



Islam in France

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ABSTRACT

France is a country with a population of 60 million where Churches and State are separated since 1905, which means, among other things, that asking people about their religious affiliation in a population census is forbidden. However, it is believed that between 4 and 5 million Moslems, whether foreign residents or citizens, live here, compared to roughly 600,000 Jews. After the bombings of September 11th, 2001, as elsewhere, France has had its share of often-harsh controversy about the compatibility of Islam with the values of the Republic and Western-type democracy. Some marginal, but very vocal voices, within the Jewish community and conservative right circles close to the Jewish political right, have openly questioned the possibility for Moslems to fully integrate into French society, and even compared Islamic fundamentalism to national-socialism, which is both irrelevant and dangerous.

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

France is a country with a population of 60 million where Churches and State are separated since 1905, which means, among other things, that asking people about their religious affiliation in a population census is forbidden. However, it is believed that between 4 and 5 million Moslems, whether foreign residents or citizens, live here, compared to roughly 600,000 Jews .[1] After the bombings of September 11th, 2001, as elsewhere, France has had its share of often-harsh controversy about the compatibility of Islam with the values of the Republic and Western-type democracy. Some marginal, but very vocal voices, within the Jewish community and conservative right circles close to the Jewish political right, have openly questioned the possibility for Moslems to fully integrate into French society, and even compared Islamic fundamentalism to national-socialism, which is both irrelevant and dangerous.

France has a large Moslem population, which lives here to stay, and most of the young Moslems are now French citizens. This situation is the result of history: France has been a colonial power and still retains overseas territories; Algeria was French until 1962, Morocco and Tunisia until 1956. Furthermore, the Moslems were predominant in most of the African countries that were granted independence at the beginning of the 1960s. The Comoro Islands were a colony until 1976, and the now Republic of Djibouti, until 1977. As a consequence, it is likely that one will find a Moslem association, mosque or prayer room, catering to the needs of a specific ethnic group from those countries, in the major cities, and in the first place, in the Paris area. To the population coming from former French colonies, one should add the numerous immigrant communities from the Balkans, Turkey and the Indian subcontinent that follow Islam, certainly making France the second place in Europe when it comes to diversity and strength, after the United Kingdom.

Putting fears and ignorance, which lead to prejudice, aside, this is the reason why it is time for the Jewish communal institutions to have a clear picture of French Islam in 2003. Although the wave of anti-Semitic incidents, which took place here since the beginning of the Intifada Al Aqsa, marked an all-time high since the Second World War—and although many of the identified perpetrators are Moslems—the overwhelming majority of the community rejects violence, even among the fundamentalists. And the very strident anti-Zionism of many exponents of the Palestinian cause, which gathered crowds of several tens of thousands at demonstrations in support of the Intifada, often has more to do with Arab nationalism than with Islam. Before starting our description of the trends within French Islam, we have to choose the vocabulary we shall use with great care.

In a must-read essay, Olivier Roy wrote that the Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brothers, the Turkish Refah Partisi, the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the Sudanese Hassan al Tourabi or the Iranian Revolution, “see Islam as a true political ideology which makes possible the building of the Islamic society through the State.”[2] On the other hand, he thinks that those who go back to their Muslim roots (what he calls “re-islamisation”) are “neo-

fundamentalists”, because their main concern is the practical aspects of the implementation of shariah in one’s everyday life, not building the Islamic State. However strange this may sound, it is true that neither the Afghani Taleban, nor the Salafi in the Paris suburbs, nor Bin Laden himself, have ever expressed what looks like a political platform.

Following Roy, we have also restricted the use of the words “radical Islam” to the Jihadist-type groups which are an offspring of the neo-fundamentalist movement that is, the Al Qaida network, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the jihadist branch of the Salafi school of thought, which is represented in the United Kingdom by sheikh Abu Hamza al Masri of the Finsbury Park mosque, but is almost non-existent in France. Finally, we have deliberately chosen not to describe the various terrorist cells and networks which have been dismantled by the French intelligence services, in order to delve more deeply into the intricacies of those movements which have a public activity. In order to do so, we have conducted field research, between August 2001 and February 2003, in places of worship, demonstrations and various public expressions of the Muslim faith. Some of the information contained in this report has been previously published as articles in the French Jewish weekly newspaper Actualit? Juive .[3]

The rise in anti-Semitic activities and the Moslem community

As I reported in the 2001/2 Annual report of the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Racism and Anti-Semitism at the University of Tel-Aviv , the marked rise in anti-Semitic violence which began in 2000 continued into 2001/2, reaching an unprecedented peak, with more than 400 anti-Semitic attacks recorded for the period fall 2000 to spring 2002.[4] Although anti-Semitic incidents declined sharply after the May 2002 presidential election, in which far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen came a surprising second to Jacques Chirac, they continued well into 2003, fuelled by the US intervention in Iraq and despite the refusal of France to fight alongside the coalition against Saddam Hussein.

This wave of anti-Semitism appeared to be both a consequence of the undeniable growth of anti-Jewish feelings among Moslem youth, triggered by events in the Middle East, and a phenomenon rooted in social unrest in the suburbs, mainly among those disaffected youth of Muslim (North African) origin. It is to be noted that so far, among those arrested for anti-Jewish acts, no one belongs to an established Moslem fundamentalist or Islamist group, a fact which corroborates our own findings when attending the pro-Palestine and anti-war demonstrations, in which the most stridently anti-Jewish slogans are uttered either by supporters of Arab pan-nationalism, or by non-Moslem activists of the Palestinian cause.

In 2001/2, the Jewish community became understandably angry at the Socialist-Green-Communist government's unwillingness to acknowledge the extent of the rise in anti-Semitism, and its inability to react. A possible explanation for the then-government's soft line was that, with both a presidential and a general election in sight, it preferred not to alienate the large Muslim electorate, even at the cost of losing the Jewish votes. Another possibility is that the Left, which was in power until spring 2002, simply failed to understand the scope and magnitude of the wave, which contradicted all the scholarly research and surveys proving that anti-Semitism had been on the decline since 1945.

The situation is indeed very complex: the 2003 survey of racism and anti-Semitism released in March by the Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme showed that, while the rise of anti-Semitic acts was undeniable, the overwhelming majority of those who declared themselves hostile to the Jews were also hostile to the Arabs. So the higher level of expression of the French Moslems' prejudice against the Jews is also deeply correlated to the anti-Semitic tradition of France, and it is almost certain that the electoral successes of the extreme-right since 1983 has made anti-Semitism more acceptable than before: after all, Le Pen, who still thinks that the Holocaust is "a detail in the history of the second world war", polled 17% in the first ballot of the April 21st, 2002 presidential election.

The situation in France is not only the result of the Moslem population being ten times the size of the Jewish community. It is also the result of history, and the attitude of the French elites when confronted with anti-Semitism is to be understood within this context. It is necessary to recall that, whether the government is conservative or left-leaning, French foreign policy has always been friendly towards the Arab world and cooler towards Israel. The fascination of French leaders for the Arab world have their roots in the times when part of today's French territory was under Moslem control (Emperor Charlemagne, after Charles Martel's victory at Poitiers in 732 C.E, definitely put them to rout).

Later came the times of the Crusades, into which most of the nobility took part. Between 1100 and 1291, the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem covered part of what is present day Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and the crusaders, after they were defeated by Saladin, retained hold of Cyprus (from 1192 until 1489!) and part of Greece (Rhodes island among others), from where they continuously traded with the Middle-East.[5]

France always kept an eye on the Arab world: in 1494, King Charles VIIIth was crowned under the title of "King of Naples and Jerusalem" (despite the fact that Jerusalem was long lost) and in 1535, King Francois I caused a scandal within Christian Europe when he chose to look for an alliance with the Turkish Sultan against the Holy Empire, eventually opening the first French embassy in Constantinople the same year. Later came a period of intense rivalry between France and the United Kingdom, which in a way still continues through the opposite attitude of the two countries vis à vis the US intervention against Iraq.

After Bonaparte was defeated by the British in Egypt (1801), France, which considered and still considers herself the protector of the Arab Christians, intervened in 1860 to support the claims of the Maronites, thus setting a foot in the area again. The result after World War I was that, while British influence was exerted over Palestine, Jordan and the Gulf States, France was given a protectorate over Syria and Lebanon (1916-41), which extended also over part of today's Turkey (the Iskanderun area, until 1939).

This short reminder of history is to show that France is attracted by Islam and the Arab World, for reasons which also have to do with its colonial past in the Maghreb, but is also, up to this day, very much concerned about the fate of the Christian minorities in the Middle-East. This explains much of the attitude towards the Palestinian, the French diplomacy's blindness over the anti-Semitic speeches of Lebanese President Lahud and other Christian politicians, the friendly attitude towards Syria, where a sizable Christian minority lives and where the first French-speaking Jesuit school opened in 1831, and the good relations with Saddam's Irak, which was always described by the pro-Iraqi lobby as a country of religious freedom.

In conclusion, we can say that the attitude of the State towards Islam stems from an historical tradition of pro-Arab diplomacy which was best exemplified in the Gaullist foreign policy, leading de Gaulle, who was not an antisemite, to embargo the sales of weapons to Israel after the Six Days War, and speak of the Jews as "an elite, self-confident and dominating people." As for the attitude of the intellectuals, it is mostly a consequence of the impact of leftist anti-Zionism associated with the French tradition of opposition to the United States: this explains why all the demonstrations against the US intervention in Iraq were also directed against Israel and in support of the Palestinian. The anti-US feeling in France is a result of the country's will to remain a first-rank power in the world, once again a legacy of the Gaullist policy. But it has to be noted that for the first time, some prominent French intellectuals outspokenly took side against the anti-Semitic wave of 2000/2002, criticizing the anti-Zionism of most of the left, to which they belong, and pointing to the need to counter the rise of anti-Semitism among the Moslem community. The most well known are philosophers Alain Finkielkraut and Bernard-Henri L?vy, sociologist Jacques Tarnero, political scientist Shmuel Trigano.

