

13 For a 'visible' Islam

The emergence of protest speech in French mosques

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Abstract

Many imams attempt to promote the visibility of Islam in the public space, both in France and in other European countries, and this issue has become the subject of heated debates. Imams participate in the search for recognition based on their ability to embody an 'acceptable Islam': one that is supposedly acceptable for all actors in the public debate. To reverse the discourse that describes Islam as a religion that is foreign and maybe even incompatible with the principles of western democracies, imams in France aspire to the acculturation of Muslim identity or identities, while at the same time stimulating the Muslim faithful to integrate into French society.

Keywords: Islam in France, religious authority, militancy, secularization, Muslim identity

1 The expression of Muslim identity in the public space

In many respects, the practice of Muslim worship in public spaces causes concerns for European democracies, but as well for imams because the state and the surrounding society expect them to facilitate the 'integration' of Islam into national realities. France is no exception to this phenomenon. Imams adjust their roles in response to these pressures; indeed, far from perpetuating North African or Middle Eastern norms, as debates on imam training often continue to assume, their ways of showing their Muslim identity in the public sphere reflect their involvement in the emergence of what is sometimes called (in the case of France) a 'French Islam'. More specifically, the changing stances of imams are involved in the negotiation of the place of Islam in a secular society.

The place of Islam in France is not always obvious, despite the fact that Muslims have been present in French territory for several decades. On the contrary, the visibility of religions, and of Islam in particular, is now more than ever a cause of dissension in the country. The veil, for example, has probably never been so widely worn as it is now; at the same time, it has never generated so many prohibitive laws and controversies. Never have 'great mosques' been so numerous or given rise to so many protests and desecrating acts. Prayers in the streets of Paris, Nice, and Marseilles have suddenly become an unprecedented political problem. Debates arise from these conflicts, even within mosques themselves. For example, in 2014 the *Rencontre annuelle des musulmans du Sud* (Annual Meeting of Muslims living in the South of France) hosted a conference entitled 'Islam and Muslims – what visibility?' Tareq Oubrou, the imam and director of the Mosque of Bordeaux who has become famous for his work on Islam in France, has declared himself in favour of a 'discreet Muslim visibility' (Oubrou, 2013; see also Baylocq, Part II, and Hashas, Part I). Naturally, the views of different imams also differ. There are Salafi prayer rooms where preachers dictate increased religious ostentation, and there are some imams who regularly advocate the abandonment of identity markers that provoke negative reactions in public spaces. Oubrou (2013) claims that the hijab is not an Islamic obligation; Hassen Chalghoumi, the imam of the Mosque of Drancy, is publicly against the wearing of the *niqāb* ('full-face veil').¹ The purpose of this chapter is not so much to provide an overview of these debates as to explain what is at stake in the discourses of French imams.

This chapter is based on research carried out between 2006 and 2012 in France. During that period, I conducted 60 semi-structured interviews with 30 imams considered to be 'moderates' and I undertook as well a series of observation sessions, paying attention to their various functions, including *khuṭba* (pl. *khuṭab*; 'sermons'), legal consultations, discussion groups, classes, interreligious meetings, and social gatherings. All of the interviewed imams were born abroad, mostly in Morocco, Algeria, and Turkey, but also in West Africa and a few other countries. They fall into two main sociological profiles. First there are the 'imam-workers', who account for approximately a third of the interviewed imams. These immigrants came to France in the 1960s and chose the profession of imam because of the practical necessity of leading prayers, without being well trained. These imams generally practice in small prayer rooms. They originally followed the

1 <http://www.leparisien.fr/societe/drancy-l-imam-qui-dit-non-a-la-burqa-22-01-2010-787034.php>, consulted in August 2014.

unofficial route of peer networks, finally finding opportunities in French mosques. The other two-thirds of the interviewed imams were immigrants who had received training in the Islamic sciences in their home countries. Some of them had also practiced as imams in their country of origin. They are hired and supervised by consular networks in France for periods of four years. These imams exercise responsibilities in large mosques where various religious, cultural, educational, and other services are offered.

After the end of these investigations, the results of which have been published (Sèze 2012, 2013, 2014a), I continued to meet with some of the imams, and in some cases with their successors, and have cultivated opportunities for informal exchange with other imams. It appears that over the past decade, imams have made efforts to communicate their speeches in the public space by diverse means, set up websites for mosques, and use social networks like Facebook, hosting sites like YouTube, and other media.

The present chapter is structured as follows. The first part shows how imams in France have gradually come to embody community leadership. Since the public expression of Muslim identity is currently a source of dispute and sometimes even of struggle, imams tend to position themselves as the leaders of an oppressed minority. It is in the light of this observation that the second part analyses the ways imams promote or manifest Muslim identity in the public space. Generally, during the interviews or in their sermons, interactions with the faithful, and public statements, imams promote discourses that lie between two poles: denouncing the injustice of laws that tend to evict religious expression from public spaces, on one end, while not hesitating to denigrate the 'excessive' visibility of some Muslims, on the other. What remains in the space between these two poles is likely a matter of 'ethical exemplarity', civic participation, and other exhortations inspired by the *shahada* ('testimony') and consistent with many initiatives undertaken by Muslim associations since the 1990s, such as interreligious meetings, social work, and humanitarian aid. Muslims are therefore called upon to appear as such in the public space through actions that will bring them recognition. In other words, the imams' speeches belong to a particular moment in the history of the Muslim presence in France, in that they question and try to negotiate the position of Muslims in a minority context.

