

BETWEEN SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY: MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN AND FRANCE TODAY*

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The long-term settlement in north-western Europe of people from Muslim countries is one of the most important phenomena of the last quarter of the twentieth century. In an unprecedented way it forms a central element of the demographic and cultural changes taking place in the Old Continent, and as yet no-one can foresee the precise consequences. Some, who have a monolithic view of these populations, believe that Islam is now established in a continent which it will in time conquer by means of a birth-rate *jihad*, thanks to the fertility and the youth of its followers, in the context of an ageing Europe in demographic decline. Others denounce such predictions as racism and xenophobia; they see Islam as one of the peacefully coexisting components of tomorrow's multicultural Europe, the symbol of modernity bringing Europe closer to the model of the United States, where blacks, latinos and Asians lay claim to their own specific racial and cultural identity, or at least such is the perception. A third group denies that the variable 'Muslim' has any significance; instead, the problem posed by the populations concerned is linked exclusively with their temporary inferior social situation, just as for example Italian or Polish immigrants met xenophobic exclusion in inter-war France.

These three widely-aired viewpoints about the presence of Muslims in Europe fall down mainly because they are based on a considerable degree of ignorance of the concrete situation experienced by the populations in question. Although the Muslim populations in Europe have a certain number of features in common, there are also many differences between them. If we look at France and Britain, the two major north-western European states with the greatest number of Muslims, we can observe significant dissimilarities arising from two sets of factors. First, each country's traditional relationship with its settled immigrant populations (intersecting with the legacy of colonial practice) has pre-constructed a social model of reception (and rejection) which is specific to that society and which the Muslim populations have had to face. On the other hand, the internal structure of these populations and in each case the groups which have achieved overall authority in the expression of their identity and determined the dominant strategy with regard to the surrounding society are not identical in the two countries.

In comparing the situation in France and Britain we will observe how the conflictual link between the national model of settlement and the assertion of identity by Muslim populations has been established in each case. We are particularly concerned to show how, in Britain, the model of *integration of communities* as organized blocs has encouraged the expression of a

* Credits should go to Daniele Joly, holder of the copyrights, and author of the book for which this paper was an introduction. Daniele Joly, *Britannia's Crescent: Making a Place for Muslims in British Society* (Avebury, 1995).

unanimous Islamic identity which revealed its limits during the Rushdie affair. In France, the dominant model of *integration of individuals* (by-passing communities) has given rise to more differentiated forms of expression of identity, until the 'Islamic veil' controversy in 1989-1990 brought home the deleterious effects of a process of integration lacking significant social force.

In comparing modes of connection between these different logics in France and Britain, we will also map out the possible future of the Muslim populations in Europe, between the two opposite poles of complete assimilation within the existing society and the sharpening of specific community identities.

1. *From the Integration of the Islamic Communities to the Rushdie Affair: the British Case*

The British model of integration of communities is the paradoxical result of the country's historical constitutional tradition as well as the decolonization of the British Empire, formalized in the creation of the Commonwealth. Until 1 July 1962, citizens of the Commonwealth member states and the colonies of the Empire were free to take up residence in the British isles. The restrictive measures passed on that date did not apply to the many overseas holders of British passports, former subjects of the Empire, like the Indians and Pakistanis of East Africa. They were strengthened in 1968 by a new measure restricting entry to British passport-holders able to prove a family relationship in Great Britain, but the migratory flow from the Commonwealth continued thanks to the efficient and long-established network of smugglers.¹

As in other European countries, work immigration, involving mainly single men coming over to provide cheap labour for the labour-intensive industries of the 1960s, has given way since the mid-1970s to family immigration. The latter was not a response to offer in the fairly depressed labour market of the time, but rather stemmed from the settlement of women and children joining their husbands in a continent where, in spite of unemployment, living conditions seemed better than those in the country of origin.

Paradoxically, the vast majority of Commonwealth citizens more or less automatically become British citizens once they have settled in Britain—even if they cannot speak English or are unfamiliar with the customs and culture of the host country — and have the right to vote, even if they have no experience of electoral democracy. But British citizenship in itself has not carried with it the means of integrating these populations — let alone assimilating them — into one of the nationalities which make up the United Kingdom: there was no question of becoming English, or Scottish or Welsh. British citizenship has created for the immigrants of the Commonwealth resident on its soil a symbolic and political space, but only indirectly. This space expresses itself through race, ethnicity and religion, intensified in a *community* dimension which has gradually made its way into the social and political system.