The organization of French Islam

In 1808, Emperor Napoleon I convened a "Great Sanhedrin" which was asked to answer questions about the compatibility of Judaism with French citizenship. Ultimately, this convention, which was imposed on the Jewish authorities of the time, led to the creation of the

Consistoire Central, which up to this day is the official representative body of French Jewry when it comes to religious matters.

In a highly centralized country such as France, where the Ministry of the Interior has authority upon the recognized religious denominations, the existence of a several million strong Moslem community without a representative authority was seen as nonsense, notwithstanding the fact that Islam, much like Judaism, has no supreme authority and no “clergy” (at least for Sunni Moslems). Since 1990, when Pierre Joxe, the socialist Minister, launched a Conseil de réflexion sur l’islam de France (Corif), various attempts had been made to gather the numerous and often bitterly opposed Moslem associations under one umbrella organization, under the aegis of the State. Minister Charles Pasqua, an arch-conservative Gaullist, chose in 1993 to disband Corif and play the Algerian card, by asking the Great Mosque of Paris, which is controlled since 1982 by the Algerian Government, to be the official representative of French Moslems. Once again, this authoritarian method failed.

From November 1999 until he resigned in August 2001, Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement tried to convene what was known as “Al Istichara” (The consultation process), once again without success. Thus, the current Minister of the Interior, Gaullist Nicolas Sarkozy, chose to act with Islam as the Emperor did with the Jews: on December 19th and 20th, 2002, he convened a meeting at Nainville les Roches, near Paris, and gave all the representatives of the groups which took part into the consultation two days to reach an agreement and form a representative body of French Islam. The so-called Conseil Français du Culte Musulman, which was formed as a result, will be chaired by Dr. Dalil Boubakeur, the Imam of the Great Mosque of Paris (who is appointed by the Algerian Government), and will have two vice-presidents, one from the Fédération Nationale des Musulmans de France (Mohamed Bouchari for the FNMF; close to Morocco) and one from the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (Fouad Alaoui for the UOIF, inspired by the Muslim Brothers). This marks a compromise between the moderate wing of French Islam and the fundamentalist UOIF that, by the way, has for the first time met with a delegation from CRIF on January 13th, 2003, under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior.

The Conseil Français du Culte Musulman was elected on April 6th and 13th, by 4000 delegates from 995 mosques, with a voter turnout of over 87%. The result is a severe defeat for the Mosque de Paris which will have six representatives out of 41, while 14 seats go to the UOIF) and 16 to the FNMF. The Comité de coordination des musulmans turcs de France, close to the Ankara government, will have two seats and three others go to various groups. This means that the President will be in the minority within his own institution. The Boubakeur presidency was imposed by the French Government both as a gesture towards Algeria and in order to promote the “moderate”, “secular” and “republican” stream of Islam, but both the FNMF and the

UOIF agreed to this designation, and will certainly do with it, at least until the next election which will take place in 2005.

In the provinces, there will be 25 “Conseils régionaux du culte musulman,” also elected on April 6-13th. There also, the lower voter turnout among the less religious Algerian Moslems explains the defeat of the Mosquée de Paris. In the capital city, the presidency will go to UOIF national chairman, Laj Thami Br?ze, who was on the same slate than the French representative of the Mili G?r?s, Ahmed Bakcan, and a key figure in the Foi et Pratique movement (offshoot of Tabligh), Mohsen Hammami. In the southeastern suburbs of Paris, which has its own Council, the slate of the Mosquée d’Evry and the FNMF received 30% each, and the presidency will go to Hassan Moussaoui from FNMF.

Moslems from the Provence-Alpes-Cote d’Azur region also rejected the candidates of the Mosquée de Paris, led by Bachir Dahmani (30%), whom the Marseille city council chose to run the Grande Mosquée, which will be built there. In this area, the UOIF allied with the al Islam mosque (led by Attalah Bounoua), polled 42%, and will have Mourad Zerfaoui elected as president of the regional council. The Paris Mosque suffered the same setback in Rh?ne-Alpes (the Lyon area) where the treasurer CFCM, Imam Kamel Kabtane from the Grande Mosquée de Lyon, was defeated by the coalition of UOIF and Turkish Moslems, led by Azzedine Gaci. This is not good news for the large Jewish community there, which has built a very good relationship with Kabtane.

The successes of FNMF and UOIF are also evident in Languedoc-Roussillon (Montpellier and Perpignan), where their coalition slate, led by Abderrahim Berkaoui, polls 63% against 37% for the Mosquée de Paris, and in Midi-Pyr?n?es (Toulouse area), where Ahmed Elalami (FNMF) gets 75% of the vote. In the Nord-Pas de Calais(Lille-Roubaix area), the coalitionslate of FNMF, UOIF and the Tabligh, led by Bahssine Saaidi, polls 76 % and undoubtedly benefited from the candidacy of Hassan Iquioussen, a preacher with a large following among Moslem youth of the underprivileged suburbs.

The situation which is the most threatening to the Jewish community is that of Alsace (Strasbourg area). There, Abdallah Boussouf, who is close to Issam al Attar, the exiled leader of the Syrian Muslim Brothers who lives in nearby Aachen (Germany) led a coalition slate with the moderate, pro-Ankara Turkish moslems. However, he only leads by 6% the slate of UOIF and Milli G?r?s, led by a controversial convert, Thomas Abdallah Milcent, known as “Doctor Abdallah.” This is a setback for the Strasbourg municipality, which chose Boussouf as head of the soon to be built Grande Mosquée. But the real danger is that an alliance between UOIF and the Mosquée de Paris could well lead to « docteur Abdallah » winning the presidency. The man has been a vocal supporter of the “Islamic scarf” since the 90s, wants a reform of the secular State in order to accomodate the beliefs of religious Moslems, and still needs to distance himself

from Mohamed Ennacer Latr?che, the anti-Semitic leader of the Parti des Musulmans de France (see below), who also lives in Strasbourg.

Is the victory of the Islamists something the Jewish community should fear? This is not sure. Both the FNMF and the UOIF know that the Government will tolerate them only if they are faithful to their pledge to abide by the laws of the Republic and refrain from any expression of extremism, including anti-Semitism. One should also note that in the Ile de France-Centre, Aquitaine and Alsace regions, the UOIF was the only movement to include several women among its candidates. Thus, wisdom is certainly on Kamel Kabtane’s side, who said: “I like better to see them inside than outside.”

In order to fully understand the situation of Islam in France, it is best to describe each component of this council as well as the various ethnic groups which are predominantly Moslem in this country. According to journalist Xavier Ternisien , French Islam, which is overwhelmingly Sunni, is composed of four distinct streams: the Muslim Brothers; the Tabligh; the Salafi and the Ahbachi.[6] The Mosqu?e de Paris represents what is perceived as the most moderate stream, that is some kind of a “cultural Islam” which is less concerned with Sharia-related topics and fully accepts the constraints of the secular State. Those who promote a totally secular Islam and oppose the inclusion of the “fundamentalists” in the Council have launched the Coordination des Musulmans de France, under the leadership of Abderrahmane Dahmane, but this is a very small group.

The traditional Algerian Islam: the Mosqu?e de Paris

This is of course a paradox: while the overwhelming majority of French Moslems is totally alien to Islamism or radical Islam, and follows a rather casual way of expressing its religious beliefs, eating halal, praying more or less regularly and fasting during the month of Ramadan, the official expression of moderate Islam is less prominent in the public debate than more militant groups like UOIF and Tabligh.

The Grande Mosqu?e de Paris is the official representative of this strand. The Turkish Sultan Abdulhamid was the first to push the idea of a Moslem religious center in the French capital city, but it was not until 1920 that the State, at the request of moderate politician Edouard Herriot, agreed to allow such an institution, in recognition for the sacrifice of Moslem soldiers during World War I. Consequently, the Great Mosque was inaugurated in 1926. It was financed partly by the State, partly by a tax paid by the Moslem residents of then-French Algeria. Its imam, Dr. Dalil Boubakeur, is one of the very few Muslim dignitaries to engage into inter-faith dialogue with the Jews, as does the representative of the Grande Mosqu?e in the Marseille area,

Souheib Bencheikh, head of the Comité Régional des Affaires Islamiques (CORAI). Being moderate, the Grande Mosquée is, however, supportive of the Palestinian cause. In a joint press statement with UOIF, released on October 2nd, 2000, it asked “Moslems in France to express their solidarity, in those times of harshness, with their Palestinian brothers and sisters’ legitimate rights.”