2 **Becoming minority leaders**

During the institutionalization of Muslim worship in France, imams have gradually emerged as congregational leaders whose legitimacy depends

largely on their ability to deliver speeches that make sense to all of the faithful. In doing so, they tend to behave like leaders of an oppressed minority. The importance of this position for the legitimacy of imams can be observed in the criticisms attracted by those who refuse to appear as such.

2.1 Structuring French Muslim leadership

Although Muslim worship in France dates back to the Middle Ages (Renard, 1999), Islam became a major social phenomenon with the migratory flows between 1950 and the 1973 oil crisis. The number of prayer rooms expanded significantly, especially in hostels for migrant workers such as those built by the *Société nationale de construction de logements pour les travailleurs* (Sonacotra; National Company for the Construction of Workers' Housing) in response to the strikes that regularly broke out in the 1970s.² In 1976 there were 90 prayer rooms in the country, and by 1980 this number had increased to 150 (Legrain, 1986). In the absence of substantial support from the countries of origin and from transnational Muslim associations, Muslim immigrants themselves had to lead the worship. This was the origin of the 'imam-worker' – a man appointed as a leader because of the practical necessity of directing collective prayers, rarely qualified in religious sciences but endowed with social qualities such as humility, charisma, respectability, and notability, all of which gave him a certain pre-eminence over his coreligionists.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s a new organizational model for worship was born. The economic crises caused (in part) by the 1973 oil shock led to a review of immigration policies. The massive flows of immigrants were stopped, and family entry was encouraged.³ France's Muslim population was growing in numbers and included women and children; the newcomers sometimes had new academic and professional profiles (Cesari, 1997)⁴. In this context, the visibility of Islam and its management by the authorities, the countries of origin, and transnational Islamic organizations were

2 Sonacotra is a semi-public company created in 1956 to address the issue of Algerian immigrant slums. It began with the construction of the first workers' hostel in 1959 (Argenteuil) and has built 450 dwellings to date.

3 The mass regularization of immigrants, easing access to the right of permanent residence (i.e., cancellation of the Bonnet Law), suppression of assistance for return, project for a foreigners' right to vote, and establishment of residence permits that are valid for ten years (Law n° 84-622, 1984).

4 Turkish migrants mostly came after North African migrants and often hold more favourable professional and economic positions. These policies also lead to the presence of students from North Africa who came to France to pursue higher education (Geisser, 2000).

simultaneously redefined. Islam became emancipated from workers' hostels and moved into districts where Muslims were concentrated in large numbers (Kepel, 1991), and it became more autonomous. At this time the development of mosques was based on the initiatives of Muslims who formed associations,⁵ with the help of foreign institutions like the Muslim World League; these associations increasingly became the owners of their places of worship. This gave rise to 'mosques' that were recognized at both the legal and institutional levels.

There were 500 Muslim places of worship in France in 1985 and 2,368 in 2011, including 316 in the French overseas territories, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁶ It is difficult, however, to provide an exact number of imams because of the many forms their leadership can take. In some small prayer rooms, for example, it is not uncommon for two or three volunteers to share this responsibility, while larger mosques often have professional imams (and there are of course many cases that fall in between these two). The only reliable census concerns consular network imams, who numbered 300 in 2014. The Ministry of Internal Affairs uses a 'professional' definition of an imam, i.e., the one who usually gives sermons. Using this definition, a survey commissioned by the *Direction centrale des renseignements généraux* (Central Directorate of General Intelligence) managed to identify 1,026 imams and 1,685 Muslim places of worship in 2004. This is, of course, less than the actual figure, which is ultimately impossible to rigorously quantify.

In any event, 'new generation' imams gradually supplanted the figure of the 'imam-worker'. A 'new generation' imam is rarely trained in France, and is more often recruited through Turkish and North African consular networks, or through peer networks that feed on the pool of graduates in Islamic sciences that are disappointed by the saturated labour market in their home country (Roy, 2002). These imams are duly trained in the Islamic sciences and considered professionals who work full-time, and are even protected by an employment contract and paid by the mosque's association. More than their predecessors, the 'imam-workers', these professional imams were placed in the position of acting as a community leader. In the absence of theological and legal central authorities in a society where Islam is a

5 This was promoted by the 1981/09/10 Law, which includes associations created by foreigners under the law of associations of 1901. This was the end of the law of 1939, which stated that foreigners had to obtain permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs if they wanted to form an association.

6 This census was based on participation in the elections of the *Conseil Français du culte musulman* (French Council of Muslim Worship). <http://questions.assemblee-nationale.fr/q13/13-15308QE.htm>.

minority religion, they seem to be a point of reference – for the faithful, who urge them to define acceptable norms in a non-Muslim society; for the media, which broadcasts concerns about the ‘Islamic threat’; for Islamic organizations, as shown in the ‘Charter of Muslim Worship’ (Boubakeur, 1995);⁷ and for the French State, which would like to have them as partners working towards the development of a civil religion that would be easy to integrate (Peter, 2006).