The notion of "race" and "race relations" has thus acquired great importance, both in the research of British sociologists and in juridical practice. Michael Banton and John Rex,

¹ On these questions, see Danièle Joly's comprehensive review: "Grande-Bretagne: minorités ethniques et risques de séparation", in Didier Lapeyronnic (ed.), *Immigrés en Europe: Politiques locales d'intégration*, Paris, La Documentation Française, 1992, especially pp.114-115.

who both played a pioneering role in conceptualising the notion of race, have made it an essential social object, a major marker of the identity of social groups. The political and juridical practice of local and national institutional actors in Britain who invested their energy in the question of race relations was to promote "racial equality" by providing corrective measures to racism in job opportunities, housing etc., in the form of "positive discrimination". This entails the attribution of quotas to "minorities" juridically defined as such by the colour of their skin. Alongside the English or Welsh, then, a "Coloured" population existed, a nation by default within the body of British citizens. In the public perception these undifferentiated "Coloureds" were called "Blacks", until within this conglomerate groups started to make specific demands, seeing their identification with black (Afro-Caribbean) people as offensive. In order to make the distinction clear, they defined themselves as "Asian", a term which does not include Chinese or Japanese but the peoples of the Indian sub-continent, even those from the Indian and Pakistani community which had been in East Africa for more than a century before emigrating to Britain. Naturally, they demanded "positive discrimination" measures specifically in favour of Asians. However this new community bloc soon split along ethnic-national (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis) but especially religious (Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims) fault-lines.

It is within this general framework that the construction of a specific Islamic identity in Britain must be placed. This identity fits into a system which is communalist, in the sense that it deals with social problems on the basis of identity blocs defined first by common belonging to a "race" or "ethnic", then sub-races or sub-ethnics which emerge according to the ability of a given community elite to become the mouthpiece and exclusive representative of an (atavistically given) group. Within each of these groups, individual aspirations must necessarily be stifled if they clash with the monolithic definition of identity worked out by the community leaders.

Whilst it is neatly tucked into the system of British citizenship, and also occupies a niche in the "nation-by-default" of the "Coloured", the Islamic identity expressed in the United Kingdom is also a transposition onto the mainland of the system of indirect rule which had provided the means of controlling the human masses of the Empire at the least expense. The community leaders find that management of day-to-day problems and responsibility for social peace within their respective populations are delegated to them. They are all the more disposed to carry out this task because it also contains some of the elements of the logic (transposed to mainland Britain) of communalism, which is the name given in India to community-based organization or to the factionalism which divides Hindus and Muslims (as well as Sikhs) in an increasingly violent form. The juridical system of reference of this communalism is a personal status which varies according to confessional membership, that is, it institutionalizes differentiated rights for citizens of the same state.²

The number of people of Muslim origin in the United Kingdom is estimated at around a million,³ around a third of whom come from Pakistan. A further 100,000 approximately come from East Africa (all "racially" originating from the Indian sub-continent), more than 80,000 come from India and over 60,000 from Bangladesh. Two thirds of British Muslims are

² For a more detailed presentation, see Gilles Kepel, *West of Allah* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), Part II. (forthcoming)

³ See Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe, Edinburgh, 1992, p.41, on method of calculation.*

therefore “sub-continental”. The rest are mainly made up of 120,000 Arabs, Iranians and Turkish Cypriots (both of these around 50,000), 30,000 Malaysians, 25,000 Nigerians and 21,000 Turks.

This set of people is heterogeneous not only in terms of language and origin, but also in terms of age, social situation and geographical location. Thus, in the early 1980s, more than one third of people of Pakistani origin had been born in the British isles — and were therefore directly exposed to the modes of cultural imposition of the surrounding English society.

For the Islamic community leaders in Britain, the major issue at stake was to present themselves as the exclusive representatives of the million Muslims and to shape these into a monolithic community cleared of any “Westernization”, which was seen as a centrifugal force jeopardizing the cohesion of the system. This process was carried out in two main directions: on one hand, the construction of a separate Islamic identity, with the aim of reducing to a minimum any cultural interaction with the surrounding society; on the other hand, the stigmatization of supposed members of the community who did not fit in with the community logic. All this took place within a general context of competition between Islamic organizations, in the form of a sharpening of religious identity and an increased role as intermediary with local authorities in the running of social services for the populations of Muslim origin.