The Sufi orders

Another branch of French Islam, which is most of the time moderate, is Sufism. Historically, the existence of branches of the Sufi orders (tariqa, pl.turuq) was the work of converts who are not accepted unanimously as being orthodox Moslems. Such was the case of René Guénon (1886-1951), who in 1912 entered the Shadhiliyya tariqa, while remaining a Roman Catholic writing in many counter-revolutionary French publications.[7] In 1933, one of Guénon’s followers in esotericism, the Swiss Frithjof Schuon (1907-98), established the Maryamiyya, supposedly an offshoot of the orthodox Algerian Alawiyya tariqa. Although Guénon, who established himself in Cairo in 1930, became both an Egyptian citizen and an orthodox Moslem, most of his followers have since adopted some kind of a New Age philosophy, which is very far away from Sufism. Roger Maridort’s Torino-based Darqawiyya is a good example, as is Michel Valsan’s Shadhiliyya and Paul de Seligny’s Alawiyya branch in Monaco. However, after Valsan’s death in 1974, several of his disciples returned to traditional Sufism, as did some of Guénon’s. Among the Sufi orders which have a following here, are the Alawiyya, under the leadership of sheikh Khaled Bentounes, and the Bouchichiyya, a Moroccan movement led in France by Faouzi Skali, and which in Morocco, organizes prayers “to alleviate the daily plague of the everyday life of our Palestinian brothers.”[8]

Two publications also disseminate the message of the spiritual Sufi way: Terres d’Europe, under the editorship of Boutoule Fekkar-Lambiotte, who on February 8th, 2003 left the Consultation sur le culte musulman in order to protest the participation of the UOIF into the elections to the CFCM, and Soufisme d’orient et d’occident, under the direction of Jean-Louis Giroto, a follower of the aforementioned Bouchichiyya .[9] Terres d’Europe also sponsors the Scouts Musulmans de France, one of the very few Moslem movements, which receives Jews and Christians for their religious festivals.

There are also branches of the Naqshbandiyya, and it should be noted that although this is a relatively moderate tariqa, one of its offshoots, led by the Great Mufti of Syria, sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, disseminates a strongly anti-Semitic ideology through a French language website (www.kuftaro.org). The Nimatullahi Sufi order, founded in the XIVth century by Shah Nimatullah Wali, was established in Iran. One of its specificities is that it enjoins disciples to avoid seclusion and retreat, have an occupation and refrain from wearing in public any particular

costume, which would draw attention to them. The order's teachings were imported to Europe in the 1970's. The present master, Dr. Javad Nurbakch, is an Iranian-born, London-based medical doctor who was trained in the Sorbonne University and retired from the University of Tehran in 1977.

In France, the order has two centres, one in Rosny sous Bois, east of Paris; the other in Tassin la Demi-Lune, a Lyon suburb. Those "khaniqahs" are founded as non-profit charities and live from the monthly contribution of the members, and whatever surplus may be accrued is used towards the establishment of new centers. Sufism is also the mainstream tendency among African Moslems coming from the former French colonies, especially Senegal, Mauritania and Mali. Many of them live in shelters for migrant workers, which were built and are run by State-sponsored companies (SONACOTRA, ADEF and Soundiata among others) and in which a prayer room is nearly always included. The preachers who cater to the needs of those immigrants often belong to the Mouride tariqa, a dominant force within Senegalese Islam since it was created at the beginning of the XXth century, as an offshoot of the Qadria bekkaiia, a Sufi order founded in the XVIth century and which is dominant among the Moorish people.

The Mouride people seem to pay little attention to the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Middle-East states or the Saudi religious charities, which have settled in West Africa. However, another important tariqa, the Tijaniya, which is active among expatriates from Mauritania, Mali and Senegal shows signs of open anti-Semitism, as exemplified by a fatwa from their former leader, sheikh Ibrahima Niasse (1900-1975) , on "the Jews' crimes against the Moslems," a lengthy diatribe against "The sons of Israel, the abject, God's worst creatures, who ventured to burning the holy mosque of al Qods, thus committing an odious crime which add to the list of all the other crimes they have continuously perpetrated, throughout the times, against Islam and the Moslems." [10] The text, then calls the followers to "prepare for a repressive war and for a holy war in order to uproot Jewish presence from the holy place of God." The Tijanya has a long record of being a relay for the Islamic World League in West Africa. Sheikh Niasse built up a large following in northern Nigeria, now a hotbed of radical Islam, had a close personal relationship with Gamal Abdel Nasser, and served as vice-president of the Pakistan-based Islamic World Conference .[11]

The Fédration des Associations Islamiques d'Afrique, des Comores et des Antilles (FFAIACA) is the official representative of African Moslems and seats on the Conseil Francais du Culte Musulman. Led by sheikh Moussa Toure, Ahmed Baba Miske and Asani Fassassi, it is certainly not radical, but promotes a distorted view of history: in an article they wrote, the three leaders of the Federation acknowledge the existence of the Nazi genocide of the Jews, but only to include it in a list of the "most horrible tragedies in the history of mankind", ranging from the trade of slaves to the genocide of "the Tutsi, the people of Bosnia and Kosovo, the people of Chechenya and the Palestinian." On October 10th, 2000, the Fédration issued a press statement

calling its affiliates to “express their solidarity with the Palestinian people and to pray for the safeguard of the al Aqsa mosque” and asking them to “pray for the memory of the martyrs and innocent victims who fell for the defense of the third Holy place of Islam.”

The conservative and moderate Islamist movements: FNMF and UOIF

The major phenomenon within French Islam is undoubtedly the emergence of a mass movement which affirms a strictly orthodox outlook, adhering to the Shariah and Sunnah, and which wants to adapt it both to modernity and to life in the West. Two groups represent this strand. The Fédération Nationale des Musulmans de France was created in December 1985 by people from Morocco and converts, among them Daniel Youssouf Leclercq.

Very much opposed to the Paris Mosque, for reasons which have to do with the relations between Rabat and Algiers, the FNMF was instrumental in pushing the claims of the islamists who, in 1989, engaged into what became a major issue in French politics: the right to wear the hijab in state-run schools. Chaired by Mohamed Bouchari, the FNMF is very close to the state of Morocco, although its main mosque, that of Evry, was financed by the Saudi Islamic World League. Apart from this one, whose imam is Khalil Meroun, the FNMF controls the mosques in Asnières and Argenteuil, and barely more. It is thus much weaker than the UOIF, which today stands as the major representative of the “enlightened” Islamist movement, that is, those who pledge allegiance to the State and civil law, and only want to accommodate it to the needs of “orthodox” Moslems. The UOIF, which is a branch of the UK-based European Union of Islamic Organizations, was founded in 1983 under the spiritual guidance of the Lebanese sheikh Fayçal al Mawlawi. It is the umbrella organization of more than 210 local groups, including a youth movement (Jeunes Musulmans de France, led by Fouad Imarraine and Yamine Makri) and a training seminar for imams at Châteaueu-Chinon (the Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines, opened in 1990), and it has an estimated following of around 100,000.

The UOIF, with headquarters at La Courneuve, near Paris, holds a yearly convention at Le Bourget (last edition on April 19-21 2003), which draws a crowd of several thousands and was attended, over the last few years, by such personalities as sheik Youssouf al Qaradawi, the Qatar-based preacher who broadcasts on the Al Jazeera TV channel, and Mahfoud Nahnah, the leader of the Algerian Islamist political party HMS (Society’s Movement for Peace). On religious matters, the UOIF relies upon the fatwas of sheikh Qaradawi, who has condemned the Sept.11th attacks, but condones the “suicide bombings” in Israel.[12] It participates into a religious body, the Conseil Européen de la Fatwa et de la Recherche (based in London and chaired by Qaradawi), which acts as the supreme religious authorities for those Moslems in Europe who feel close to the Moslem Brothers.

Set up in 1997, the Conseil held a plenary meeting in Paris on July 13th/17th, 2002. Among its members is the UK-based leader of the Tunisian Islamist party and Nahda, sheikh Rached Ghanouchi. The UOIF leadership is predominantly from Morocco, under the presidency of Lhaj Thami Br?ze and with Fouad Allaoui as secretary general. Its spiritual leader in France is sheikh Ahmed Jaballah, but one cannot understand the influence of UOIF among the youth especially without referring to the personality and charisma of Tariq Ramadan, although he took distnaces from the UOIF two or three years ago and has formally never been a member. Born in Geneva in 1962, the great-son of Hassan al Banna, founder of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, is the exponent of a fundamentalist yet “modern” Islam which seeks to accommodate Islam with the secular State. Tariq Ramadan opposes the public statements of his brother Hani, also based in Switzerland, who recently condoned the punishment by stoning of women caught committing adultery. He has published a statement condemning the anti-Semitic acts committed in France as alien to Islam. On the Palestinian issue, his views are best understood by referring to his editorial in the Pr?sence Musulmane bulletin (n°24, May-June 2002):

“You find it hard to refrain from hating, you don’t understand and you are at war with the whole world. You are against the Jews, against the all-powerful America, which condones, against those so-called Muslim states, which let their brethren being humiliated because this is not against their interests. So you accuse (...) how much would you love to be there in Palestine, to defend your sisters and brothers and satisfy part of your desire for retaliation. (...) You have a deep hate of all that looks like your enemy: the Zionist, the Jew, and the West all that is not Muslim. And finally you mix up everything like others do about you.”