In the framework of efforts to classify the different kinds of religiosities that shape the diversity of Islam in France, imams have often been presented as the guardians of what is supposed to be immutable (i.e., Islamic laws and rituals), and therefore out of touch with the expectations of young Muslims who are trying out different ways to reconcile religious and civic identities (Venel, 2004) and who are longing to hear discourses that make sense of their own experiences (Babès, 1996, 1997). In her ethnographic survey of French mosques, Solenne Jouanneau (2013; see also her chapter in Part I) clearly shows that imams *de facto* have only the authority that the faithful give them, circumstantially, and no more. This being the case, the institutionalization of Muslim worship in France has progressively led to the emergence of community leaders who propose more interactive kinds of speeches to keep in touch with their audiences. In the following section, I demonstrate that imams hold views that reflect the common denominator of their audience, namely the experience of being a minority.

2.2 Internalization of a minority consciousness

The collective feeling of a minority consciousness in France is rooted in the ‘making of the Muslim problem’, which dates back to the 1980s and is still relevant today (Hajjat and Mohammed, 2013). Debates regarding Islam and Muslims are occurring at such a hectic pace that they inevitably impact interviews with imams, to the point that my field notebook turned into a list of grievances. There are also new issues for controversy, which are often related to the visibility of Islam. The issue of the hijab has been recurring since 1989 due to a series of disputes in which head-teachers

7 The *Charte du culte musulman* (Charter of Muslim Worship) is a document written with the advice of university scholars, comprising 37 articles on the organization of Islam in France. This charter includes the willingness to ‘clericalize’ Muslim worship (such as the appointment of muftis at the regional level and the definition of imams’ roles), based on the Algerian model. Although this initiative initially spanned the main Islamic federations of the day, in the end it sanctioned the hegemony of the Great Mosque of Paris. Therefore, other Islamic federations refused to sign the document.

refused to allow veiled students into their schools. These disputes were finally 'settled' by the 2004 law that banned 'obvious [in French: *ostensibles*] religious symbols' (including the veil) at school.⁸ Still, the issue has remained highly controversial, as shown by the 'Baby Loup case' (a nursery where an employee was dismissed in 2008 because the director considered her wearing of the veil to be an infringement of the laws applying the principle of secularism). Then the *niqāb* ('full-face veil') was banned by a 2012 law on the 'concealment of the face' in public spaces.⁹ Although most imams call for laws to be respected, they sometimes state that such laws that ban the wearing of religious signs at school specifically target Islam (Sèze, 2013). They hold similar views in regard to the ban on 'concealment of the face' in public spaces (interview, Paris region, May 2014). This feeling is maintained by debates about the possibility of veiled mothers accompanying their children on school trips, by the imprecations of politicians against Islam, and also by the increase in attacks against veiled women (particularly in 2014).¹⁰

The same tension is expressed around mosques. While they initially blended inconspicuously into the urban landscape, 'Great mosques', i.e., mosques with explicit if not spectacular architecture, have been on the rise since the 2000s.¹¹ This sudden visibility has engendered negative reactions, such as graffiti urging Muslims to leave France, insulting letters, and desecrations (Godard, 2015). During a conversation about the many desecrations of his mosque, a Moroccan-born imam denounced such acts and described society at large as increasingly 'racist' (interview, East of France, March 2014). The 'street prayer case' is another example. Although the situation is improving, the size of the mosques is insufficient in some districts, and

8 <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000417977&categorieLien=id>.

9 <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000022911670>.

10 *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France*, Annual report, 2014. <http://www.islamophobie.net/sites/default/files/CCIF-RAPPORT-2014.pdf>.

11 Since the 2000s, the following cities (among others) have been the site of Great Mosque construction (including mosques in service, under construction, and at the planning stage): Alençon, Avallon, Amiens, Aubervilliers, Aulnay-sous-Bois, Avignon, Béthune, Blois, Boulogne-Billancourt, Bobigny, Bordeaux, Brive-la-Gaillarde, Bussy-Saint-Georges, Caen, Cannes-la-Bocca, Carcassonne, Carpentras, Carrières, Cergy, Charleville-Mézières, Choisy-le-Roi, Clamart, Decazeville, Déchy, Décines, Épinal, Évreux, Gennevilliers, Grande-Synthe, Grigny, Guéret, Hérouville-Saint-Clair, La Réole, La Roche-sur-Yon, Le Havre, Le Mans, Limoges, Lorient, Marseille, Massy, Metz, Mérignac, Mons-en-Barœul, Montigny-Lès-Cormeilles, Mulhouse, Nanterre, Nantes, Narbonne, Niort, Nogent-le-Rotrou, Orléans, Ostricourt, Paris, Poitiers, Reims, Robertsau, Roubaix, Saint-Louis, Saint-Quentin, Sarcelles, Saint-Denis, Saint-Etienne, Saint-Florentin, Sète, Sochaux, Stains, Strasbourg, Tours, Toulouse, Ullis, Valence, Vaulx-en-Velin, Vernouillet, Vigneux-sur-Seine, Villefranche-de-Rouergue, and Villeneuve d'Ascq.

on busy days Muslims pray in the streets. These 'street prayers' have been taking place in Paris since the 1990s, but they suddenly became problematic in the winter of 2010, when both far-right leaders and 'identity groups' initiated a massive campaign in which they denounced what they felt to be the illegitimate desire to ostentatiously occupy public space for a religious reason. Following the declaration by Marine Le Pen, president of the French populist party Front National, that 'it is not Islam that is the problem, but its visibility',¹² another imam (born in Turkey) did not see anything in her words that reflected the French principle of *laïcité* ('secularism'), but rather a 'hatred of Muslims' (interview, East of France, January 2014).

