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The Beur uprising

Poverty and Muslim atheists in France

During the riots in France in November 2005, much was made of the increasing religious radicalism of the Muslim youth. But it is not so much cultural difference and Islamism that is taking young Muslims to the street, says Turkish sociologist Ayhan Kaya, as a mass reaction to two centuries of colonialism and racism, compounded by recent poverty and exclusion. Does the bell toll for French Republicanism?

In the western European context, neighbourly relations are transformed into relations revolving around religious, ethnic and cultural differences. One in ten residents in Western European nations is a migrant, and is culturally different from the majority. Meanwhile, only one in seventy people is a migrant in the southern hemisphere. This is the main reason Western nations are different in terms of cohabitation with ethno-culturally and religiously different neighbours. This mode of relationship has created tension over the centuries, leading to the intimidation, annihilation or assimilation of some neighbours. Such tension has generally existed during eras of socio-political or socio-economic structural problems. We know that peaceful coexistence can prevail during times of wealth. However, during times of political, legal and economic crises, we have borne witness to many accounts where our "next door neighbours" have been subject to exclusion, isolation or minorization mechanisms to become "the Others" and "the enemies within". A most obvious example of this experience is how Muslim migrants in Western nations are becoming the Others. Western democracies that do not grant sufficient political rights to migrants and do not support them to ensure that they are politically represented face some important dilemmas. It is not surprising that such "democratic" nation-states that cannot overcome their structural problems and thus encounter legitimacy crises take a shortcut and place the burden of ongoing structural problems to the "guests next door", turning them into "enemies within". It is possible to explain the recent violent uprising in France in this framework.

The problem of integrating the immigrant population was brought to attention once more following the acts of violence that took place in the suburbs of Paris during late October 2005, and spread to other French cities, Belgium, Holland, even Germany. When two young North African men were electrocuted as they were trying to hide from the Paris police in a power transformer, millions of young Muslims, most of them North Africans, took to the streets. How to interpret the actions of violence and hate, mostly by the third-generation immigrants in the country, has become a priority on the agenda of international community. The President of France implied that the uprising was the consequence of structural problems, providing subtle hints of his awareness of the core of the problem, while the Secretary of Internal Affairs, Nikolas Sarkozy, chose to describe the Muslim suburban youth with attributes such as "criminal", "vagabond", "ruffian" and "scum", demonstrating his effort to win

the support of French public opinion. Since French politicians and intellectuals are still far from bringing critical explanations to the substance of the matter at hand and easing tension within society, a dangerous chasm has opened between the mostly Catholic French majority, and the Muslim immigrants, whose population numbers close to five million.

While this event seemed extreme, with the burning of several hundred cars, attacks on public buildings, aggravation of social tension and the championing of Muslim identity, it must be noted that similar events have been frequent in France in the past two decades. Mathieu Kassowitz's 1996 film, *La Haine* (Hate), had especially caught the attention of immigrant youth across the world. This cult film brought an acute and unhibited perspective on the daily lives of the Muslim and Jewish youth living in the suburbs of Paris. It disclosed the isolation, loneliness, and hopelessness of these young people as well as the problems of education, employment, and xenophobia they face, and made an accurate depiction of the protest culture (rap, graffiti, break–dance, hip–hop) they produce. Kasowitz underlined that especially the Northern African youth (*beurs*) found their salvation in militant Islamic movements and in street gangs. It should be remembered that similar events had occurred when a young motorcycle rider was shot to death by a policeman in the Vaulx–en–Velin suburb of Lyon, in October 1990.¹

During both current and past uprisings (in the 1990s), public opinion underlined the progressively more radical Islamic identity adopted by the youth. In view of the ever–increasing popularity of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis, developed in 1992, it becomes clear why Islamic entity is so intensively questioned and made an issue of in the West. It is apparent that identity politics with cultural, ethnic and religious features is primarily produced by the marginal, minority, and migrant groups that mostly belong to the working or lower classes. This recalls Alisdair MacIntyre's alternative modes of politics. According to MacIntyre,² there are two modes of politics: *politics of the insiders* and *politics of the outsiders*. The insiders carry on their political practice via legitimate political institutions (the parliament, political parties, the media), while the outsiders resort to culture, ethnicity, religion, and traditions to achieve their goals. Therefore, the main motive behind the development of ethno–cultural and religious inclinations by migrant and minority groups can be perceived as their concern to be attached to the political–public sphere.