And he goes on by warning against “letting yourself gets filled up by hate until you become blind.” And he finally calls to the fight “against the criminal Zionist state”, but in association with people from other denominations, not in the name of jihad. This is the ambiguity of a man who is undoubtedly the most clever, gifted and innovative thinker of the Western Moslem world. And whether one thinks that he is a moderate, or uses double talk to hide his radical views, he is the reference for the vast majority of practising Moslems in today’s France. Tariq Ramadan’s works are distributed by the al Tawhid publishing company in the Lyon area, an offshoot of the Union des Jeunes Musulmans, founded in 1987 and led by Yamine Makri .[13]

Back to the UOIF. Despite its relative moderation, it still allows anti-Semitic literature to be sold at its annual rally in Le Bourget. For instance, at the 2002 convention, one could buy Le manifeste jud?o-nazi d’Ariel Sharon, a 64-page booklet, falsely portrayed as an interview given by the Israeli prime minister to the writer Amos Oz in 1982, and in which Sharon allegedly said that he wanted to do to the Arabs what the Nazis did to the Jews. The text was, in fact, published by Mondher Sfar, a Tunisian Marxist who heads the Collectif de la communauté tunisienne en Europe and wrote articles for Pierre Guillaume’s Holocaust denying publication; La pierre et

l'olivier, a pro-Palestinian association led by Ginette Skandrani; the Parti des Musulmans de France (see below); and the Arab Commission of Human Rights.

Rival to UOIF, and close to the Syrian Muslim Brothers, which are said to be more moderate than the Egyptian branch, is the Association des Etudiants Islamiques de France (AEIF). It was founded in 1963 by a famous Muslim scholar from Hyderabad in India, Muhammad Hamidullah (1908-2002), who lived in France between 1947 and 1997. Hamidullah, who is the translator into French of a reference edition of the Kuran, was both a strictly orthodox Sunni Moslem who held a diploma of Hafidh (which means he memorized the whole Koran) from Saudi Arabia, a pioneer in interfaith dialogue, having founded the Islamic Cultural Center in Paris in 1958 and a France-Islam Friendship Association in the same period, and a scholar who worked with the CNRS (French National Council for Scientific Research).

Among the students who were the first members of AEIF was the Sudanese Islamist Hassan al Turabi, who completed his PhD in law at the Sorbonne University in 1964 and was then a member of the board. The former Iranian head of State, Abdolhassan Banisadr, was also a follower. The AEIF follows the teachings of the Syrian Muslim Brothers head, Issam Al Attar, who lives in exile in Aachen (Germany) since 1968. After the 70s, all those imams who were close to it, such as Mamadou Daffe in Toulouse and Larbi Kechat (at one time, the Sunday morning lectures of Pr.Hamidullah were held at his Addawa mosque, in Paris), have left, and only Abdallah Boussouf in Strasbourg, seems to still belong to it, although the annual convention he used to convene in his home city is no more. The AEIF headquarters is now in Paris, but the level of activity is low.

The Ligue Nationale des Musulmans de France (LNMF), also has Muslim Brothers like approach but with a small following. On April 2nd, 2002, it issued a statement condemning “the acts of violence perpetrated by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as the profanation of the al-Aqsa mosque.” The LNMF “asks the whole Muslim community to be on the side of the Palestinian and their legitimate authority” that is, the Palestinian Authority and Yassir Arafat.

Other Islamist groups in the Muslim Brotherhood ideology:

The Etudiants Musulmans de France (EMF), founded in 1989 and close to UOIF, caused quite a surprise in 2002 when 11 of its members were elected to the students representative bodies (CROUS) which are under supervision of the Ministry of Education, a big gain from its former 3 seats. The candidates were on the slate of the F?d?ration des Associations G?n?rales Etudiantes (FAGE) a secular, non-moslem students union, which is politically non-committed. The chairman of EMF, Fethi Balabdelli, claims he supports the values of “diversity and

tolerance” and that of FAGE, Jean-Baptiste Mougel, thinks that EMF follows “ a way of promoting diversity and the secular state, which means taking into account everybody” .[14]

Yamine Makri, who owns the Al Tawhid bookshop and is a relative of the Algerian Islamist leader Mahfouz Nahnah, founded the Union des Jeunes Musulmans near Lyon in 1987. The movement fights for “the rights of Moslems as French citizens in a secular Republic.” Close to EMF, the Union represents the ideology of those young Moslems who are conservative on religious issues and want the secular state to adapt to the existence of an orthodox Moslem population. No wonder then that the reference author for UJM is Tariq Ramadan, whose books are published by al Tawhid. Although it is not a group, one should also mention the wide influence of the Oumma.com website (www.oumma.com), which is devoted to providing daily news and discussions about Islam in France, in the vein of UOIF/Muslim Brothers. It is the most moderate of the Muslim portals on the French web, and the contributor’s views on the Israel/Palestine situation range from moderate to radical .[15] This website was launched by Moussa Allem and Said Branine, but lately, the influence of more anti-Zionist writers have grown, such as the Algerian journalist Rabah Attaf from Marseille, “Doctor Abdallah,” or Ginette Skandrani, a non- Moslem member of the Green Party with a long record of anti-Jewish writings, including articles in far-right publications.

The pietistic Islamist movement: Tabligh and Foi et Pratique

While the UOIF and Tariq Ramadan try to think the way Islam can adapt to the modern Western world and secular institutions, with a rather philosophical and political approach, others keep a strictly religious profile. Such is the Tabligh movement, which was founded by Muhammad Ilyas, in India in 1927 under the name Jama’a at-Tabligh. It is basically a proselyte and pietistic movement, which has been nicknamed “Islam’s Jehovah’s’ Witnesses” because its members engage into recruiting activity among those who do not know their faith, mostly in underprivileged neighbourhoods.

The French headquarter is the Ar-Rahma mosque in Saint-Denis, near Paris and the chairman is Wissam Tabbara. As a missionary movement, it has played a key role in bringing back many young people of Arab (mostly Moroccan) and African origin to religion. It is also active in Lille, Marseille, Mulhouse and Dreux. It is active in France since 1968 and acquired legal recognition as “Association Foi et Pratique” in 1972. In 1979, a Tunisian working-class immigrant, Mohammed Hammami, opened the Omar Ibn Khattab mosque in the Belleville area of Paris, which until the late 80s served as the movement’s main center.

As time went on, Hammami became less influential and in 1978, the association Tabligh wa Da'wa was established, with a more conservative perspective, while Foi et Pratique, whose main center remains the Omar Mosque and has a large Tunisian following, adopted a more open approach. It is back into Hammami's hands again, after he came back to France in April 2002, following 8 years in administrative detention in Tunisia, under surveillance by the Ben Ali regime. Although still an islamist, he has a more modern approach than Tabligh wa Da'wa, which is quite a mysterious group, as there is no real leader, but a "consultative council" of four life-members, which reports only to the European headquarters based in Dewsbury, UK.

Tabligh is first and foremost a religious movement: it offers the potential recruit short "training periods" during which he is taught the fundamentals of Islam, and is asked to say the "dikhr", an incantatory sentence from the Koran which he has to repeat one hundred times every morning and evening. Then, recruits are asked to go out in cells of three to five people and reach out to their fellow Moslems wherever they may find them including hospitals, prisons and in the streets. After one year or more in this capacity, the confirmed member may be selected for a four-months stay in one of the movement's centers in Pakistan (notably in Lahore).

Although it is widely believed that a few of them later went to training camps in Afghanistan to fight the jihad, and although it is true that two of the people involved into the 1986 bombings committed in Paris by the Fuad Ali Saleh group came from the Omar mosque, Tabligh's shortcoming is that it shuns political activity: after some months of a harsh life devoted to preaching, some adepts may want to shift to more activist, jihad-committed groups, but this happens because of the Tabligh's strictly religious approach, not because it promotes violence. With regard to the newly established representative body of French Islam, Tabligh at first sided with the Coordination des Musulmans, which, under the leadership of Abderahmane Dahmane, united those who refuse to seat on a council they see as non-democratic, but in some regions (Auvergne; Nord; Centre) had candidates.

The Ahabachi: an expanding sect in disguise

Because it consistently denounces the salafi and the Muslim Brothers as terror-prone fundamentalists, the Ahabachi are thought by some to be moderates. This, however, is complete nonsense. They appeared in France in 1991, under the guidance of Abdel Nasser Tamim, but the movement originates first in Ethiopia, the birthplace of its founder, Abdallah al Harari, then in Lebanon in the 80s and it is allegedly financed by Syria. They operate under the name Association des Projets de Bienfaisance Islamique en France (APBIF), under the guidance of Lebanese Shaykh Khaled El Zant, based in Montpellier, who became famous during the Gulf War in 1990 by his inflammatory speeches calling for the extinction of the state of Israel. They are active in the 18th district of Paris, in Nice, Saint-Etienne, Saint-Dizier, Narbonne, Lyon,

Nîmes, Rennes and Toulouse. The elder brother of Zakarias Moussaoui, accused in the US of involvement in the September 11 attacks, is an Ahbach. The Ahbach is a proselyte group, even among non-Moslems .[16] Although the textbooks used in the two schools it runs in Paris do not show any sign of extremism and anti-Semitism, the yellow flag of APBIF was present in the anti-war demo in Paris on February 15th, 2003, and the group shouted aggressive slogans against Prime Minister Sharon and Israel. Numerous anti-ahbachi websites, run by the Salafi, exist, which describe the movement as a sect.

The fundamentalist Salafi groups

The Salafi school rapidly expands in France. Literally, the word ‘Salafi’ refers to the ‘pious predecessors’ (salafi salih) that is, those who were the Prophet’s early followers. The Salafi school of thought, which emerged at the end of the 19th century with the writings of Jamaluddin al Afghani, is in fact an arch-conservative stream within Wahabism, which insists on purging Islam from any idea or habit coming from the West. The Salafi pays great attention to following the literal text of the Kuran, the Sunna and the Sharia. As said before, the Salafi are divided between a ‘jihadist’ branch, which supports the use of violence against the enemies of Islam (both the enemy from within and that from the non-Muslim world), and a non-jihadist one, which is the only one openly active in France.