In imams' offices, therefore, protest flows easily; this feeling of injustice feeds the defining of a collective identity. Favourite stories related in imams' speeches include Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh (which was then polytheistic), events like the Expedition to Tabuk and the Battle of Badr, and the prophet Muhammad's life in Mecca, during which the early Muslims were persecuted. All of these references are presented as foundational experiences of a minority status that are useful for making sense of the present at the local level, with reference to islamophobic attacks; the national level, with reference to the imprecations of politicians who are hostile to Islam and laws against veils; and the international level, with reference to armed conflicts in the Arab world and Western imperialism (Sèze, 2013). When, in addition to debates over the visibility of Islam, the decisions of school leaders, mayors, judges, the National Assembly, and the Senate are added to the mix, Muslims' 'possibility of participating as equals with others in social interaction' (Fraser, 2011, p 54) is challenged. In this sense, French Muslims are not only a minority because they are quantitatively fewer; they also become a minority because of these structures of power (Asad, 2003) and because they internalize the resulting feelings of being dominated (Akgönül, 2007). Imams' sermons express this collective consciousness by defining Muslim identity in opposition to a 'them', with Islam becoming the 'religion of the oppressed'¹³ (Sèze, 2013).

Imams talk to a 'community of experiences' in the sense that 'beyond the simple relationship to an inherited identity, it is the experience of discrimination and social contempt that is the source of a shared sense of unworthiness' (Boubeker, 2011). Reference to Islam was not a component of the collective identities of immigrants on their arrival in France in the 1970s, which was

12 Interview published by *Zaman France* in April 2013. <http://www.zamanfrance.fr/article/marine-pen-n-est-pas-l-islam-qui-pose-probl-me-visibilite>.

13 This expression comes from Farhad Khosrokhavar (1997).

instead marked by the predominance of Arab nationalism. Following the failure of Arab nationalism in the 1980s, however, the countries of origin started to include references to Islam in the construction of their collective identities, in which Muslim immigrants in France, and today some of their children, have reinvested (Cesari, 1997). However, this religious identity is also sometimes formulated in terms of race (Asal, 2014), and is now the target of both the new European populism and widely disseminated attitudes. According to the *Institut français d'opinion publique* (French Institute for Public Opinion) survey in 2012, 43 per cent of the French people interviewed said the presence of Muslims was a threat to the identity of their country; 68 per cent stated that they were poorly or not integrated; 68 per cent said that if Muslims were not well integrated it was because they refused to integrate; 63 per cent associated Islam with the rejection of Western values, 57 per cent with fanaticism, 46 per cent with subjugation, and 38 per cent with violence; 60 per cent said that the influence and visibility of Islam were too great; 68 per cent would have been hostile to the existence of political parties or trade unions based on Islam; and 33 per cent would have been hostile to the election of a Muslim mayor in their municipality.¹⁴ Imams can hardly evade this reality. Their positions are also linked to the collective aspirations that, as leaders, they are required to channel and that involve their legitimization. 'In order to be authenticated [recognized as such], the authority must be received by those to whom it is addressed, and this "reception" involves the faithful body,' writes sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2003, p. 289). Manifesting as a minority religion is a way to unite a plural audience under one banner. In this context, imams are not only congregational leaders, but also minority leaders.

2.3 'Corrupted imams from the West'

The authority of an imam can always be subject to dispute, because being an imam is an adventitious function that is accessible to 'lay people'. This sometimes makes this kind of authority fragile. It is relatively common for imams to face neo-fundamentalist Muslims who challenge their authority, and who are in fact intent on contesting and appropriating it¹⁵ (Sèze, 2013). Faithful support is not always enough to oppose these destabilizing attempts, although cooperation with intelligence services (Sèze, 2014a) and the more

¹⁴ Ifop, 'L'image de l'islam en France', 2012. http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/2028-1-study_file.pdf.

¹⁵ Imams' power, authority, role.

professional and solid organization of mosques limit the risk that small militant groups will try to seize power (Godard, 2015). Yet it is these same imams who have the feeling of betraying an oppressed minority and who are sometimes the most severely challenged – to the point that they are presented by radical groups as ‘corrupted imams from the West’. There are two imams in France who are particularly exposed to this rhetoric, albeit to different degrees: Tareq Oubrou and Hassen Chalghoumi.