Demands for democratic political involvement

The ethno–cultural and religious identities developed by minorities faced with apparent inequality in political representation should be taken as a product of the quest for rights and justice. It should be remembered that Muslims, who are politically underrepresented and perceived as a threat to national and social security, can be expected to turn inward and establish parallel societies. The Islamic parallel societies manifest in Western nations such as France, Germany, England, Holland, and Denmark are not the result of the conservatism of the Muslims, but their reaction to the structural and political mechanisms of exclusion. In other words, religiosity is too important to be limited to the beliefs of the said minorities, because what lies beneath religiosities are the structural problems of racism, xenophobia, poverty and unemployment. Although it is without doubt that social and class tensions erupt from such structural problems, conservative administrations, the state, the media, and even intellectuals intentionally or unintentionally make wrong diagnoses of and misrepresent the issue to the public, which in turn make it

almost impossible to solve it. Is it really their cultural differences, their anti-integrationist, reactionary attitude, and their Islamic identity that considers fighting against Christianity a religious duty, that takes Muslims to the street? Or, are their mass-opposition and social movements the manifestation of a resistance against almost two centuries of colonialism, exclusion, racism, xenophobia, and the more recent conditions of poverty? Answers to these two essential questions provide clues to how individuals, institutions and the state approaches the problem. Those who answer the first question positively find the Islamic, the culturally different, and the ethnically diverse "problematic" by nature. The "Others" are expected to eliminate their differences and become assimilated into the dominant civilization project. In the French example, the main problem is that they pose an attitude ill-suited to the Republic of France, with its discourse of "equality, fraternity, liberty", and its values.

In fact, upon a deeper inquiry into the religious inclinations of millions of Northern and Central African Muslims living in France, it will be seen that especially the religious identity adopted by the Muslim youth is not closely related to the dreaded "radical Islamic identity". Needless to say, some young Muslims have chosen a more fundamentalist view of Islam under the influence of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) that is primarily organized in Algeria and earned a degree of legitimacy against the colonialist French state.³ However, recent studies both in France and other countries show that young Muslims hold their Islamic identity only at a symbolic level, that most do not observe religious rites such as daily prayers and fasting (during the month of Ramadan), and that they adopt an increasingly secular (material) worldview.⁴ In fact, the works of Hargreaves⁵ and Taibalat⁶ mention that some young Northern Africans in France (*beur* in French) see themselves as "*Atheist Muslims*".

There may be different answers to why such social tensions and uprisings occur repeatedly in France. The aim of this essay is, with reference to a study conducted in France in 2004, to assert that the recent acts of violence are not unexpected, but rather that they have a structural background. In 2004, together with sociologist Ferhat Kentel, I conducted a [study](#) on behalf of the Istanbul Bilgi University Centre for Migration Research. The quantitative and qualitative study was conducted among Turkish migrants in Germany and France. The methodology consisted of one-to-one polling with 100 questions, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. The study involved approximately 1000 people in Germany and 700 people in France, and the results can be considered highly representative. They show us that migrants in Western Europe are faced with important structural problems. It has been observed that the de-industrialization process across Western Europe in the last two decades has left migrants facing problems unemployment, poverty, and racism. Although the study mainly aimed to map the paradigms of Turkish migrants living in both countries, it is possible to extrapolate results to all migrants, especially Muslims, living in the West.