The Islamic organizations established in Britain are to a large extent the reflection of the specific way in which Islam is structured in the Indian sub-continent of today. In its militant form as a reaction against the Western modernity embodied in British colonization, Islam is organized on two main poles: the Deobandis at one end, the Barelvis at the other. The Deobandis strive to preserve Islam from contamination by the Western state. To this end, they set up a network of schools in which the acquisition of modern techniques and sciences was encouraged, but subordinated to the knowledge of the sacred texts of Islam, so that a civil society obedient to the instructions of the *shari'a* would emerge. Unconditional supporters of a specific individual juridical status for Muslims within post-1947 pluralistic, secular India, the Deobandis “hoped that some form of jurisprudential apartheid would be achieved between the Hindus and themselves”.⁴

The Barelvis, who represent the other main pole of the reaffirmation of Islam, belong to a tradition of mystical confraternities, or Sufism. For them, the role of mediator to the sheikh, saint or religious figure is fundamental. The mediator, through his favourable influence with a cosmological order guaranteed by God, restores community cohesion threatened by the intrusion of modernity in areas as varied as health, family life, employment, the world view etc. This “Islam of shrines” or miracle-workers is radically opposed to the scripture-based religion of the Deobandis, and the conflict between them has been transposed onto Islam in Britain, where both groups compete for access to resources and a monopoly in dealing with local authorities, and both claim to be the best defenders of Islam against the threats of adulteration apparently posed by the surrounding society.

Between these two poles, other militant movements have sprung up. Some are pietistic in character, like the *tablighi jama'at*, which is also very active in other European countries. Its only aim is to resocialize in as autonomous a way as possible the “lost” Muslims by making them adhere to a very strict form of Islamic observance, completely cut off from the cor-

⁴ Francis Robinson, *Varieties of South Asian Islam, Research Papers on Ethnic Relations*, no.8, University of Warwick, 1988, pp.5-6.

rupting influence of the West in all areas. Others, such as the UK Islamic Mission (a British branch of the *jama'ate-e islami*, a Pakistani movement which campaigns for the application of the *shari'a*) have pushed the logic of the conquest of Islamicized spaces in Europe even further, by seeking to negotiate on the strength of the Muslim vote or the pressure of street demonstrations over important national issues — such as elections to the House of Commons, or the Rushdie affair — which they themselves initiated.

In order to build up frontiers between communities and make British Islam as “water-tight” as possible, the various groups mentioned above have directed large efforts towards the control of culture and education, seen as the major determinant of separate identity. The juridical framework of primary and secondary education in Britain lent itself quite well to the expression of demands in this area. In general, local education authorities have quite a lot of autonomy in the choice of courses and textbooks; at national level, the law requires only religious instruction and prayer. During the 1970s and 1980s, the school-age Muslim population grew considerably. Several Islamic movements in the UK set up ad hoc committees in order to prevent the school from becoming a locus of assimilation which would threaten the cohesion of the Islamic community. The Muslim Educational Trust, which was founded in 1966 but became particularly active in the 1980s, has been one of the spearheads of a campaign which consists of putting pressure on LEAs (particularly in areas with a high concentration of Muslims, where the “Islamic” vote could be evoked) in order to influence the choice of courses and textbooks, as well as to exempt Muslim children from the prayer and Bible-reading required by law.

In the case of the former, the Trust published a list of nineteen demands.⁵ It demanded the systematic appointment of Muslim teachers in schools with Muslim pupils, the banning of “non-authentic” books on Islam and the maintenance of (non-mixed) girls’ schools: “Allah did not make man and woman identical and therefore Islam requires that boys and girls be educated separately”. Other demands included the provision of halal food in school meals, the wearing of “Islamic clothing”, that is trousers and headscarves for girls “in a colour matching the school uniform”, and the opening of Islamic prayer rooms in schools (or, failing that, exemption from Friday afternoon prayers for children to attend the mosque). In the mid-1980s, some LEAs took these demands into consideration, particularly the questions of school meals and clothing. Using a different tactic, the Trust distributed forms to Muslim parents which they could use to withdraw their children from religious instruction classes, unless the classes could be changed into Islamic education classes taught by selected Muslim teachers.

In 1985 came the publication of Lord Swann’s report, entitled *Education for all*, which attempted to take into account the “multicultural” character of British society. Obligatory religious instruction should now allow children to have a knowledge of the plurality of beliefs. This provoked a virulent response, not only from “white” Britons who felt that too much was being done for the “coloured” but also from Islamic campaigners. The latter were of the opinion that the new measures gave pupils the impression that all religions had equal value and that people could choose freely between them, which contradicted the eminent superiority of Islam and could jeopardize the “preservation of the separate identity of Muslim children”.