The non-jihadist Salafi follow the teachings of the Saudi ulemas from Mecca and Medina Universities, notably the late Saudi Great Mufti, Abdulaziz Ibn Baz and the late sheikh Mohamed Nasiruddin al Albani, and also sheikh Abubakr al Jezairi, whose book, “La Voie du Musulman” (The Moslem Way) has been translated into French and is common reading among the adepts. In 2003, it is believed that around 20 mosques in the country are run by the Salafi, most of them in Paris and suburbs, one in Roubaix (the Dawa mosque) and one in Venissieux, near Lyon.

The area around Lille and Roubaix, in northern France, has been a fertile recruiting ground for those who wanted to fight the jihad abroad: in January, 1996, the so-called “Roubaix gang” was dismantled by the police, and it is now certain that this group of former Bosnia fighters, which financed its activities from robberies, was an Al Qaida cell. As for the Lyon area, it is also a hotbed of terrorist-related activity: among the sons of the imam of the Abu Bakr mosque in Venissieux, Chellali Benchellali, an Algerian, one, Mourad, is detained in Guantanamo and fought alongside the Taleban, and the other, Menad, was arrested in December 2002 when a cell thought to be linked to the Abu Doha network was dismantled near Paris. Furthermore, several relatives of Nizar Nawar, the Tunisian born perpetrator of the attack on the Djerba synagogue (April 2002) were also arrested in the vicinity of Lyon.

The growth of the Salafi movement is undoubtedly the most preoccupying development in French Islam, because of the possibility that followers of a non-jihadist sheikh may later switch to radical, armed groups. The method of the Salafi in order to take control of a mosque is always the same: it begins with a small cell of adepts praying with the others and trying to rally them to their point of view, until they either become the majority, or until the majority, tired of their relentless arguing, verbal abuse and sometimes physical threats, go to another place.

On December 21st, 2002, one case of physical abuse was reported at the Omar mosque in Paris, when a group of salafi extorted money from the “zakat” (the equivalent of tzedaka) and threatened imam Hammami until the police arrested two of them, Karim Bourti, a member of the algerian Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC), and his accomplice, a convert named Rudy Terranova. Therefore, police surveillance of those mosques with a salafi orientation has become a priority. The few openly Salafi mosques often invite Moslem scholars from Saudi Arabia to give lectures and hold tests in order to select students who will be given a grant to study in Mecca or Medina Universities.

Among the leading prayer rooms associated with the movement are: the Centre Socio-Culturel Islamique in Longjumeau, who received sheikh Abdoul Malik Ramadan al-Jazairi and the Ulema Falih Ibn Nafi al Harbi from Saudi Arabia in February-March 2002; the Asslam mosque in Argenteuil and at the Al Ihsen mosque in the same city, where in May 2001, the radical sheikh from Jordan, Salim Hilali, and another one from Egypt, Abdellatif Mahmud Ali Osama, preached the Jihad both in and outside of Europe to an overall audience of 2000, including members of the GSPC. According to Ali Laidi, following those preaches, several young Muslims from the nearby city of Sartrouville left for Yemen. In the same area, west of Paris, the salafi convened another week of predication in June 2001, at the Sartrouville mosque, under the aegis of the Saudi al Haramain Foundation. East of Paris, the salafi control one mosque in Stains, one in rue Broussais in Vitry sur Seine, and the Association culturelle de la Rose des Vents in Aulnay sous Bois, which on 10-26 July 2001, hosted a course with an overall attendance of 500, during which Medina University recruiters were present, as well as two teachers from there, Abdallah al Boukhari and Salih Az Zouaydi, and one from Oumm oul-Qoura (Mecca) University, Muhammad Bazmoul.

As said before, the salafi put emphasis on the strict adherence to the Sunnah and sharia, thus regulating every aspect of the adept’s everyday life. Many of them being “born-again Moslems” or even converts, they have a great need of what resembles the “sheelot ve teshouvot” system of learning. This is where the Internet becomes an important tool in propagating the salafi way, especially among those who do not have a salafi mosque nearby. French language sites linked to the salafi have blossomed. In order to spread their teachings and expose the numerous controversies which arise in their midst over doctrinal or personal issues, the non-jihadist Salafi have designed “fatwa banks” which enable the newcomer to religion to read translations or

Arabic originals of fatwa from the major wahabite sheikhs. For example, the www.sounnah.free.fr website, which follows the teachings of sheikh Rabi ibn Hadi Oumayr al Madkhali and sheikh al Jazairi, contains a fatwa which condemns Bin Laden's activities, and another one from sheikh Muhammad al Otheymin, who says that "The perpetrator of a suicide bombing is not a martyr and he is in the fire (of hell)." It should be reminded, however, that this condemnation only applies to the bombings against Western interests, either in the Muslim world or elsewhere, whereas all the salafi sheikhs support such actions when they are aimed at Israeli people.

Furthermore, the Internet is also the only open mean of expression of the jihadist salafi in France. Some of the most radical websites are based abroad, such as the Website Coran et Sunnah (www.angelfire.com), based in Tripoli, Lebanon, which puts Bin Laden's declarations online, offers strongly anti-Semitic material and also publishes a fatwa by sheikh Hammoud Bin al Uqlaa ash Shuaybi, which asks every Moslem to help the Taleban "with money and body." But others are the work of French Moslems.

The main such portal, openly calling to jihad, is "st.com.net", which links to other sites by the same company, such as "la Voix des Opprimés"; "quibla.lvo.info"; qoqaz.com (news of the Chechenya jihad) and lately "morojihad.com", devoted to terrorist muslim groups from the Philippines. The man behind st.com is Smain Bedrouni, who since 2001 supports Bin Laden and the Taleban on his website and has for this reason been indicted in september 2001 by French justice. One intriguing aspect of his activities is that he is a vice-president of FLIP (Front de Lutte contre la Pedoclastie), a group based in Montpellier which is theoretically an anti-paedophilia movement, but whose website reports only the "martyrdom" of Palestinian children. Moreover, Bedrouni was a board member of a sectarian group named "Politique de Vie", led by Christian Cotten, a non-muslim who wants President Bush to stand trial before an international court because of his responsibility "for the Sept. 11th bombings."

Other jihadist sites are www.sahih.net, which offers writings of the Palestinian leader of the Beit al Ansar, sheikh Abdullah Yussuf Azzam, and of Sayed Qutb, the Egyptian intellectual of the Muslim Brothers who inspired the ideology of Takfir. Finally, the alfutuhataaama.org website offers texts from the Taleban leader, Mullah Omar, and a very singular exemple of Jewish(?) self-hatred, namely the article by Israel Shamir: "The Elders of Zion or the masters of speech."

Another noteworthy Islamist groups include the very secretive Takfir wal Hijra, a Sunni extremist sect with connections to the Algerian terrorist movements. As Takfir members usually consider the whole Moslem community to be "kuffar" (heretic), they live in isolation and do not attend the existing mosques, which makes it difficult to find them. A Takfir cell was believed to operate in the Yvelines département, west of Paris. At all major pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Paris, a group of about 150-200 followers of the Lebanese Hizballah have appeared, as did

some individuals waving posters of Hamas leader Shaykh Ahmed Yassin and shouting slogans such as “Jews to the ovens” or “Jews are the enemies of humanity.”

These groups are well organized and structured: the use of cellular phones is common for contact between cells, and senior members protect their identities behind aliases when speaking to each other. Most followers are aged between 16 and 30 and are French-born citizens, originating from the eastern or northern suburbs or eastern boroughs of Paris. While their knowledge of Islam is limited (a majority are “born-again Moslems”), most seem to have mastered the Arabic language. Many are young educated women who are often more vociferously anti-Semitic than men. For the first time these groups have declared their ideology openly (waving the yellow Hizballah flag; calling Muslims to prayer after the demonstrations; wearing T-shirts with the slogan—in French— “Hamas: the sword of the faithful”). It is now documented that in 2002, a member of the Lebanese leadership of Hizballah was in Paris and took part in the demonstrations.

Finally, it is important to watch out for the Antwerp-based (Belgium Flanders) Arab-European League, a Hizballah-oriented militia-like group led by Lebanese-born Dyab Abu Jahjah, which has announced it would launch a French branch.

Islamic charities: how Saudi and Gulf States’ money support French Islamists

Over the last 20 years, a number of Muslim charities with headquarters in Saudi Arabia have set up branches in France. Some of them, such as the World Moslem League, help financially with the building of mosques and religious education, while others do fund raising in order to finance humanitarian projects in war-torn countries and in the territories administered by the Palestinian Authority. The World Muslim League opened its Paris office in 1979 and has financed two major mosques, in Evry (total cost: 4.5 million euros) and Mantes la Jolie. When its secretary general, Abdallah Turki, visited France in October 2002, he was received by the Minister of the Interior but was strongly warned by the authorities that the Government did not want the League to interfere with the setting up of the CFCM, and that it did not want the Saudi-inspired fundamentalist movement to expand. Among the charities which collect money for Palestine, one, Secours Islamique, is close to Saudi Arabia and the other, Comit? de Bienfaisance et de Soutien aux Palestiniens (CBSP), is close to the Muslim Brothers and is supported by Shaykh Raid Salah, the former mayor of Umm al-Fahm.