The migration process in France

France was faced with a need for foreign manpower in the aftermath of World War II, and received migrant workers from mid-1950s to the beginning of the 1970s. However, only a part of the postwar discussions on migration evolved around migrant workers; another important issue was the need for population growth in the face of decreasing domestic birth rates. By separating residence permits from work permits, the government opened the gates to workers

seeking employment and their families. This helped migrants view themselves not as temporary workers, but as permanent residents⁷ Although there were no ethnic quotas, French administrations preferred migrants from former colonies and Europe over migrants from Africa or Asia. Algeria was followed by Portugal, Morocco, Italy, Spain, Tunisia, and Turkey chronologically and in number of migrants. The first settlers were French nationals living in Algeria, known as *piets-noirs*,⁸ and were followed by Algerians who fought on France's side during the Algerian war of independence. Following the defeat of France, many allies of the former colonist were executed by Algerian nationalists, but more managed to escape to France. In 1962, shortly after the independence of Algeria, the two governments signed a workforce agreement that led to a concentration of Algerian population in Paris, Lyon and Marseille. They were followed by the Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Turkish.

Emigrants'countries of origin	Pop.	Emigrants'countries of origin	Pop.
Algeria	1,550,000	Turkey	341,000
Morocco	1,000,000	Converts	40,000
Tunis	350,000	Legal/Illegal Refugees	350,000
Central Africa	250,000	Asians	100,000
Other	100,000		
Total			4,181,000

Table: Origins of the Muslim population⁹

Although worker migration was banned by the conservative Valéry Giscard d'Estaing administration in 1974, migration from North Africa, Central Africa, and Turkey continued in the form of family re-union and the illegal immigration of people entering as tourists. Migration continues even today through marriage and asylum seeking. The conservative government attempted to decrease the foreign population in the country through repatriation campaigns that included financial incentives. Between April 1971 and November 1981, the government of France paid each unemployed immigrant who volunteered to return home with his family the sum of 10,000 Francs. Although this campaign was targeted towards non-EU nationals, very few migrants from the Third World accepted the offer. Returning immigrants were mostly from Spain and Portugal, where democratic governments had been re-established. Through these measures, the population of "foreigners" remained constant throughout the last quarter of the 20th century.¹⁰

The French Republic and democratization

From the French Revolution onwards, France has defined citizenship along political lines rather than ethno-cultural lines, and has invited all "freedom-loving" foreigners to join France. The decree of 26 August 1792 entitled all foreigners who supported liberty and the principles of the revolution with their action or thinking, to French citizenship. While the principle of *jus sanguinis* granted automatic French citizenship to anyone born of French parents in France, the revolutionaries attributed certain conditions to the principle of *jus soli* that would ensure love for and loyalty to France. The supremacy of the *jus soli* principle has not changed since the Revolution. The citizenship law of 1851 granted French citizenship to third-generation migrants, while the amendment in 1889 allowed second-generation migrants to become legal citizens.¹¹ The amendment of 1889 has survived to date with little change.

French citizenship law includes two articles that solidify the *jus soli* principle: art. 23 grants citizenship as a birthright to third-generation migrants, while art. 44 states that second-generation migrants born in France and residing in the

country since the age of 13 will be entitled to citizenship at 18 unless they choose another citizenship or commit certain crimes. The law also allows double citizenship. However, it has been recently criticized by nationalists claiming that it made foreigners who do not "feel French at heart" (*Français de coeur*) citizens on paper. Nationalist criticism toward the *jus soli* principle has been growing since the beginning of the 1990s, when alleged Islamic fundamentalism began to emerge in the West.

The French saw themselves as an integrationist nation, but were unprepared against the rapidly rising presence of Muslims and people of other colours. Alec Hargreaves summarizes this situation as follows:

The virtual invisibility of former generations of immigrants and their children as well as grandchildren is perceived as the evidence of their successful integration. It is felt that post-war migrants and especially the migrants of the last two decades threaten this tradition. It has become a common claim that it is harder to integrate migrants from the Third World as opposed to those from Europe. Instead of dissolving within the society without a trace, they are becoming more visible in an era when consecutive governments claim that "migration is over". What is frightening is that migration is beginning to create permanent and diverse minorities within the French society.¹²