Tareq Oubrou was born in 1959 in Morocco. He came to France to study medicine and biology, but quickly dedicated himself to the Muslim community by taking on the role of imam in several cities before settling at the Mosque of Bordeaux. The author of several books and known for holding ‘liberal’ public positions, he is France’s only imam who has publicly challenged the obligation to wear the hijab (Oubrou and Lieven, 2012; see also Baylocq, Part II, and Hashas, Part I). He argues that the veil is related to a ‘minor and ambiguous prescription’, and that it is only advisable as part of an ethic of decency. The ethic, he argues, has now been lost because the veil is sometimes worn with presentations of the self that contradict this value (i.e., slinky, provocative clothes), or because it is worn as part of a search for ‘oppositional identities’ (Oubrou, 2013) by looking to break from society – neither of which conforms to the message originally conveyed by Islam. For this reason, Oubrou no longer considers the wearing of the veil to be obligatory. He even questions whether it might be a ‘divine [and obligatory] requirement’ today (Babès and Oubrou, 2002, p. 216). This position is part of his general call for a ‘moderate’ (Oubrou and Lieven, 2012) or ‘discrete’ (Oubrou, 2013) visibility of Muslims, in line with what he first termed a ‘sharia minority’ (which consists of adapting Islamic laws to a non-Muslim society: Oubrou, 1998, 2004; see Auda in Part I) and that he has continued as part of what he calls a ‘theology of acculturation’ (2013). Oubrou tries hard to provide a normative framework that will facilitate the easy integration of the practice of Islam into the French context – by ‘erasing’ norms that are, from a theological point of view, unnecessary sources of blockages. In this, however, he has exposed himself to criticism, a significant example of which comes from the anonymous author of an article posted on the website *Oumma.com*.¹⁶ This author first criticizes Oubrou’s position on the veil for not being consistent with the title of his book *An Angry Imam* (*Un imam en colère*; with Lieven, 2012), in which Oubrou defines himself as a ‘protester’. The critic further declares that Oubrou’s view leads to the

16 ‘Tareq Oubrou, l’imam qui veut rendre le foulard et les barbes invisibles’, November 2012. <http://oumma.com/14717/tareq-oubrou-limam-veut-rendre-foulard-barbes-invisibl>.

'dehumanization of Muslims'. Another anonymous detractor accuses Oubrou of 'despising' Muslims and wanting to make them into 'ghosts'.¹⁷ It is not Oubrou's arguments themselves that are discussed by these critics, but rather the purpose of his reasoning, because being visible is not automatically reducible to a defensive identity reaction; it is also seeking to exist in the eyes of the other, sometimes even through reactions of rejection (Monnot and Piettre, 2014). Visibility is also an aspect of the social construction of the self, as a subject (Honneth, 2013).

The debate aroused by Oubrou's positions is nowhere near the vast and sometimes acrimonious disputes among Muslim associative networks concerning Hassen Chalghoumi. Born in 1972 in Tunis, Chalghoumi was trained in the Islamic sciences during several stays in different Muslim countries. Having arrived in France in 1996, he first preached at a workers' hostel, while cultivating a close relationship with the Tablighi Jamaat (a pietist and proselytizing movement). In 2008, he was placed at the head of the Mosque of Drancy by its mayor Jean-Claude Lagarde (rather than 'appointed' by his co-religionists); this, in addition to his position in favour of banning the *niqāb*¹⁸ (sometimes perceived as discriminatory, particularly among people sensitive to the defence of 'Muslim causes') and his publicized proximity to state bodies and Jewish authorities like the *Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France* (Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France), and the *Union libérale israélite de France* (Liberal Israelite Union of France), which awarded him the Copernic Prize for Dialogue, Peace, and Brotherhood in 2013, has significantly eroded his legitimacy, especially when populist and conspiratorial fantasies had the wind in their sails. The vast smear campaign initiated by the sheikh Yassine Collectif (a militant group for the defence of Muslims), which demonstrated in his mosque in 2010 and disseminated videos supposed to prove his duplicity, has highlighted and reinforced the unease generated by Chalghoumi's commitments. This led to his labelling as a 'state imam', stigmatized for his alleged lack of loyalty to the umma. In June 2012, the *Collectif pour la dignité des musulmans* (Collective for the Dignity of Muslims) wrote an open letter calling upon Chalghoumi to resign that was signed by Muslim militants and intellectuals.¹⁹ He is often repudiated in discussions both inside and outside of the mosques, especially on social media. A simple Google search of his name shows the

17 <http://doulfikar.com/enquetes/Oubrou.html>.

18 <http://www.leparisien.fr/societe/drancy-l-imam-qui-dit-non-a-la-burqa-22-01-2010-787034.php>.

19 http://www.petitions24.net/chalghoumi_ca_suffit_appel_a_sa_demission.

mass of invectives, insults, and hate he is confronted with. This also led to him – involuntarily, obviously – appearing in recruitment videos for jihad in Syria²⁰ as one of the ‘corrupted imams from the West’, as well as his placement under police protection.

3 Protest speeches in French mosques

Imams’ position is often the basis of protest speeches, which are driven by a search for recognition and formulated in socially acceptable categories. In sermons, the definition of religious identity is not reducible to dogmatic criteria, but is put into perspective through exhortations to ‘exemplary ethics’ that invite Muslims to appear in an environment where their identity is sometimes belittled. This goes hand-in-hand with frequent exhortations for their participation in social life, the aim of which is to concretely demonstrate this daily exemplarity by assuming the status of full partners in social interactions and thereby encouraging Muslims’ full belonging to the national community. The following three subsections look at different aspects of these developments.

3.1 ‘Exemplarity’ as a logic of engagement

Based on Muslims’ ‘minority consciousness’, there are at least two possible horizons (Roy, 2014) of ‘ideal types’ that can be used to identify dynamic working commitments in the name of Islam in France, both of which can be found in the sometimes-contradictory speeches of imams. The first possibility is neo-fundamentalism, that is, withdrawal into an identity at odds with an environment perceived as pagan; some imams who are close to Salafism or radical Islam adopt this approach. The second possibility is not to break away from mainstream society, but instead try to build bridges. Most imams favour this second possibility, and criticize the zeal of some young converts who want to socially exalt their religious differences. These imams are challenged by the teenagers who choose to wear the veil because of an ‘identity crisis’ more than because of virtues (see also Lieven and Oubrou, 2012), or they condemn ‘victimizers’ views’ for calling for Muslims to be held accountable if they want to see the world change (Sèze, 2013).