⁵ Ghulam Sarwar, *Muslims and Education in the UK*, The Muslim Educational Trust, Nottingham, 1983, pp.7-11 and 18-19.

In the area of social policy as such, it was vital for the British authorities (as for their French counterparts) to maintain a form of contact with the most under-privileged sections of the immigrant populations, in order to find channels for the allocation of social benefits as well as for maintaining a minimum of order in situations of extreme deprivation which could lead to deviant or delinquent behaviour. The perpetuation of structural under-employment among the long-established generations, along with the growth of a young generation born and educated in Britain and faced with a post-industrial society offering unskilled workers only insecure and ill-protected jobs, have created a situation of social tension, as expressed in recurrent riots in the inner cities. As a result, there is an urgent need for social intermediaries. Within the British political system, the way in which communities are structured has encouraged the emergence of Islamic religious leaders who fulfil a double function as dispensers of mutual aid services and resource allocation, and as electoral brokers. In order to reach the populations in question more easily, Birmingham city council has thus set up one of its job centres in the annexe of a large Barelvi mosque. In this way the faithful can look for a job between prayers, whilst the mosque benefits from the flow of job-seekers attracted in the job centre's wake. In another large mosque in Birmingham, the ground floor has been rented by the constituency MP-of the Labour Party — who has made it his political office. The degree of interpenetration of religious political and social affairs is unequalled in continental Europe. The objective of the British authorities — to manage social peace at a low cost by farming it out to the Islamic associations — means in exchange that people of Muslim origin go through their community networks in all matters concerning their relations with the ambient society.

This context explains the outbreak of the Rushdie affair and its dimensions in Great Britain (whereas its impact on continental Europe was relatively low). Salman Rushdie himself is an exceptional figure in relation to the community framework: of Indian and Muslim origin, his identity is based not on exclusive reference to Islam but on the clash and break-up of conflictual and antagonistic components. India, Islam, immigration, England: in the intimate mingling of these worlds, the blurring of boundaries between them and the violent rejection of each of them which are expressed by the characters of *The Satanic Verses*, the subject constructs his identity as a post-modern individual of Muslim origin resident in the England of the end of the twentieth century. "Racist" England or the political chicanery of post-independence India are not spared criticism by the novel; but only the way in which the character who represents the Prophet Muhammad is treated in the novel gave rise to violent reactions and in the end to Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwah which set a price on Rushdie's head. In fact, very many Muslim believers felt attacked in their faith by the "blasphemous" nature of the description of the Prophet. This gave the Islamic associations heading the campaign in Britain against *The Satanic Verses* the chance to strengthen community cohesion against an individual who was the perfect incarnation of the figure of the apostate — the product par excellence of the Westernization awaiting all Muslims who strayed from the authority of the community leaders. *The Satanic Verses* appeared in September 1988. On 11 October an ad hoc committee to wage a campaign against the book, the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs was formed.⁶ The doctrinal accusations against Rushdie combined apostasy in relation

⁶ The Rushdie affair gave rise to a sizeable amount of publications, dossiers of press articles etc. I would single out one of the dossiers which defends the "Muslim perspective" and presents a fairly complete account of the affair up to 1991: M.M. Ahsan and A.R. Kidway (eds), *Sacrilege versus Civility: Muslim perspectives on the Satanic Verses affair*, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, 1991. The Islamic Foundation is close to the most militant movements of re-Islamicization, embodied notably in the *Jama'at-e islami* founded by A.A. Maududi.

to Islam (punishable by death in Muslim jurisprudence) with insulting the Prophet (*sabb an-nabi*), incurring the death sentence according to the Hanbalite school of jurisprudence, which inspires the most militant Islamist movements. The campaign, which began with protest marches and press statements, was given wide public airing by several international Islamic bodies, then went into a new phase in Britain when some Muslims in Bradford performed a public auto-da-fe of the book on 14 January 1989. This act in turn sparked off widespread reaction against "Islamic fanaticism" which allowed the associations running the campaign to consolidate their hold over the Muslim populations now singled out for criticism and to develop within them a siege mentality, with the associations presenting themselves as the best means of defence. Because of its long-term effects and the traumas it caused, and because of the antagonisms which it reinforced between the "Islamic community" and British society, the Rushdie affair pushed to the limits the logic of separate identity which the British model of community integration of settled immigrant populations accommodated.