The Secours Islamique is an UK-based charity, founded in 1984, and which is not considered to be linked to terrorist activities. With headquarters near Paris since 1992, it supports educational, construction and health projects around the Muslim world and has 5 offices in Gaza and the West Bank. In December 2002, the worldwide president, Dr.Hany El Banna, visited the

Paris office with Adel Kadoum, the head of the Palestine field office. The CBSP, founded in 1990 in Nancy, is totally aimed at supporting the Palestinian, especially through educational and welfare projects. In 2002, it raised money to rebuild 14 homes in Gaza, which it says were destroyed by the IDF. The cost of the project was Euro 300 000.

One of the new means to raise funds was via the Internet, in cooperation with the radical French website, www.islamiya.net. The results, however, were below expectations, with a mere Euro 17,184 raised during the month of Ramadan 2002, which enabled the committee to send 860 packages of food to Palestine. The Muwafaq Foundation and the Al Haramain Foundation, both Saudi-funded, are said to be active in France and the latter, although it is included in the United States “black list” of terrorist-related organizations, acknowledges some French activity on its website.

The Parti des Musulmans de France: from militant Islam to political action?

The existence of Muslim political parties is something new in the West. Those, which exist, such as the Islamic Party of Britain, the Noor Party and the Mouvement Jeunes Musulmans in French-speaking Belgium, remain fringe groups with a very small membership. One such attempt has been made by the Parti des Musulmans de France (PMF), founded in 1997 by Mohammed Ennacer Latr?che and based in Strasbourg. It strives to participate in all elections, but has never polled more than 0.67 percent (Strasbourg, 1997) and only runs in local elections. What makes it famous is its extremely anti-Semitic and Holocaust denying ideology.

On 7 October 2000 it led a 3,000-strong demonstration against Israel in Strasbourg, during which the slogan “Death to the Jews” was heard. The PMF used to be in contact with the German branch of Milli G?rus, which is active in the Alsace province, where the Muslim community is predominantly Turkish. In 2002, it held a public meeting in Paris featuring the notorious left-wing negationist, Serge Thion. On February 15th, 2003, a party delegation left Paris for Iraq with the aim of showing its support for Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party. What made the event special is that this was a joint trip with the radical-right, national-revolutionary R?seau G?opolitique Europ?en, an offshoot of the French group Unit? Radicale (banned in August 2002) and the Italian group Rinascita Nazionale. The neo-Nazi from Belgium, Herv? Van Laethem, leader of the Mouvement pour la Nation, also participated. The fact that the group was granted a free visa by the Syrian Embassy in France, and that participants were proposed a 2-days extension of the trip to either Damascus or Lebanon, could confirm the widely accepted idea that Latr?che is closely linked to the Syrian regime. But is the party an Islamic one? None of its demands refer to the implementation of sharia, and it should be noted that its name is the French Muslim’s Party (thus referring to Islam as a culture), not the Islamic Party of France.

The Shiite Moslems: the invisible minority

Shiite Moslems are a tiny minority in France. The support and presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was strong in the 80s in the Lyon and Paris areas (through one “Cultural Center of the Imam”, in the Belleville district of Paris) stopped after the 1986 bombings, which took place in Paris and were masterminded in Tehran. Thus, the following of Iranian-type Shiism is marginal, although it seems that small cells of young Moslems who were secretly Shiites existed in the suburbs of Paris, notably in Nanterre, in the late 80s.

There are three Shiite Jamat in France: two in the Paris suburbs and another in the Reunion Island (Indian Ocean). They are affiliated with the UK-based World Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities, which also has a representative in Marseille. In the Paris suburbs, the two jamat of Bagneux (ACCIJ-Centre culturel de Bagneux) and La Courneuve (Mehfil e-Zaynat center) were founded around 1980 and, at a time, the members prayed in the basement of a Catholic Church in Paris, until Al Haj Nazirali Goulamhousen formally registered the group in September 1982. Most members in continental France seem to be Indians originating from the Indian Ocean, as it seems from the fact that sheikh Moiseraza Momin, one of the spiritual leaders, is Gujarati-speaking.

For the Moharram and Ashoura high celebrations in 2002, they invited a preacher from Pakistan, Maulana Ali Raza Mehdavi Momin. In the Reunion Island, the Shiite community is more organized and since 2002 even convenes a public celebration of Ashoura in the streets. It also publishes a magazine: “Noor.” The most fascinating aspect of the Reunion jamat is its close relationship with Shiite communities in Madagascar and Africa. The jamat participates in the activities of the Africa Federation, the umbrella organization of Shiites on this continent. Thus, there are constant joint activities with the neighboring communities in Tanzania (incl. Zanzibar) and Kenya.

Politically, the French jamat follow the teachings of the Iraqi Ayatollah Al Ouzama as Sayyid Ali al Housseini al Sistani, supreme authority of the London-based Imam Ali Foundation. His proclamation, dated April 13th, 2002, on “supporting the Palestinian people against Zionist aggression”, which makes it a duty for every Moslem to help the Palestinian “recover their spoliated rights and save Islamic land from the aggressors”, was translated into French and distributed by the Reunion jamat.

The same day, the Jamat convened its AGM in the city of Sainte-Clotilde and adopted resolutions, which called for a joint action with the other Moslem associations (Association Musulmane de la Reunion; Pr?sence Musulmane) as well as with other religious groups, in order to organize a march in support of Palestine. Lobbying local politicians asking them to condemn

the “genocide of the Palestinian people” was decided (it has to be remembered that the Parti Communiste Réunionnais is still the major leftist party on the island). Boycotting Israeli and US products, but also avoiding trade with “those who openly support Sharon’s government”(an obvious reference to the island’s 50-families strong Jewish community) was also adopted. In 1999, the Jamat gave the Islamic Relief organization the sum of 3000 USD for helping the Kosovo Moslems.

A case study in ethnic/ religious identity: the Comorian community[17]

Moslems from the Comoro Islands (official name: Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros) first came to Marseille in the 40s and today number between 40 and 50,000 in this city, and perhaps more than twice that number in France (other big communities are in Paris and Dunkerque). 95% of the immigrants come from Ngazidja, the Great Comoro Island. It is thought that the overall money transfer from France to the Comoros amounts the annual budget of the State there.

First and second generation immigrants gather in numerous associations which are run on a political or strictly communal basis (members come from the same village, and raise money to help sustainable development projects there), while third generation young people are totally integrated into French society and reject the traditional organization of the community. Thus, in the 90s, the leadership of the powerful FECOM (Fédération des Associations Comoriennes de Marseille) has been challenged by younger leaders, who launched the Comores Mag magazine. Moslems from the Comoros gather in the Fédération Française des Associations Islamiques d’Afrique, des Comores et des Antilles (FFAIACA).

However, there is one peculiarity of this community which is worth mentioning: apart from members of the Qadiriya, most Moslems in the Comoros belong to the Shadhuliya Yashrutiya, a Sufi tariqa founded by the Tunisian-born Nuruddin al-Yashruti al-Hasaniya, who died in 1899 in Akko (Palestine). Thus, until 1948, the “world center” of this tariqa was located there, before moving to Beirut in 1948 and after 1975, to Amman. Despite the fact that the Yashrutiya has followers among the Palestinian (including expatriates in the Arabic Gulf), there are no signs of overt and particular concern about the Palestinian cause among followers in France. In 1995, more conservative French adepts have founded the Rassemblement des Mourides Chadhouliyyi Yashrouti (RMC) which aims at strengthening the relationship with the Amman center.

The Pakistani and Indian Moslems: a new hotbed of radical Islamist activity

There are different groups of Moslems from the Indian subcontinent living in France .[18] The first one is that of the Gujarati Indians who left Madagascar in the 70s (organized within the NAGIN association), or come from the Reunion island and Mauritius. Most of them are businessmen and professionals, and follow the Shiite way. Immigrants from Pakistan number around 50000, many of them undocumented, and living either in Paris or its northern suburbs (Garges; Sarcelles). The majority comes from Punjab or are Mohajirs from Karachi, that is, people whose families left India after the partition of 1947, eventually settling in the Sind province. Those mostly live near the clothing industry district of le Sentier in Paris, and are often employed by Jewish-owned firms. In lower numbers, there are also Gujaratis from India, fleeing the local fighting between Islamist groups and Hindutva radicals, and Bengali from Bangladesh (who run their own prayer room in the XIth district of Paris, the left-of-center Awami League seemingly being the most important of the political groups in this Diaspora).

As a result of history and the colonization of the Pondichery area on the Indian western coast, there also exist a small group of Moslem Tamils known as the Marecar, a caste of merchants whose members, like most Pondicherians, are French-born and very well integrated into French society. The Marecar played an important role in the first attempts at organizing Islam in the country in the 70s, and were instrumental in the building of the Mantes la Jolie mosque at that time.

Radical Islam within the Pakistani community openly appeared for the first time in 1989, when a demonstration was staged in Paris against author Salman Rushdie: the rallying point for demonstrators was then a Pakistani bookshop in rue de Jarry, in the "Little India" quarter. Some radical bookshops are to be found in this area, and the rallying point for Pakistani Islamists seems to be the Ali Mosque, run by Association Foi et Pratique, at 83, rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis, one of whose two imams have been arrested in autumn 2002, in relation with the "shoe-bomber" (Richard Reid) case.

This case showed that radicals within the Pakistani community offered him assistance and in June 2002, Ghulam Mustapha Rama, head of the Association Chemin Droit, was arrested, because he is thought to be the local contact for the terrorist group Lashkar e-Toiba. In an interview with the weekly Journal du Dimanche (February 16th, 2003), the head of the Renseignements G?n?raux (the Ministry of the Interior-run intelligence service), Yves Bertrand, acknowledged that radical Islam from the Indian Subcontinent was both a new concern, and more worrying than radical Islam from Algeria. The Union Nationale des Pakistanais en France, the main organization of expatriates, appears to be moderate. However, this word has a very different meaning, depending on whether you apply it to Pakistani or Western politics. This is exemplified by the case of the democratic, left-leaning Pakistan Awami Tahreek, which is the political wing of the Moslem sect Minhaj ul Quran, founded in 1980 in Lahore by Mohammed Tahir al Qadri, a follower of the barelwi school.