20 ‘19HH’, edited by Omar Diaby and available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtIDBTkthbo&t=15s>

As it appears in sermons, Muslim identity is not limited to dogmatic criteria such as observing fundamental beliefs and obligatory practices. Instead, Muslims are also defined as worthy, just, good, fair, honest, tolerant, patient, and chaste beings. Religious identity is also made up of ethical references; as such, it supposedly becomes audible to the majority. This is what imams are aiming at in their appeals to Muslims to embody socially attractive behaviours. This purpose is sometimes explicit; indeed, in a sermon in September 2014, Tareq Oubrou said 'you have to be visible in the sense of generosity, kindness and dialogue'.²¹ One mosque director (born in 1958 in Morocco, with no training in the Islamic Sciences) urged the faithful 'to remain dignified in the face of polemics that disfigure Islam' by never ceasing to present themselves as 'models for society' (sermon, June 2011). A relatively young imam, born in Algeria, prefers to talk about an 'exemplarity' that involves acting every day in such a way that Muslim identity will be associated with socially valorized behaviours (sermon, June 2013), while one of his colleagues, a mosque director born in 1958 in Morocco, likes to promote the ideas and concepts described by Tariq Ramadan in his 'testimony' (2003)²² and of the *Union des organisations islamiques de France* (Union of Islamic Organisations of France). Leaders of the Ahmadi²³ minority have issued a 'call for jihad' (often translated as 'holy war', but in this case implying struggle with the 'pen' and not the 'sword') with exactly the same concern of spreading the peaceful message of their 'community' and 'mak[ing] the Truth triumph' over the misrepresentation of the media (Sèze, 2015, p. 250-258).²⁴

21 Sermon delivered in September 2014, and consulted on YouTube in August 2015. No longer available on the Internet, but the author has saved a copy.

22 According to a classification of the world produced by Muslim jurists, France is not part of the Muslim countries (Dar al-Islam), but is included either among territories with which Muslim countries are at peace (Dar al-'Ahd) or the territory of war (Dar al-Harb). Tariq Ramadan has challenged this division of the world. He states that Muslims are at home in France and suggests considering France as part of what he calls a 'space of testimony' (Dar al-Shahada). Muslims are asked to 'testify', i.e., to demonstrate to non-Muslims their values and the greatness of their faith, and thus to contribute to their society (Ramadan, 2003).

23 The Ahmadiyya is a reformist and missionary community founded in the late nineteenth century in Punjab by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who proclaimed himself Mahdi (guide) of Islam, and which has been banned from the umma (Muslim community). Ahmadi have been established in France since the 1980s.

24 'L'islam en quête de repères: le rôle de la jeunesse islamique Ahmadiyya': <http://www.islam-ahmadiyya.org/conseils-aux-jeunes-ahmadiyya/95-islam-terrorisme-musulmans-occidents-intolerance.html> (August 2010); <http://www.islam-ahmadiyya.org/communiqes-ahmadiyya/394-appel-au-jihad-lance-par-le-calife-de-la-communaute-islamique-ahmadiyya.html>.

This definition of Islamic identity is, first, a self-presentation to the extent that it is aimed at an audience. To define a Muslim visibility that is not disruptive (Göle, 2013), but rather in the register of 'exemplarity' in French society, also means encouraging a revision of the pejorative meta-discourses about Muslims and making them able 'to relate positively to [their] special qualities and [their] practical abilities' – in other words, to obtain social recognition (Honneth, 2006).

3.2 Participation in social life in imams' speeches

The exhortations to 'exemplarity' outlined above are manifested in the collective impetus for participation in social life that is conveyed by a growing number of Muslim leaders. The start of the school year, such as those in September 2007 and September 2008, presented an opportunity for sermons urging young people to achieve academic success and to become influential members of their societies (Sèze, 2013). Another sermon from an imam born in Morocco glorified the value of work and promoted participation in unions during a conversation group (personal observations, 2012). One of his colleagues, an 'imam-worker' born in Algeria, used a sermon about alms to encourage solidarity, such as food distribution to the homeless by local services (personal observations, 2012), while another imam, born in Morocco, encouraged women to achieve academic and professional success (using examples of 'sisters' becoming doctors and teachers), to 'get out' of their homes and take part in activities offered by the mosque, and not to withdraw from public life, including educational institutions.

