout Muslim citizens, and also to a number of fanaticized extremists. What it does not seem to host in any significant numbers, however, are Muslims demanding the implementation of a form or other of ‘ethno-religious communitarism’. French Muslims may have resented the ban on the headscarves in schools, and on the burqa in the public space, but the application of both laws caused surprisingly few problems.<sup>88</sup> It is undeniable that there are tensions surrounding Islam in France, but there is no reason why they could not be resolved within the framework of laïcité, provided that ‘reasonable accommodation’ be found where necessary.<sup>89</sup> Although calls for restrictions on freedom of speech were frequently made in the English-speaking world on behalf of French Muslims, I heard no such calls in France (although there were expressions of disagreement with Charlie Hebdo’s work). I am unaware of any demands for the institutionalization of special Muslim courts on the English model. Should they wish to do so, French Muslims would now have the financial means as well as the legal right to create private Muslim schools, and yet very few exist.<sup>90</sup> When Tariq Modood and others urge France to renounce a secular model supposedly intolerable to Muslims, one may wonder, all things considered, on whose behalf they are speaking: what French Muslims seem to want is not multiculturalism but the full enjoyment of their republican rights.

### **Conclusion. France’s minorities are the beating heart of French republicanism**

In 1989, the Algerian playwright and former member of the Front de Libération Nationale Kateb Yacine wrote a play, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, in homage to Robespierre. By juxtaposing events such as the ‘Champ de Mars massacre’ (during which Parisian *sans-culottes* were shot at by the National Guard in 1791) and the massacre of Algerian independentists in Sétif in 1945, Yacine identifies yesterday’s colonized peoples as the true

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<sup>88</sup> Isabelle Kersimon & Jean-Christophe Moreau, *Islamophobie. La contre-enquête* (Paris: Plein Jour, 2014) p. 240-244.

<sup>89</sup> A compelling case for the renovation of Republican principles to better accommodate minority religions is made in Cécile Laborde, *Critical Republicanism. The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>90</sup> On these matters, one can compare Abdellali Hajjat & Marwan Mohammed, *Islamophobie. Comment les élites Françaises fabriquent le ‘problème musulman’*, (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2013), which presents an apocalyptic description of the relations between Muslim and Non-Muslim French populations, and its refutation in Isabelle Kersimon & Jean-Christophe Moreau, *Islamophobie. La contre-enquête* (op. cit.).

heirs to the Revolution. He also suggests that whilst French colonial history has led to a perversion of the Revolution's principles and a selective reading of the Revolution's history, French minorities are in a privileged position to reclaim both: at some stage, Yacine stages two school boys who, during a history lesson on the Revolution, read out loud from a speech of Robespierre which their school teacher does not recognize. She angrily tells them to put away the book, to which the boys reply that 'in the whole history of France, the Revolution is the only thing that concerns [them]'.<sup>91</sup>

There are some who would tell these young men that they are mistaken: the Revolution was but a lure. In *France since 1945*, Robert Gidea explains that the French Republic rests on four cardinal principles: a universal, secular, compulsory and free education; equality of all citizens before the law, whatever their class, race or gender; the indivisibility of the Republic, in which the laws are made by a single legislature, articulating the will of the sovereign people; and finally, a contractual conception of the nation, as opposed to the German organicist conception of the nation as *Volk*. His examination of France's actual policies leads him, however, to dismiss these principles as 'the founding myths of the Republic' which in fact 'disguised and were made to disguise radical inequalities.'<sup>92</sup> Whether or not the Republic's ideals were elaborated as a conscious deception, it is essential to note that this deception has failed. The revolutionary ideals have not only served to justify inequalities, but also to contest them, and French colonial subjects and postcolonial citizens have played an important part in shaping the Republic as we know it. The Revolution is the locus of a tension between France's universalist principles and its nationalist policies. Dismissing the former as a mere cover-up for the latter leads to a failure to identify the beating heart of French republicanism.

That the revolutionary ideals can be appropriated by French minorities suggests that, *pace* François Furet, the Revolution is far from over. According to Furet, the fact that all governments now pay homage to the Revolution is a sign that the body politic has finally reabsorbed this uncanny lump, with only a light scar remaining.<sup>93</sup> The Revolution, he claimed, has become 'cold history'. Furet mistakenly believed that the meaning of the Revolution could be fixed once and for all. Its ideals are peculiar in that they simultaneously found the

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<sup>91</sup> Kateb Yacine, *Le Bourgeois Sans-Culotte*, in *Bougeries de l'Espérance*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1999), p. 478-479 (my translation).

<sup>92</sup> Robert Gidea, *France Since 1945*, op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>93</sup> François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

nation and forbid its closure. In Ernesto Laclau's terminology,<sup>94</sup> the hegemony of the revolutionary discourse is such that the State is forced to articulate its claim to legitimacy in its terms, yet as soon as the opponents of the State master this discourse, they acquire powerful means to contest its legitimacy. The centrality of the Revolution in the French imaginary enables minorities to stand for France against the majority: they do not deduce the nature of the republican pact from the actual policies of the State but define what the policies should be according to their understanding of the principles. Ultimately, French republicanism is neither really universal nor merely nationalistic: it is dialectical and dynamic.

In a European-wide context of intensification of identity politics and hardening relations between communities, the ideals of the Revolution are undoubtedly threatened. Fear of terrorism, anxieties born of the ongoing economic crisis, and the erosion of nation-states have triggered an unexpected reinvestment in national identities: the same process of alienation in one's own country that leads some Muslims towards fundamentalism is also making the popular classes more responsive to the far right's islamophobic discourse. Those who believe that multiculturalism can succeed in satisfying identity claims that have been constructed antagonistically may consider that universalism can be readily discarded. Those who believe, to the contrary, that the only way to resolve current tensions is to supersede identity issues with universal values will hope that the ideals of the French Revolution can prevail. French Muslim citizens have an essential role to play in keeping them alive.

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<sup>94</sup> Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso Books, 1985).