For an entire century, France defined second-generation immigrants as citizens. This was an undisputed practice until recently. However, the application of the *jus soli* principle met with severe attacks from the extreme right. The National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen would openly say, "you must deserve to be French" (*Etre Français, cela se mérite*). Centre-right parties under the influence of the National Front proposed the rejection of automatic French citizenship, and brought up the issue during the 1986 legislative year. Second-generation migrants would no longer be granted French citizenship according to the *jus soli* principle; they would have to apply for it and obtain the consent of the state. The Chirac administration proposed to limit the *jus soli* principle in the case of migrants, but the proposal met with strong opposition, and was finally removed from the agenda. A commission that defended the expansion rather than the limitation of French citizenship rights was established¹³. The report of this commission became the foundation of the law (nr 93.933) adopted on 22 July 1993. The most significant aspect of this law was the principle of consent, which essentially stated that "anyone born of foreign parents in France will be entitled to French citizenship upon application between the ages of 16 to 21, provided the person has been residing in the country for at least five years and not been convicted of a crime". Those who explicitly waive their right to become French citizens during the year before they reach adulthood, or are convicted of certain crimes, would not be entitled to citizenship.

Accession to citizenship is secondary compared to obtaining citizenship. Contrary to the declaration, accession is optional, that is, contingent upon the control and approval of the authorities. The procedure requires five years of residence, reaching the age of maturity, knowledge of the language, assimilation into French society, having not received a jail sentence in excess of six months, or committed crimes against the security of the state, all of which mean "good standing". Unlike many other nations, France does not require waiver of original citizenship. Accession is based upon assimilation, interest, affection, and loyalty of resident aliens; therefore, the applications of

foreigners whose families live abroad are generally refused. It can be said that the principle of creating politically equal citizens in the Fifth Republic faces major dilemmas that began with De Gaulle and continues to date. Although France set out to create politically equal citizens with no regard to religion, language, race, ethnicity and gender, it no longer recognizes the identity politics developed especially by migrants, ignores the cultural, religious and ethnic differences emphasized by minorities, and adopts an assimilation policy, all of which serve to show that the Republican project and its values are under threat. These demands, voiced by migrants and minorities and left unsolved by the Republic, clearly show that the Republic needs to be democratized.

Dilemmas of national education

The French Republican ideal has been subject to several criticisms recently. On the one hand, certain changes in French public life oppose the traditional assumption of the oneness and indivisibility of France. On the other hand, the Territorial Laws of New Caledonia and French Polynesia, as well as the legislative authority granted to the Corsican parliament, imply that the Republic of France is still "one", but no longer "indivisible". Moreover, the evident discrimination in the public sphere, mostly experienced and voiced by Muslims (especially Algerians) strongly suggests the failure of a national education apparatus designed to produce French citizens and protect the homogeneous French nation.¹⁴

France cannot provide migrants and their children with a platform where they can convert their cultural capital to economic capital upon graduation. As such, it can be said that France, much like many other Western nations, discriminates against migrant families on a business and economic level. Moreover, Tribalat¹⁵ asserts that illiteracy is higher among Moroccans and Algerians. The inability of Muslims to socially mobilize themselves in public life leads to the emergence of strong mental constructs that define social, economic, and educational problems of the nation in terms of "backward cultures". This mentality makes it difficult to implement an all-encompassing education system. Sociologist François Dubet observes the following:

Relations in schools, much like relations in society as a whole, are becoming increasingly racist. Individuals are perceived and branded as people with "ethnic identities". To put it simply, whereas schools would define some students as working-class children in the past, now they define them as children of emigrants. While a child's problems would be attributed to his/her father's poverty in the past, now they are being attributed to the fact that his/her father is a migrant, even though the child belongs to the third generation. The behaviour of male children would be described as "hostile" in the past; now the behaviour itself is being described as "ethnic".¹⁶

Along with the racialization of the discourse on social mobility and educational failure comes the fact that almost no Muslim has a seat local or national parliaments today. The combination of the absence of successful models with racist branding makes it far more difficult for children of ethnic minorities to identify with a republican discourse that fails to provide any material capital to them.¹⁷ Lately, France has been meeting with much resistance in its effort to raise citizens loyal to the Republican principles of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". The education of citizens through the national school system was always considered as an apparatus to integrate various

groups within a unitary educational system that was defined as republican. Universal and liberal values were always placed before cultural, ethnic and religious identities. This produces a static and assimilation-oriented French society to which children must conform.