Represented in the Pakistani Parliament, PAT is advocating total freedom of religion for non-Moslems and is very active in the welfare work among expatriates, through its office in the Passage du Prado (Paris Xth district). But when it comes to the Middle-East situation, it does not hesitate to say that the US intervention in Iraq is motivated by the will to “provide greater security and political say to Israel in the region.” It condemns the “sham negotiations between Israel and Palestine” and pretends that “the impending war against Iraq also seeks to implement the dream of Greater Israel.” So there is much doubt about the stand of the seemingly secular Pakistani immigration movements, such as those which publish the Paris Urdu magazine “Nawa i Waqt”, those who run the website for second-generation young people (www.e-pakistan.biz), or the members of the non-affiliated group which demonstrated in Paris on March 15th 2003, to the cry of “ Bush, Sharon, murderers” .[19]

An oddity in the spectrum of the Indian Subcontinent’s Islam in France is the existence of a branch of the Ahmadiyya, located in Saint-Prix, north of Paris. The Ahmadiyya is seen by most orthodox Moslems as heretic. It is advocating a peaceful Islam that allows religious freedom for non-Moslem cults and is itself subject to persecution in Pakistan. The Ahmadiyya branch in Strasbourg is part to the interfaith dialogue with, among others, the Jewish community.

Turkish Islam: a rising force and a divided community

The moderate Turkish mosques, which are a majority, are under the supervision of the Union turco-islamique d’affaires th?ologiques en France (DITIB), a registered association which is under strict control of the Embassy of Turkey, and promotes a secular Islam. The Ankara-controlled associations which take part into the Conseil Repr?sentatif du Culte Musulman, in which they hold the Secretary General, gather in the Comit? de Coordination des Musulmans Turcs de France, whose key organizer is the vice-president, Haydar Demiryurek.

In the Paris and Alsace areas, the two strongholds of Turkish immigration, the Milli G?rus movement, which is close to the Islamic party now in power in Ankara, is also active under the name Tendance nationale-Union islamique en France, or in Turkish, Islam Toplumun Milli G?rus (TNUIF). There is also a branch of the so-called “kaplanji” radical movement, by the name of its leader Metin Kaplan, now jailed in Germany, where the group is banned, for having ordered the murder of its rival within the movement. It operates under the name Association Islamique en France and is originally a splinter group (1983) of Milli G?rus. The group is aligned on the ideas of the Islamic Republic of Iran and once tried to reach an alliance with Al Qaida. It runs two mosques in Paris and one in Metz, and promotes the idea of “Khilafah” as well as an extremely anti-Semitic rhetoric .[20]

According to a study by Ali Basaran , the Turks who live in France mostly came during the period 1974-93, and come from rural areas of Turkey.[21] Since 1978, an agreement between the two countries allows the Diyanet, an official body depending from the Prime Minister in Ankara, to send teachers of the Turkish language and imams to France. In coherence with the Turkish state's vision of Islam, those imams do not take into consideration the ethnic origin of the Kurds, nor the existence of religious minorities such as the Alevis. As a consequence, separate movements which refuse submission to Ankara have been set up such as COJEP in Alsace (an offshoot of Milli G?rus), Perspectives f?minines and several Suleymanci mosques.

One of the major problems with the Turkish immigrants is that, according to Basaran, in 1992, 85% of the adults “ had trouble understanding the news in French on TV.” While 50% of Algerian mothers say they hardly speak French, the figure is 93% for Turkish mothers. This difficulty with integration into French society is not, however, a result of religious fundamentalism. This community is also home to a lot of Turkish extreme-left groups and among the Kurds, Ocalan's KADEK party (formerly PKK) has a sizable following. Furthermore, it should be noted that, while the influence of conservative Islam is growing among Turks living in France, most fundamentalists maintain a low-key approach to politics: in the pro-Palestine demonstrations, the Kurdish islamist movement, Kurdistan? Islamiya Harakat, is the only one to be seen, while the Maoist parties and the radical leftist Kurds are very vocal against Israel.

The converts to Islam

There is a long tradition of the French elites' fascination with Islam. The general Jacques-Fran?ois de Menou, who was second to general Bonaparte during his expedition to Egypt, and brought the Rosetta Stone to Alexandria, converted to Islam. Henry Corbin (1903-78) and Louis Massignon (1883-1962), the most well-known orientalist of their time, although they did not convert, were strongly attracted by Moslem esotericism and spirituality, and the latter became a very harsh critic of Zionism until his death. Massignon's work was decisive in the conversion of Vincent-Mansour Monteil (b.1913), a former colonial army officer in Morocco, who was a UN observer in Palestine in 1948, converted in Nouakchott in 1977 and turned an antisemite, supporting Ayatollah Komeiny and Mouammar Khadafi, then promoting freedom of speech for Holocaust deniers in a book supporting Faurisson (“Intolerable intolerance”, 1981).

From the colonial times up to the 80s, conversion to Islam was mostly the matter of a personal search for spirituality and was restricted to the intellectual milieu: the orientalist Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch (1909-2001), the choreographer Maurice B?jart, the communist-turned Holocaust denier and philosopher Roger Garaudy, are exemples. In the last few years, a new wave of conversions has begun, which is that of native Frenchmen, mostly from Catholic families, either practising or not, who grew up in a predominantly Moslem neighborhood

(typically the suburbs of a big city), and chose to follow Islam because it was the religion of the people they socialized with. A fascinating account of such conversions is to be found on the French-language websites specifically aimed at newcomers to the faith, such as www.air-islam.com/convertis and www.islamic-knowledge.com/Francais/Invitation.

The main question with those conversions is whether they stem from a genuine belief in Islam as a set of values or mean what the British sociologist, Grace Davie, called “belonging without believing”, that is, the feeling of being the member of a community (in which case conversion to Islam may well mean entering into one of the “urban tribes” studied by the sociologist Michel Maffesoli or be what German philosophy named a “Lebenswelt” - a “world to live”-).

What role do converts play within French Islam today? For reasons which have to do with the fear of Islamic radicals, the media devoted much attention to those who engaged into terrorist activity: to the al Qaeda cell which was dismantled in Roubaix in 1996, belonged Lionel Dumont (who converted while being a soldier on duty in Somalia) and Christophe Caze, both of whom fought in Bosnia against the Serbs. In 2001, the Dutch police arrested Jerome and David Courtallier, two brothers and suspected terrorists, the latter having been trained in Afghanistan. And one should pay attention to the growing number of prison inmates who convert, one striking example being Rgis Schleicher, a former (Jewish) member of the far-left pro-Palestinian terrorist group, Action Directe, who seem to have been influenced by a co-detainee, George Ibrahim Abdallah, who is responsible for the murder of the Israeli military attache in Paris, Yaacov Barsimantov.

But there are of course more positive stories: that of converts who come to occupy prominent positions within the community. As said before, the FNMF leadership, at the start, included two of them, Daniel Youssouf Leclercq and Ali-Didier Bourg, its spokesman. While he was a Moslem activist, Bourg was also active within the Human Rights movement as a branch chairman of the leftist Ligue des Droits de l’Homme and showed his concern for his fellow citizens by being a delegate of the Socialist-leaning school parent’s association, FCPE, which promotes a strictly secular agenda...in what is surely France’s most reactionary and clerical (Catholic) city, Versailles.

Many Moslems rely, when coming to learn how to pray, on Yacoub Roty’s books, published by al-Tawhid editions. And Moslem internet hooks, when connecting to the must-read website www.oumma.com, have to do with Emmanuel Dubuc, a convert from a middle-sized city in the half-Catholic right, half Communist departement of Cher. As in Judaism, there is no central authority in charge of conversions, thus no reliable statistics. However, a conservative estimate is between 30,000 and 50,000. On the basis of conversions registered with the Mosque de Paris, it was said that one third of those were the consequence of a trip to a Moslem country or meeting a Moslem and wanting to marry her/him, while two thirds were the

result of a personal belief that Islam is the truth .In 1983, some sources said that 55%of converts were women.

French overseas territories

In the Indian Ocean, the Reunion Island has a population of nearly 50,000 Moslems out of 700,000. Most of them are Gujarati Indians of the Sunni rite, called “zarabes” by the non-Moslem locals. In the capital city, Saint-Denis, the Noor al Islam mosque was built in 1905, that is before that of Paris. Moslems on the island enjoy rights which are unknown on the mainland, such as having their own private cemeteries (In Saint-Denis, since 1915) and running a medersa which is supervised by the State, offering a mix of religious and secular education for children under 10. All the imams there are French citizens.

In the election to the local CFCM branch, the moderate slate led by Farouck Omarjee, chairman of the Saint-Pierre mosque, won over a more militant slate led by the chairman of the Islam Sounnat Jamat of Saint-Denis. Another French island is Mayotte, in the Comoros archipelago, which chose in 1976 to remain French territory after the country gained independence. The population is 135 000. 97,1% of them follows Islam mixed with local animist creeds, while a small Indian minority, speaking Gujrati, follows the Shiite rite. As a unique case in France, Mayotte is ruled by French penal law and, for personal status and real estate, by Islamic law, under the supervision of cadis (judges) who are appointed by the French administrative authority. So far, the island has not witnessed any emergence of radical Islam. When the State Secretary for Overseas Territories visited the island, in October 2001, the Great Cadi of Mayotte said that” It is important to anticipate and ask ourselves about the eventual emergence of integrism, but there is no reason to fear an extremist upsurge, as long as the people of Mayotte can learn and practise their religion without constraints.”