Participation in social life also represents a collective commitment. During the French presidential elections of 2007, one mosque director exhorted the faithful to what he called 'positive citizenship' (sermon, 2007). In concrete terms, he meant 'contribut[ing] to the development and prosperity of their society' by establishing a presence in educational bodies, socio-cultural centres, 'civil society institutions and organizations that defend just causes and by participating in all elections'.²⁵ Along the same lines, in a sermon before the departmental elections in March 2015 Farid Darouf (imam at the Mosque of Montpellier) urged the faithful to vote, saying to his coreligionists: '[y]ou must be present in the ballot box on Sunday. [...] You must be active citizens. [...] You must participate and give value to your citizenship. [...] You are great people! You are in France! You must express your citizenship

25 Sermon delivered on 20 April 2007, rendered in full in Sèze, 2013, pp. 159-163.

with your ballot.²⁶ Mohammed Khattabi, another imam at the Mosque of Montpellier, exclaimed in a sermon early in 2015:

How can French society trust in Muslims if Muslims are disconnected? We do not participate in anything! 'The election is haram! The army is haram!' [...] If we keep this spirit, we are condemned to suffer. [...] Either we are an integral part of this society [French society], its defence, its stability, its integrity, its prosperity, or we are nothing! And if we are nothing, one day we will get thrown out! [...] It is important for Muslims to be aware of this European reality in 2015. [...] And believe me, in twenty years' time, or fifty years' time, things will change, and Muslims will be recognized as a European community and not as people who have come to work, to make money and to go back home! All of that is now over!²⁷

Not only imams, but also occasional preachers, *dā'ī* (pl. *du'āt*, 'itinerant speakers'), and mosque directors encourage the faithful to adopt such an attitude of engagement in society. Rachid Abou Houdeyfa,²⁸ Mohamed Bajrafil,²⁹ Dalil Boubakeur, Hassan Iquioussen,³⁰ Ahmed Mikhtar,³¹ Tareq

26 Sermon delivered in March 2015, and consulted on YouTube in August 2015. The sermon is no longer available on the Internet, but the author has saved a copy.

27 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zexjARppF3c&feature=share&fb_ref=share.

28 Sermons at the Mosque of Brest: 'Doit-on voter?' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWiZVi3xb6Y>); 'Respecte les non-musulmans' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKGBwMX_kCM); 'Réagir aux agressions islamophobes' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KF7S7dWpxEY>)..

29 A number of lectures and sermons are available on YouTube:

'L'Islam, citoyenneté et démocratie' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyvtTGdn2xo>);

'Allez voter!' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tr55rEJfx38>);

'Le musulman, citoyen avant tout' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffvVCbfpaMI>);

'Le musulman, un acteur positif dans sa cité' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15KnQO9RNw>).

30 'La France, tu l'aimes ou tu l'améliores' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rek-iOH5BXU>);

'La participation citoyenne: un devoir' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iR8s5Ethubs>);

'Musulman et citoyen' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUCeIAQrflk>);

'Le rôle de la mosquée dans la société' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nP3J_s2cwtc);

'La responsabilité individuelle, familiale et sociétale' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yvFc7F1Jc>);

'La participation citoyenne à la lumière des textes' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTz4FMJIOVA>);

to some extent 'S'engager pour l'islam, une nécessité' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ef39qkZJydg>).

31 Sermon at the Mosque of Villeneuve d'Ascq: 'Soyons acteurs pour l'intérêt général' (December 2013). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNxgt6Oismk>.

Oubrou (2013), Dhaou Meskine (Bowen, 2010), Tariq Ramadan (2003, 2009)³² and others have incorporated participation in social and civic life into their speeches to varying degrees, even while they disagree on many other issues; being a responsible citizen, voting, fighting discrimination, acting in the public interest, and 'improving France' are among the common exhortations of Muslim leaders.

Such speeches have a normative character, the field of which exceeds the framework of worship in the strict meaning of the term. The aim of these performances cannot be reduced to a worship-related issue.

The possibility of actors managing to forge a self, a conception of themselves in an inter-subjective relationship, and entering into relationships of recognition with others depends on their ability to make themselves visible, to exist and to be seen and heard. The first condition of a relationship of recognition is the ability to exist in a world of speech and action, to 'count' to others and to contribute thereby to the collective practice. (Voirol, 2005, p. 117, my translation)

The aim of such speeches is to concretely demonstrate this daily exemplarity by participating in social life, and so to assume, as Muslims, the status of full partners in social interactions.

3.3 The issues associated with involvement in city life

The issue of participating in social life is not limited to certain imams' speeches; it is also sustained by initiatives on the part of many mosques. From the late 1980s and early 1990s, the organizational processes of Muslim worship in France adjusted themselves to their minority condition. This is a process common to all Western countries that have experienced recent Muslim immigration – and that is why it has attracted the interest of observers in both Western Europe and North America (see Laurence, Part I). In France, mosques started offering services that are traditionally entrusted to different institutions in Muslim countries (Cesari, 2004), including prayers, religious celebrations, births, weddings, and funerals; legal advice; conflict mediation; lessons in Arabic and religious courses, often offered on the weekend, for children and teenagers, and sometimes also for adults; conferences for both young Muslims and more diverse audiences; fun activities such as cultural

32 See also: 'Il y a un vrai djihad de la citoyenneté active à mener.' http://www.lepoint.fr/societe/tariq-ramadan-il-y-a-un-vrai-djihad-de-la-citoyennete-active-a-mener-27-09-2014-1867221_23.php.

and sporting events, sometimes organized during school holidays; chaplaincy services; and women's groups which conduct activities for themselves. Far from being limited to places of worship, mosque associations are keen to respond to the diverse needs of local Muslim communities based on the model of immigrant associations. This dynamic has led to the view that Muslim communities are organizing themselves based on the pattern of Catholic parishes (see in particular Cesari, 2004, pp. 183-205; Étienne, 1989, p. 98; Frégosi, 2006, pp. 65-67; and Laurence, Part I).