II. *France: the Rise and Fall of Republican Integration*

In contrast with the British model of community integration, France has throughout its recent history developed a tradition of individual integration of the immigrants settled on its territory, leading ultimately in theory (and in the vast majority of cases, in practice) to absorption by assimilation into the French people. This tradition is the result of two specific characteristics of the country: its extremely centralized structure and its status as host to large-scale immigration.

The centralized structure, inherited from absolute monarchy and reinforced by Jacobinism, has constantly opposed any assertion of a political identity mediating between the citizen and the "one and indivisible" Republic. This strategy of mistrust of affirmations of regional identity which would strike a blow at the very notion of a sovereign French people⁷ has been applied in the same way to wishes expressed by immigrants to assert their own identity, whether in nationalist, ethnic or confessional terms. As regards the expression of confessional identity, the 1905 law on separation of church and state, which stipulates that the Republic neither recognizes nor funds any creed whilst guaranteeing freedom of worship for all religions, also prohibits any assertion of religious identity from organising forms of community structures with a view to negotiating with the state a special status for its members.

As regards migration itself, France stands alone among the large states of Europe in having been, since the nineteenth century, a country of immigration and not of emigration. Whilst Britons, Germans, Spaniards or Italians went to populate the two Americas or the Australias, very few of the French emigrated; rather, France received migratory flows from southern, eastern and to a lesser extent northern Europe. France was therefore a "host" country, but also at the same time a land of rejection and xenophobia. Usually poor, with disconcertingly different customs and habits, and prepared as they were to take on unpleasant jobs,

⁷ In 1991, a government bill emphasizing the specific status of the Corsican people, a component of the French people, was thrown out by the Constitutional Court.

the foreigners who took up residence in France did not always see France as the “welcoming” country of its image. The groups formed to defend immigrants from hostility or racism were organized temporarily on the basis of national or regional criteria, but often became incorporated on a more permanent footing into wider campaign movements. In particular the workers’ movement, especially its communist form, attracted a large number of immigrants whom it endowed with a “proletarian consciousness”: Italians, Poles and Bretons fought together against the “French bourgeoisie”, “the oppression of the working class” and so on. Parallel to the integrationist ideology of the Republic, this process thus created in a concrete fashion and at the social level in the exact sense a “dialectic of integration”, which integrated immigrants by contesting the established order together with people “of French stock”.

It is the paradoxical combination of the tradition of centralization, the dialectic of integration and the dominant assimilating ideology which shaped the French model. The dominant ideology also had a previous incarnation in the colonial era, by the name of “France’s civilising mission”. Beyond the triumphal chauvinism of the phrase, this expression made it clear that the “indigenous populations” – or at the very least their elites – could have no higher aspiration than to become completely French, thus guaranteeing their access to modernity and to universal values.

However, this logic was placed under stress from the mid-1970s by the long-term settlement on French soil of large populations of Muslim origin. In order to understand the key issues arising from this new situation, it is necessary to understand the factors which were undergoing structural change at this time, so as to avoid the risk of attributing single causes to what is in reality an extremely complex phenomenon.

During the “thirty glorious years” of consecutive economic development following the end of the Second World War, a large number of people of Muslim origin migrated to France, mainly from North Africa and West Africa. This population was then known as “immigrant workers”; the term reduced the population to its status of imported factor of production, whilst drawing attention to its atypical composition in relation to the “normal” population in that it was composed of working men with jobs, (virtually) excluding women, children, old people and unemployed workers. The Islamic feature of their identity was not highlighted, either by the immigrants themselves or by the French press or public opinion generally.

In 1974, a governmental decree put an end to the legal flows of imported labour. The labour market situation had worsened considerably following the increase in oil prices immediately after the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973. The French state, like its EEC partners, hoped to slow down the rise in unemployment by stopping immigration and offering incentives to immigrants without a job to return home. In fact, the effect of the measure was the exact opposite of what the public authorities had hoped: many of the immigrants in France considered that, even unemployed, they stood to gain a comparative advantage from living in France. Not only did the majority not return to the country of origin, but they internalized their resident status by bringing their family over to join them or by starting a family in France. This family immigration created a new configuration of the population in question, which could no longer be called “immigrant workers” in the sense that it included an ever decreasing proportion of workers (because of the growth in the number of children, women without a job and unemployed workers) and an ever decreasing proportion of immigrants (since their children were now being born on French soil). The settlement of this population

was particularly precarious, because of the difficult social context in which it took place.