In our in-depth interviews and observations during the *Euro-Turks study*, the unique condition of the youth, who feel and reflect social changes and crises most directly, is highlighted. Just as "success" and "integration" is manifested in "hybrid" form, so "failure" is expressed in similar form. The inability to earn a place in education or work brings resentment. Isolation, humiliation, and racism, burdening especially young North Africans due to the difference in their colour, names, and religion, lays the ground for an anarchist attitude among them. The state these young people are in is a kind of "dis-establishment", and the only thing they can establish themselves in or hang on to is a feeling of "we" produced through fictitious references. It is very easy for the statement "one can become a terrorist" to enter the language of these youngsters.

As Tribalat¹⁸ expresses, "If I am to meet with discrimination, what is the point of working hard for success in school?"¹⁹ Tribalat asserts that discrimination poses a problem of inconsistency between the republican ideal and the reality of the French society. Until recently, speaking about discrimination was a taboo because it was a threat to republicanism.²⁰ The opinions of Pierre Sadran openly show the legitimacy crisis of the French republican ideology:

The French have come to lose their belief in being "privileged". First and foremost, the country has been shaken from above and from below by the stagnancy of the nation-state, decentralization, and the dynamics of European integration. Secondly, the French universality should abandon its ambition to represent a certain adaptation of universality, and should be content with representing a specific universality... Finally, the French social integration model based on the republican school no longer functions as before. The 1998 World Cup held in France gathered the different cultures of France not around the blue, white and red colours of the national flag, but around the Black-White-Beur colours of the players in the national team.²¹

There is no doubt that the myth of republicanism in France is under attack from several fronts. There is a paradox deep within the country. On the one hand, the French state is changing due to decentralization and European integration, while on the other hand the social and political culture of the country is still being shaped by the myth about a holistic and republican state. Regarding migration policy, migrants still appear to be subject to the notion of universality that requires them to be assimilated in the traditional political values of the French nation. It is probable the assimilationist integration which the migrants are subject to will result in culturalism and identity politics among them. Identity politics can be expected to fortify the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries between the majority and the minorities.

Structural problems and symbolic religiosity

While some Muslim migrants in the West have some degree of social mobility, the rest are doomed to an existence of poverty and exclusion. It is very possible to hear in the suburbs of Paris the voice of masses that are not

employed in any formal job, become progressively poorer, and whose numbers are on the rise. Some of these benefit from the social welfare system by receiving unemployment compensation from the government, but an increasing number not only do not receive any aid from the state, but are in no position to contribute to the social security system due to their chronic unemployment. Unemployment, no doubt, is the result of the global stagnation. Unemployed masses, frequently seen in neighbourhoods such as Kreuzberg (Berlin), Keupstrasse (Cologne), Villier le Bel (Paris),²² are truly disadvantaged. The state of structural exclusion and dispossession they are in cannot be adequately described by "isolation" or "marginality", but in some cases with a term like "hyper-isolation". Muslims in the suburbs of large cities attend their isolated schools, pray at their mosques, shop at their isolated stores and develop their own marginal economy. The advance of the Muslim middle-class from the suburbs to the new neighbourhoods has left only the poorest of the poor behind — increasingly distanced from the urban economy at large, and deprived of the institutional support that allows a bare existence in the ghettos of a hostile world. In an age when industrial production is in rapid descent, these people cannot adapt to the changing economy, and fall into a state of constant exclusion and loneliness.²³