In the Caribbean, local estimates are that about 2,600 Moslems live in Guadeloupe, Martinique and Haiti (which is an independent country). In Martinique, there is a large and wealthy Palestinian community with an Islamic centre (Centre culturel islamique de la Martinique), whose imam is paid by the Saudi”Dar el Iftah.”The International Islamic Federation of Islamic Students(IIFSO) helps by sending printed material, and one native Muslim was recently reported to study in Saudi Arabia, expectedly to be employed by the organization when he comes back. Pro-Palestinian activists there are mainly radical leftists who support independence, like, in Martinique, Combat ouvrier, the local branch of Arlette Laguiller’s Trotskyite group, which in 2002 demonstrated to the cry of “Free Palestine, down with Sharon’s and Bush’s criminal policies.”

Conclusion: A growing minority, but not the majority of believers

It is a reality that the Islamist and even radical groups have acquired a following, especially among the youth, and more so since the Gulf War. It is also a sad reality that the level of anti-Semitic incidents in France has reached unprecedented heights in 2001-2002, that is, at a time when the September 11th attacks by Al Qaida, and the Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorist attacks on civilian Israeli people, were felt by Jews worldwide as the symptom of a new wave of anti-Semitism which is thought by many to be more dangerous than the anti-Semitism of the extreme right.

The French situation, however, is not a black and white picture. If we consider the number of Moslems living in the country, the overwhelming majority is no threat to the State or to the Jewish community. It can even be said that the secular radical groups, whether Arab, Turkish or Kurdish, which demonstrate their support for the Palestinian cause in the streets of Paris, use a rhetoric which is more violent against Israel and the Jews than that of the Islamist movements. The Association de Solidarit? Franco-Palestinienne (AFSP), the only one whose leaflets end with “Glory to the Martyrs” and which supports Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, is a splinter group from the very leftist Association M?dicale Franco-Palestinienne (once led by Communist Party members). The Mouvement de l’Immigration et des Banlieues (MIB), a strictly secular group of second-generation Arab immigrants fighting for civil rights and the Comit?s Palestine, refer to a pan-Arab ideology which considers Islam as part of the Arabic culture, but not as a dogma.

One can even find far-left groups, which support the comeback of second-generation immigrants to orthodox Islam as a sign of their re-appropriation of ethnic identity against the former colonizer, and as a sign of revolt against capitalism and the “imperialist world order.” As an example, the “Socialisme par en-bas” movement, a Trotskyite faction linked to the UK Socialist Workers’ Party, uses the slogan “ we are all Moslems”, and has acquired a large following in some universities, even taking control of the “Agir contre la Guerre” movement which organized the anti-US intervention demos. The “anti-imperialist” meaning of Islam is such, on the far-left, that an underground publication titled “Iqra” (<http://chez.com/iqra>) features a bland of Islamist, far-left Action Directe-style language, which also refers to the anti-Jewish conspiracy theories. And last but not least, one should remind that in the French prisons, a solidarity movement with the detainees of the Neve Tirza prison in Ramleh (most of them Islamist terrorists) was launched in August 2002 by the Action Directe inmates, including R?gis Schleicher and with the support of George Ibrahim Abdallah. As one may have guessed, most inmates who followed the movement were of North African origin.

So the problem is not so much to which extent the Moslem community today in France is committed to Islamism. It is rather the fact that the vast majority of those who refer to orthodox Islam want to have their right to live by their own sets of values recognized by the French state, which historically, was built upon a strict adherence to secularism. A growing number of non-practising Moslems also want the State to acknowledge their existence as an Arab community. They develop some kind of a counter-culture which can be seen by the launching on the market of the “Mecca-Cola” or “Muslim Up” beverages and of the “Himaya” sportswear company, clearly sold as substitutes to the “US- Zionist-state-supporting” products. They are at the spearhead of the movement in favor of the boycott of Israel.

The orthodox Moslems today do not see “hijra” (emigration to a Moslem country) as their future. They rather seek to build what the sociologist Lijphardt, or political scientists Blaise and Mertens in Belgium, have called a “Moslem third pillar of society”, alongside the Christian and secular socialist traditions which are the cornerstones of French society since 1789. The Jewish community of France, long committed to supporting the Republican model of being “a Jew at home and a citizen outside” never had such a claim. So, in a country where the communitarian model more and more supersedes the old secular one, it will have to find new ways to counter the growing influence of Moslem anti-Zionism. According to a poll on the French and their attitude towards religion, published in April 2003, for the first time in history, 6% declared themselves Moslem, against a mere 2% in 1994. At the same time, the number of those who declared themselves as Jews dropped below the 1% mark. French pollsters now indicate that in every opinion poll, the sample of those who say they are Moslem is “significant”, that is, superior to 50 out of 1000. The political future of the Jewish community in France depends on those figures.

Notes:

1. According 1999 population census, there are 4,31 million foreigners or French citizens born abroad, that is 7,4% of the population. 1,56 million of them hold french citizenship. Immigration figures are stable since 1975. People from Algeria are 575 740; from Morocco: 521059; from Tunisia: 201700; from Turkey: 175987; from Senegal: 53859

2. Olivier Roy: L'islam mondialis?, Editions du Seuil, 2002, p.7

3. Follow-up reports are available on the website: www.actuj.com

4. Online edition at: www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism

5. Strangely enough, but may be not so, the crusaders left France in order "to free the tomb of Christ" from Moslem domination. And on their way, they exterminated the thriving Jewish communities of the Rhin valley, including those of Alsace, which three times chose to side along France(1870;1918;1939) against German occupation.

6. X.Ternisien: La France des mosqu?es, Editions Albin Michel, 2002

7. Cf. Mark Sedgwick, Les confr?ries n?o-soufies dans la mouvance gu?nonienne, in : Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, section des sciences religieuses, n?109 (2000-2001),pp.295-98

8. In Morocco,this tariqa refrains from any overt political activity, but is, according to Abdessamad Dialmy from the university of F?s, " islamist-to be-movement." Cf. A.Dialmy, L'islamisme marocain entre r?volution et int?gration, in Archives de sciences sociales des religions, n?110,p.5-27, April-June 2000

9. According to Odile Cimetiere and Olivier Bot in the daily Le Midi libre (Dec.10th,2002, the tariqa has around 100 followers in France, mostly converts

10. On his life, see:Ousmane Kane (University of Saint Louis, Senegal), R?sum? de la vie de Baye, in Dictionnaire des savants et grandes figures du monde musulman p?riph?rique, du XIX? si?cle ? nos jours, n?1, april 1992

11. On the links between the Tijaniya and radical Islam in Nigeria and Sudan, see: Marc-Antoine Prouse de Montclos, "Nigeria et Soudan, y a-t-il une vie après la sharia?", in Etudes n°5, novembre 2001

12. On April 25th 2001, the Qatari newspaper al Raya reported that sheikh Qaradawi declared the suicide bombings "permissible and commandable in Islam", saying that those "heroic martyrdom operations" are "the only language the jews understand."

13. He is a relative of the Algerian islamist leader, Mahfoud Nahnah.

14. Cf. the article by Martine Laronche in Le Monde, Dec.7th,2002

15. The moderate approach is that of Fatiha Kaoues, a regular contributor and webmistress of the www.arabesques.org website, who acknowledged that one of the problem within the Moslem community, regarding their opinion on the Middle-East situation, is that "some of them want to go back to the pre-1948 situation, which is impossible." Source: meeting with F.Kaoues, March 2003, Paris.

16. When visiting the Ahbach center on boulevard Ornano in Paris, in June 2002, the author, presenting himself as a non-moslem, was invited to join the daily Quran classes with his family and was able to buy the basic religion textbook for primary school pupils: La culture islamique, Ed. Darou al Mashari li t-Tibaati wan Nachr, march 2000. This would of course not have been possible in any salafi or even tablighi mosque. As other gesture to look moderate, the Ahbach have their textbooks published under the spiritual guidance and with the approval of scholars from Al-Azhar university in Cairo, the orthodox Sunni reference for religious studies.

17. I am most grateful to Marc-Antoine Prouse de Montclos, political scientist at the IRD, Paris, for his information on islam in the Comoros.

18. On this topic: Catherine de Wenden: South Asian Migrants in the Parisian and Francilian Economy: a chronological overview of the South groups'Entry in the Labour Market, research paper for the European Commission (unpublished), December 2001, 40p

19. The leader of this group, some 30-people strong, wore a T-shirt with the English-language slogan: "Proud to be a Pakistani." In April 2003, the Association Interculturelle des Pakistanais en France, headquartered at the Ali Mosque, put posters in the area in support of the French opposition to US intervention in Iraq.

20. The author visited the mosque in the Cité Industrielle (Paris 11th district) in July 2002. Posters calling for the boycott of Israeli and "zionist-made" goods were on the walls of the prayer room, which has a capacity of 100. The association is chaired by a turkish small business

owner in the 9th of Paris. Those who attend are remarkable in that they do not wear the traditional islamic garb and keep a very low-key profile.

21. A.Basaran: Les constats concernant ?cole-parents, article at www.cfait.org/IMMIGRATION/analyse.36.html