At the same time, the general crisis of industrial societies and of the mechanisms of solidarity within them struck a harsh blow to the organizations of the French workers' movement and the various trade union structures, which experienced a drop in membership and a serious problem of representativeness, making France one of the countries with the lowest unionization rates in Europe. Given the general dominance of communist influence in the French workers' movement, the decline of the Soviet model was also to aggravate this crisis, bringing about the collapse of communism in France not only in terms of its ideological domination of a significant section of the French left but also in the networks of socialization of disadvantaged groups which it had set up. "Red" local councils, *Maisons du Peuple* (community centres housing local political activities), children's holiday camps, training schools: these carriers of solidarity and social mobility no longer existed, at the very time when a new migratory wave which urgently needed precisely this type of service was settling in France.

In the second half of the 1970s, therefore, the very mainsprings of the "integration machine" constructed by the French historical tradition became overstretched. The ideology of individual integration nonetheless endured, but it no longer had all the means which had ensured the success of its policy in the past.

However, there was no question of the Republic's authorities moving towards a British-type situation where the social management of the mainly Muslim populations concerned would be delegated to religious leaders. Nor was it conceivable that secular education, which took in a growing number of children of North-African origin, should deviate from its position of refusing any assertion of religious identity within it, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim or other.

The political forms in which populations of Muslim origin in France expressed their permanent status thus came up against a model which was very hostile to the emergence of communities, without there being any effectively guaranteed or credible means of social integration. Consequently, although France has the largest population of Muslim origin among the main Western European countries, there is no "Islamic lobby" comparable to that in Britain and no real political enclave like that of the Turks in Germany. The situation is paradoxically much more "open" in the sense that the cultural assimilation of young people of Muslim origin is certainly very advanced, but that as a result they feel more deeply their exclusion from the networks of spending and welfare, especially as no alternative community structure exists in which they could be socialized. It is to this painfully felt sense of dysfunctionality of the system and anomie, that various Islamic campaign and solidarity organizations have tried to respond.

Unlike in Germany, Muslims do not constitute a demographic category in France. The law prohibits questions on religion in population censuses. Estimations normally range between 2.5 million to 4 million people, according to the argument which the figures are being used to support. On the basis of the 1990 census some studies give figures for people of "foreign" origin, who are designated as "Muslim". People from the three Maghreb countries, most of the former French West Africa, Turkey and some Middle-Eastern countries fall into this category. Apart from the errors relating to the existence of "sociologically non-Muslim", i.e. Christian or Jewish, minorities among the populations of these countries, the presumption that masses of individuals can be classed under religious labels simply on the basis of

nationality raises considerable problems in a country where secularity lays down the principle that religion is a private affair and that membership of any religion could only be valid on the basis of a personal declaration to that effect by the individual concerned. The problem is even more acute in the case of people with French nationality who are classed as Muslims, whether they are in fact former harkis⁹, children born in France of Algerian parents¹⁰ or naturalized French citizens, who have increased significantly in number during the 1980s as Third-World nationalism gave way to the attractions of a European passport and the various social and legal advantages attached to it.

As opposed to the UK, where the model of community integration coupled with the granting of full civil rights to Commonwealth nationals has allowed the constitution of a Muslim vote and a political lobby, the extremely heterogeneous nature of the populations concerned in France, both in terms of nationality and religious identity¹¹, has prevented the development of comparable structures.

The first significant Islamic institutions in France emerged in the second half of the 1970s and were concerned with the management of social peace at a sub-political level. In the hostels for immigrant workers (notably those run by the SONACOTRA company), in the large factories with a massive manual labour force (as in the car industry) and in the tower blocks of the social housing estates (HLM), the first "grass-roots" prayer rooms appeared. They arose in response to a demand by Muslim residents or workers (helped or encouraged by the Islamic associations which at that time remained embryonic) in a global context of social destructuring caused by the rise in unemployment and the precarious position of the immigrants settled in France. In the hostels, a large-scale rent strike which started in 1975 was the first major social movement concerning immigrants. Led by far-left activists, it posed considerable problems for the authorities of the time. Among the demands expressed by the campaigners, the call for Muslim prayer rooms in each hostel was put forward by the leftist activists because they saw it as a demand which the secular state would oppose, thus providing an excuse to keep the movement going and denounce the "racism" of the Republic's institutions. But the hostel managers, most of whom were former officers of the colonial army, declared themselves in favour of prayer rooms; they saw the opportunity to encourage the emergence of religious intermediaries who would be more malleable or conformist than the left-wing militants, at a time (before the Islamic revolution of 1979) when Islam appeared to be a conservative force. On the whole the demand was met and indeed the strike stopped soon afterwards, whilst the left-wing leaders saw themselves replaced by the imams.