What can best describe the viewpoint of these "hyper-isolated" people is *nihilism*, in other words, *anarchism*. Religion and ethnicity offer attractive "solutions" for people entangled in intertwined problems. It is not surprising for masses who have a gloomy outlook of the future, who cannot benefit from the society and who are cast aside by global capitalism to resort to religion, ethnicity, language, and tradition, all of which they believe cannot be pried from their hands, and to define themselves in those terms. In fact, it is consistent in itself. However, a detailed analysis must be made of the Islamic character as heavily underlined by young Muslim migrants in frequent acts of violence. If the analysis is not made rigorously, it will serve to affirm, and thus re-produce, the existing "clash of civilizations" thesis. Therefore, it is supremely important to underline that the Islamic identity used by the youth, who show their resistance to the system through different ways (music, graffiti, dance, looting, arson) in France and in other Western nations, is not necessarily essentialist or radical. The Islamic reference used in such acts of opposition is mostly expressive of the need to belong to a legitimate global discourse such as that of Islam, and to derive a symbolic power from this. Moreover, it should be remembered that the recent acts of violence, erupting in Paris and rapidly spreading to other cities and countries, are also an indication of the solidarity among the Islamic diaspora.

Islam is perceived by Westerners as a threat to the European lifestyle. Islamic fundamentalism is depicted as the source of xenophobic, racist and violent behaviour in the West. However, reversing the point of view, the rise in religious values may be interpreted as the result of structural problems such as poverty, unemployment, racism, xenophobia, isolation, constraints in political representation, and the threat of assimilation. In order to cope with these challenges, discourses on culture, identity, religion, ethnicity, traditions and the past have become the most significant existence strategy for minorities in general, and immigrants in particular. Reconstituting the past and resorting to culture, ethnicity and religion seem to serve a dual purpose for immigrant communities: a) as a way to be contemporary without criticizing the existing status quo — "glorious" past, authentic culture, ethnicity, and religion are used by diasporic subjects as a strategic instrument to resist exclusion, poverty, racism, and institutional discrimination; b) Secondly, as a way to give an individual the feeling of independence from the criteria imposed by the

majority society, because the past, traditions, culture, and religion symbolize values and beliefs that the diasporic subjects believe cannot be taken away from them.

In this context, the opinions of Herbert Gans on symbolic ethnicity and religiosity are very revealing. According to Gans,²⁴ symbolic ethnicity and religiosity are accessible resources for those who want to keep away from ethnic or religious essentialism, yet wish to experience ethnic or religious sensations from time to time. The adoption of ethnicity and religion by Euro-Turks as a source of identity is a non-essentialist attitude. This is an identification process that Gans²⁵ defines as "symbolic ethnicity", or what I call "symbolic religiosity". This process shows that the essentially religious becomes ethnic, and that "ethnicity" and "religiosity" are the two most important components of identity politics as developed by minorities under the threat of a structural isolation imposed by majority society. The following quotation from Gans clearly summarizes this process:

As ethnic cultures and groups become less functional and identity becomes the primary means of being ethnic (and religious), ethnicity (and religiosity) gains a more symbolic than instrumental function in people's lives, and lose its importance in the order of family life, becomes a leisure activity. Symbolic behaviour can be manifested in different ways, but frequently includes the use of symbols. Ethnic symbols are mostly individual cultural practices that have been acquired from older ethnic cultures; they are abstracted from that culture and stripped of their original meanings.

The quotation gives us an idea of the context in which the concept of "Muslim atheist" was used by young North Africans to define themselves. If religiosity and atheism are two opposite concepts, the "Muslim" qualifier before the "atheist" concept must bear a meaning other than religiosity. The "Muslim" adjective as used in this phrase is a reference to a type of ethnicity. Even here, the use of Islam expresses the resistance and opposition of the minority against the majority and the official. Having established that they are regarded with prejudice by the majority they live among, minority groups are inclined to emphasize such prejudicial adjectives that they believe pose a problem for the majority during their identification process; such as underlining the concepts of Islam or Muslim, which they believe pose a problem for the Christian majority, when expressing their identity. The concepts of Islam or Muslim refer to politically or economically created boundaries between the majority and the minorities, and thus bear an ethnic character.