Yet it must also be noted that this process is the result of many initiatives designed to encourage involvement in city life and the development of activities aimed at a non-Muslim environment. Mosques organize conferences where Muslim leaders, scholars, believers, and curious citizens can meet; festivities such as iftar meals for breaking the daily fast during Ramadan and the celebration of the Mawlid (anniversary of the prophet Muhammad's birth), to which local elected officials are invited; and events such as 'open days', which are both social gatherings and places of exchange. Since the 1990s, Muslim leaders have participated more frequently in religious meetings, the challenge of which is to show that they can also be engaged in the initiatives of living together (Lamine, 2005) and in parity with other religions. This parity was an explicit issue of debate in September and October 2014 (Sèze, 2014b) after protests against atrocities perpetrated by the Islamic State, as well as following the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in January 2015. Mosques also participate in humanitarian endeavours such as collective donations to southern countries in the wake of natural disasters. They have developed partnerships with non-governmental organizations such as Islamic Relief Worldwide, Muslim Hands France, and Ummah Charity, as well as taking part in food distribution during the winter. Some mosque directors have also created partnerships with the French Blood Establishment (*Établissement français du sang*) blood bank system. All such practices are a manifestation of the faith, and also show the solidarity and 'public utility' of Muslims. This is the value of their activities in partnership with socio-cultural associations, through which Muslim leaders want to lead young people, who are often considered an 'at-risk population', to both social and religious conformity, thus contributing to social peace (Bowen, 2010; Kepel, 2012).

These scattered initiatives on the part of Muslim leaders are not only the answer to prosaic and occasional needs. All of them are driven by the same concern, namely a desire for recognition. Nevertheless, it is clear that this quest brings few results. Imprecations against Muslim leaders remain common; indeed, while imams miss a certain 'openness', they allegedly do not sufficiently condemn the crimes perpetrated in the name of Islam,

especially those of the Islamic State, and they make 'inappropriate' speeches in the French context. All of these efforts therefore seem to remain 'dead letters'. After the French sociologist Vincent Geisser denounced the role of the media in the making of a 'new islamophobia' (2003), the journalist Thomas Deltombe showed how the production of attitudes that involve Islam and Muslims still largely escapes them (2007). Hence the efforts of Muslim leaders to bring their actions to the attention of the media. Most mosques have a website and sometimes a Facebook page that attest to the republican values of the association. Mosque leaders are accustomed to speaking, mainly in the local media, whenever the opportunity arises – to condemn terrorism, for example. They communicate via social networks and community websites regarding the events planned by their mosques, and sometimes broadcast their sermons on YouTube. While Muslims are suspected of 'communitarianism' (in the French context, this means forming a solidarity group that is disloyal to the French Republic), Muslim leaders who urge their faithful to demonstrate ethical exemplarity and increase their participation in society intend to confirm that their 'values and abilities' correspond to those of France (Honneth, 2013). In so doing, they seek to legitimize their presence in the public space and more fundamentally to have their full belonging to the national community recognized. The publicizing of all of these initiatives is part of a 'struggle for visibility', defined as the

[s]pecific dimension of an action which, starting from an experience of invisibility or symbolic depreciation, deploys practical techniques and communication processes to manifest in a public scene and have political practices or guidelines recognized. (Voirol, 2005, p. 108; my translation)

This public presence thus becomes an additional resource in the quest for recognition.

4 Conclusion: Imams as a 'medium for political communication'?

While Muslim worship has been institutionalized and has become more autonomous in France, imams have gradually emerged as congregational leaders and, in this minority context, also the leaders of an oppressed community. There are, however, different ways of representing a minority. The few studies since the 1990s that have examined sermons note that imams

could be part of a political protest that echoed the Algerian civil war (1991-2002), protect Muslims against temptations in a non-Muslim environment, or fall back on casuistry (Babès, 1997; Ismail, Chaabaoui, N'Diaye, and Diop, 2002; Reeber, 1993, 2005; Ternisien, 2002). During that period, the horizons of their lives seemed to lie outside of France. There was no question of getting involved in it. But the time for 'withdrawal' has passed; even Salafis have now entered the processes of acculturation in France (Godard, 2015). A new search for recognition has emerged, and this paradigm shift means the stakes have changed. The 'objective conditions', the fact that material resources are distributed in order to guarantee individuals the independence and the ability to express themselves, are no longer a serious obstacle to 'participation parity'. The challenge is now to act on the 'inter-subjective conditions', i.e., the institutionalized patterns of interpretation and evaluation that widely deprecate the quality of Muslims and that do not ensure equality of opportunity in the pursuit of social esteem (Fraser, 2011). Nancy Fraser (2011) considers the denial of recognition to be an injustice that is rooted in social relations. She states that the mobilization of imams is needed not only to challenge hostile attitudes towards Muslims, but also to assert the legitimacy of their presence in the public space and therefore to negotiate their place in a minority context. This shift occurs with Muslims who understand that France is their 'national space' too, and who reject the implications of the 'minorization' discourse. The dynamism described in this chapter reflects the ability of imams – though mostly foreign and sometimes untrained – to support Muslims in the challenges they face in their struggle for recognition and integration in the French Republic (Schnapper, 2007).

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