In the large factories, a similar phenomenon occurred. Thus at Renault-Billancourt, the symbol of the French working class and of the dominance of the CGT union (closely associated with the Communist Party), a petition went round during the month of Ramadan (October) in 1976 to demand that a mosque be opened in the factory. In this case too, personnel managers acceded to the request in the hope of seeing the imam of the mosque call work-

⁹ The term designates the former auxiliary troops of the French army during the Algerian war. Around 90,000 of them (families included) crossed the Mediterranean at the end of the war. The number of harkis is estimated at over 500,000 in the 1980s.

¹⁰ According to the double *jus soli*, anyone born in France of parents born in France is French at birth. Since Algeria was composed of French departments until 1962, children born in France of Algerian parents are considered French under the law (even if their parents register them as Algerian). There were around 270,000 such cases in 1985.

¹¹ IFOP/Le Monde 1989.

ers back to work when strikes broke out. But the union then called for other mosques to be opened in the factory, which would be run by imams who were CGT members. Islam thus became a key issue in workplace relations, with each camp struggling to control the expression of Islamic identity. A similar process occurred in the run-down tower blocks (HLM) where many large families of immigrant origin lived. The installation of prayer rooms in empty flats, where children attended Koran instruction and remedial classes, was encouraged by the local councils and the administrative offices of the HLM. They saw it as a means of "anchoring" the younger generations, giving them stability and removing them from the temptations of deviant behaviour or delinquency.

From the beginning of the 1980s, a certain number of Islamic associations called for the construction of mosques in the public domain, which would therefore be subject to planning permission from the local authorities. In the antagonistic context of the expression of Islam after the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, punctuated by Ayatollah Khomeini's regular curses of France as "little Satan", permission was often refused. Mayors proved sensitive to the pressure exerted by their voters who opposed the building of Muslim places of worship.

The issue of the mosques reveals the extent of the difference between the British and French cases. In the UK, the more or less automatic acquisition of nationality by Commonwealth nationals, together with their organization into communities, allowed the constitution of an electoral lobby and the formulation of precise conditions for a Muslim vote which would satisfy the wishes of the religious leaders. Not only have more "cathedral-mosques" been built in the UK, but the range of facilities at their disposal would be hard to imagine in France. In Birmingham, the central mosque calls the faithful to prayer by loud-speaker; in another, the constituency MP has set up his political office; and no politician worth his salt would forgo the opportunity to be photographed in Muslim places of worship, beside the imam who could secure for him the vote of his flock.

In France, such a situation seems for the moment inconceivable, although Charles Pasqua, then Minister of the Interior and of religions, made a full ceremonial visit to the Great Mosque of Paris (which is controlled by the Algerian government) in the run-up to the 1988 presidential election, thus marking the preference given by Algiers to Jacques Chirac over François Mitterrand. The Republic's principles of secularity, originally intended to stop the Catholic church from intervening in politics, still constitute an important taboo in France. Any attempt by other religious dignitaries — Jewish or Muslim — to intervene in their capacity as religious leaders to indicate a "good choice" to their fellow members can only provoke very virulent polemics among the defenders of secularity.

On the question of nationality, the acquisition of French nationality has not followed the same logic of automaticity as in the UK. With the exception of the former harkis,¹² nationality resulted from the individual choice of people born or settled on French soil. In other words, a process of acculturation (at whatever level) to the values and counter-values specific to French society in general or to certain components constituted the concrete pre-condition

¹² Harkis, Algerians who opted for French nationality and were repatriated (or "patriated") to the north bank of the Mediterranean when Algeria gained independence in 1962, have had considerable problems with social integration. Although they enjoy all the rights and attributes of French citizenship, in the 1960s they spoke little or no French, remained largely outside the labour market and were in all respects marginalized. Within the harki population there is a lot of deviant-type behaviour. The harki vote is often a community rather than an individual vote and is influenced by the local kaid or clan chief.

for naturalization. At the beginning of the 1980s, the proportion of people of Muslim origin who acquired French nationality showed a marked increase in relation to the 1970s; however, there is nothing to indicate that the religious factor constituted any sort of "Muslim vote". At the 1988 presidential elections, exit polls showed a clear preference among voters of the Muslim population, mainly that of the young "beurs" (the second generation) for Mitterrand. There was no sign of any "list of demands" linking an "Islamic vote" with the satisfaction of religious demands.