Religion is an important cultural source for the development of identity among the diaspora. However, religion no longer has an essentialist but rather a symbolic meaning for the third and later generations of the diaspora. The significance of religion for youth lies in the fact that these young people are perceived in a prejudiced manner by the majority. The majority uses Islam as the main reference point when defining young people from North Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, Tunisia, or Turkey. For example, young adults of North or Central African origin, who are defined as Islamic by the general French public, believe that their identities are recognized with prejudice. As a reaction, they show increasing symbolic loyalty to religion. An example of this process can be seen among the Turks living in Germany. A Berlin-based Turkish-German rap group in the 1990s explained the choice of *Islamic Force* as its name mainly on the grounds that they wanted to protest

the prejudiced attitude of the German majority towards Islam, and sought to provoke them further. Interestingly, *Islamic Force* was a rap group of a predominantly universal discourse, as opposed to its name (Kaya, 2000).²⁶ Steven Vertovec (1995) explains this expression of identity as "the cultural Islamic identity". There are significant similarities between the young Asian Muslim migrants living in the town of Keighley in Northern England defining themselves as "young Muslims", and the Turkish youth in Berlin or North African youth in France defining themselves along the lines of non-essentialist Islamic codes. These examples show us that cultural identities in the diaspora emerge in the process of dialectical and dialogical relations between the majority and the minorities.

Conclusion

The recent uprising in suburban Paris expresses the reaction of North African Muslim youth to unemployment, poverty, lack of education, inequality, racism, xenophobia, assimilation, loneliness, isolation, and exclusion. The resistance is also an indication that the myth of the politically equal citizen which the French Republican tradition aimed to bring about is dying. The attempt to construct a "politically equal citizen" has manifested itself as the citizen who has not fully achieved political rights. The fact that there is not one Muslim representative in the National Parliament of a nation that harbours nearly five million Muslim citizens, and that Muslim citizens are faced with similar representation issues in local councils has become the leading dilemma of the French Republic. This dilemma is the product of a misinterpretation of recent developments by the French political elite, who have shut their eyes to differences and who have been seduced by the myth that all French citizens are equal regardless of religion, language, race, ethnicity, class and gender. It would be naive to expect a correct reading from French parliamentarians whose average age is highest among EU parliaments.

As de-industrialization and rising inequality in education increasingly alienate immigrants from the Republican project, they have come to hold on to religion, ethnicity, language and tradition, whatever they believe cannot be taken away from them, even more tightly. These parallel social organizations of society are being misinterpreted by the majority, and being attributed to the conservativeness and resistance to integration of Muslim emigrants. As a result, the fact that the structural problems of unemployment, de-industrialization, isolation and racism are what lie behind the formation of parallel societies, have become traditionally ignored. Conservative political elites like Nicolas Sarkozy, who only aim at getting votes, indulge in deliberate misreadings, which result in the notion that immigrants are "enemies within" who must be eliminated. Given the problematic representation of immigrants and Muslims in the media, the issue runs into a dead-end. When all misinterpretations and misvaluations add up, it is easy to see how smoothly "neighbours next door" can be turned into "enemies within".

The bell tolls for the French Fifth Republic. The assimilationist character, the rigid structure that ignores differences, the inability to transfer political rights from theory to practice, the excessively centralized quality of the state, the exaggerated power of the national government, and the high age profile of the parliamentarians (average age in the French National Assembly is 57, while it is 50 in the British House of Commons and 49 in the German Bundestag), has given rise to a social opposition which may be expected to grow in various ways. While important for emigrants, the democratic republic project is also crucial for the French. European norms have recently been becoming definitive

with respect to decentralized governance and the political participation of minorities. Cultural autonomy granted to Corsica, the election of two Muslim members to the European Parliament, the establishment of the Islamic Council of France in 2003 by the Union of Public Movement (UMP) government are important indications that the republic is becoming democratized. Aside from these positive signs, it must be stressed again that the Islamic languages used by young Muslim immigrants is of symbolic quality. This is an ethnic language used by secularized masses. It should be noted that marginal groups who cannot enter the political platform through legitimate political channels will sometimes use the language of religion, ethnicity, and sometimes of violence. The language used by Muslim atheists in France is, in this respect, the expression of such a political search. Many Muslims can find places in the French national team, the hip-hop culture, in cinema, plastic arts and many other fields, while having absolutely no place in the political arena. This imbalance must be corrected. From this perspective, the events in France are actions of immigrants seeking political recognition. It should not be surprising, and not considered as a coincidence that France, the birthplace of the 1968 youth movements, is also the birthplace of immigrants' movements.



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- ¹ Fetzer, Joel S. and J. Christopher Soper, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France and Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, 68.
- ² MacIntyre, Alisdair, *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology*, New York: Schocken Books 1971.
- ³ See: Leveau, Rémy, "The Political Culture of the "Beurs", Steven Vertovec and Ceri Peach (eds.), *Islam in Europe: The Politics of Religion and Community*, London: MacMillan 1997.
- ⁴ See: Hargreaves, Alec G, *Migration, Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary France*, London: Routledge 1995; Tribalat, Michéle, *Faire France: Une enquête sur les immigrés et leurs enfants*, Paris: Éditions La Découverte 1995; and Kaya, Ayhan and Ferhat Kentel, *Euro-Türkler: Türkiye ile Avrupa Birliği Aras da Köprü mü, Engel mi?*, Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayinlari, 2005.
- ⁵ Hargreaves op. cit. 120–1.
- ⁶ Tribalat op. cit. 96–8
- ⁷ Kivisto, Peter, *Multiculturalism in a Global Society*, Oxford: Blackwell 2002, 172.
- ⁸ "Blackfeet" — the name given to white Europeans living in Algeria before its independence.
- ⁹ Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs; "l'Islam dans la République", Haut Conseil à l'intégration, November 2000, 26. It should be noted that figures do not include illegal immigrants.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Brubaker, Rogers, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1992, 85–86

- ¹² Hargreaves op. cit. 26–7.
- ¹³ Brubaker op. cit. 138.
- ¹⁴ The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study, being conducted annually among OECD nations since 2001, shows that the quality and opportunity of education is significantly low in schools in neighbourhoods mostly populated by minorities, that violence is an important problem in these schools, and that the schools receive inadequate technological investment.
- ¹⁵ Tribalat, Michèle, "The French 'Melting Pot': Outdated — or in need of reinvention?" in S. Milner and N. Parsons (eds.), *Reinventing France: State and Society in the Twenty–First Century*, Hampshire: Palgrave 2003, 127–142.
- ¹⁶ Cited in Starkey, Hugh, "Education for Citizenship: Reinventing the French Republic," in Susan Milner and Nick Parsons (eds.) op. cit. 120.
- ¹⁷ Starkey, op. cit. 120
- ¹⁸ Tribalat op. cit.
- ¹⁹ Our data supports Tribalat's findings on the discrimination migrants and foreigners face. Turks in France stated discrimination as the most prominent problem (17 per cent). As the statement of a participant explains: "No country could match the democracy of France until 1985. But now we have the race problem. It is not only Le Pen; the communists view the situation from the same perspective." Cf. Kaya and Kentel op. cit. 33.
- ²⁰ Ibid. 135
- ²¹ Sadran, Pierre, "The French State and the Challenges of the Twenty–First Century," in Susan Milner and Nick Parsons (eds.) op. cit. 49–62.
- ²² These neighbourhoods we have observed during our qualitative research share the common attribute of being ethnically Turkish enclaves. They are only a few of such ethnic enclaves. See Kaya and Kentel, op. cit.
- ²³ Kivisto, op. cit.
- ²⁴ Gans, Herbert, "Symbolic ethnicity: The future of ethnic groups and cultures in America", in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no.1, January 1979, 1–2.
- ²⁵ Gans op. cit. 6.
- ²⁶ Kaya, Ayhan, *Berlin'deki Küçük İstanbul*, İstanbul: Büke Yayinlari 2000.

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