The relative lack of Islamic community structures in France compared with the UK explains the sudden outbreak of the so-called "Islamic veil" affair in the autumn of 1989. The affair is as typically French as the Rushdie affair, which broke out just a few months earlier on the other side of the Channel, was typically British. It reveals desires for an assertion of community identity within a national and state framework which is strongly hostile to such assertions, but where the model of individual integration is in deep difficulty.

Originally triggered off by a headmaster's refusal to allow pupils wearing veils into school, the affair rapidly revealed the identity crisis experienced by French society at the appearance of-or on the pretext of-the assertion of Islamic identity in its midst. For the pupils concerned, by wearing "Islamic dress" to school they were obeying divine instructions, which the school's internal regulations forbidding the wearing of any religious insignia could not oppose. From the headmaster's point of view, the wearing of veils introduced religious discrimination between pupils and thus infringed the republican principles of secularity. A campaign grew up to denounce the "racist attitude" which refused to allow girls to wear veils at school, and it was taken up by the anti-racist organizations the MRAP (Mouvement contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et pour la Paix) and SOS-Racisme. The effect of the campaign was to shatter the unity of the anti-racist movement and split it between two opposing viewpoints: defenders of secularity in its strictest sense, and supporters of "tolerance". The latter believed that a pupil attending state school, even with her head covered, would undergo an inevitable process of integration, whereas exclusion from school would instil in her an attitude of rejection towards French society.

For the activists of the Islamic associations who spoke out in favour of veils, the educational sphere represented a key test. It was in the educational sphere that the acculturation of young people destined to live in French society took place; the influence of secular education was liable to inculcate in them a vision of the world in which Islamic identity would be reduced to a strictly private question, and those working for a "re-Islamicization" therefore wished to mark out a form of affirmation of Islam within schools, if only at the symbolic level. Compared to the demands of the British Islamic movements, this may seem derisory; the British associations had long since managed to gain agreement for Islamic dress to be worn at school, and were now campaigning for prayer rooms to be set up in educational establishments. But for their French counterparts, this was a first step towards creating community structures in an adverse social environment.

In the early 1990s it is too early to assess the chances of this embryonic Islamic community structure within the French polity. Throughout the last fifteen years, a first form of communalism emerged in the older generations of Muslim immigrants, particularly in the groups affected by unemployment and social dislocation. This community cooperation, organized around the French branch of the *tablighi jama'at*, aimed to reorganize within a relatively closed world cut off from the lost, ungodly French society the Muslims who experienced the

organization of French society as dysfunctional and anomic. As an alternative model of socialization, these Muslims were offered the creation of a small grouping of true believers, re-Islamicized and following in all aspects of daily life the example of the Prophet Mohammad, in whom they sought exclusive inspiration. However, this form of communitarianism remained "sub-political": its followers were all the more able to withdraw from French society because they already found themselves in a situation of concrete exclusion from it. Unemployed, foreign, illiterate, speaking little or no French, they took very little part in any case in the life of the nation.

The same could not be said of the forms of community organization of which the "veil" affair was the embryonic symbol: their followers are young, educated, speak French perfectly and most of them have French nationality. The "re-Islamicization" movements which provided the ideological mobilization at that time and flanked the numerous media appearances of the girls involved saw the opportunity to win a visible place for Islam and create a pole of identification for Muslim youth in disarray. The move was followed up in 1992 with the opening of an "Islamic university" in the Nièvre department, by the Union of Islamic Organisations in France (Union des Organisations Islamiques en France or UOIF), a campaigning organization which had been at the forefront of the veil campaign from the start. Its ambition was to train imams for the immigrant populations, who would be able to combat the gallicization of the habits and behaviour of the young "beurs" and construct a separate Islamic identity.

The advance of "re-Islamicizing" movements among the younger generations of Muslim origin in France at the start of the last decade of the twentieth century is undeniable. The successes of the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique de Salut or FIS) in Algeria, then later the retreat to France of many of its activists and leaders fleeing repression, allowed the party to create complex networks, particularly through Algerian Brotherhood in France, which is the "émigré" branch of one of the constituent currents of the FIS. On one hand, FIS activists have set up "Islamic karate" groups in some suburbs to the north of Paris, whose main job is to fight against drug traffickers and maintain order in areas where the police have difficulty entering. It is still too early to draw up a concrete assessment of these initiatives and their future. They nevertheless show that the potential construction of Islamic community structures in France reflects weaknesses in the process of social integration, and they represent attempts to build an alternative model in opposition to that which the French tradition of individual integration of foreigners settled on its soil seems hard pressed to achieve.