

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FRENCH ANTI-RACIST MOVEMENT AND THE 'MUSLIM QUESTION'

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It has been suggested that there may be less sympathy for the notion that Muslim minorities are subjected to racism by virtue of their real or perceived 'Muslimness' than there is for Jewish minorities in Europe. Public anxiety over the 'Muslim question' leads to hesitancy in naming this phenomenon as 'anti-Muslim sentiment' or 'Islamophobia' (Meer and Modood 2009). This situation is clearly in evidence in contemporary France where the 'Muslim question' has split the anti-racist movement. The split is symptomatic of a more general division within the French Left in relation to Islam and Muslims. It has coincided with a series of controversies and debates relating to Muslims in France that began emerging in the year 2000, foremost among them those relating to the adoption of the law on 'secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools' (also known as the 'Headscarf Law') in 2004. This was then followed by the ban on face covering in 2010 which aimed to stop Muslim women from wearing either the niqab or burqa in public.

The reaction of French anti-racist organisations to these issues may appear confusing to those who have not followed recent public debates on Islam in France. The fact that many of these organisations even supported the implementation of such laws may appear equally, if not more, baffling. In fact, two camps emerged over these issues, encompassing the four main anti-racist organisations active on the national level. Furthermore, there also are internal divisions within these organisations. Problems such as these are not unique to France, but it is arguable that the situation there is particularly complex, as a result of a strict historical and cultural attachment to *Republican* and *secular* values in the country.

In this chapter, I begin by presenting the anti-racist movement in France, introducing its main organisations. I then move to explain how issues relating to anti-Semitism sowed the seeds of discontent between these organisations, and how this informed the split we can now observe within them. I will focus particularly on the crucial period between 2003 and 2004, when the law banning religious symbols in French state schools was being debated, and on how this led to a wider debate amongst anti-racist organisations on the relative merits (and demerits) of the term 'Islamophobia'. I close with a look at how other events relating to Islam in France have reinforced these divisions in the anti-racist movement, and conclude with some reflections on its future.

1. *The French Anti-racist Movement*

The French anti-racist movement, or what might more accurately be called Republican anti-racism (House 2002), has a long and distinguished history, stretching back to the Dreyfus affair in the late 19th century (see Gibb 2005 and Lloyd 1998 for more on anti-racism in France). This affair led to the formation of the country's first anti-racist organisation the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (LDH - Human Rights League) in 1898 (Agrikoliansky 2002, Irvine 2007, Manceron and Naquet 2009). Anti-Semitism was also the catalyst for the creation of the *Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme* (LICRA - International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism) in 1927, in response to the rise of fascism (Allali 2002, Allali and Musicant 1987). Similarly, the *Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples* (MRAP - Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Between Peoples) was set up in 1949 by mostly Jewish members of the French Resistance (Lévy 1999, Lloyd 1998). The fourth key organisation is *SOS-Racisme*, formed in 1984 by a group of Paris-based students and activists (Gibb 1998, 2001).

SOS-Racisme was the only one of these organisations to be founded in response to the racism suffered by post-colonial migrants and their children and, in particular, in reaction to the rise of the right-wing *Front National* (FN - National Front). Most anti-racist organisations in France can be considered as belonging to the left end of the political spectrum, with *SOS-Racisme* particularly close to the French Socialist Party (PS). However, LICRA positions itself as a cross-party group, and its president between January 1999 and January 2010 was a centre-right politician, Patrick Gaubert. There is also much internal diversity within each of these organisations. For example, activists within the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR - Revolutionary Communist League)

once formed a significant bloc within *SOS-Racisme* (Gibb 2001) and its founders all began their political careers on the far left (Juhem 2001).

The organisations that make up the French anti-racist movement have not always seen eye to eye, and share a history of conflict. For instance, LICRA and MRAP have always been rivals as a result of the former seeing itself as being anti-communist, while the latter traditionally enjoyed close links with the *Parti communiste français* (PCF - French Communist Party). The first major disagreement between them came as a result of the Six Day War in 1967, when LICRA criticised MRAP for being too pro-Arab, which led a number of MRAP activists to leave the organisation (Gastaut 2005). At that time, both organisations had a mostly Jewish leadership, which remains the case today for LICRA, whereas MRAP has become more diverse. In the 1980s, divisions between activists with North African and Jewish origins in the anti-racist movement came to a head, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the growing identification of second-generation North Africans in France with the Palestinian cause (Silverstein 2008). The prominence of the pro-Israel *Union des étudiants juifs de France* (UEJF - French Jewish Student Union) within *SOS-Racisme* was a constant source of tension within the organisation. During the Gulf War of 1991, tensions came to the fore between Jewish and Arab members of the organisation, which many members left due to the pacifist stance it took during the conflict.

Since its emergence in 1984, *SOS-Racisme* has been the most controversial anti-racist organisation. It has often been looked upon suspiciously because of its links with the PS, and the way it stifled the *beur* (an outdated term referring to second-generation North Africans) movement in the 1980s (Malik 1990, Fysh 1998). Other organisations have also resented the generous funding and media attention this organisation has received, despite not having a rich history and lacking genuine support at the grass-roots level. However, it is within the last decade that the most durable split between the various organisations involved in the anti-racist movement has occurred. This cleavage pits *SOS-Racisme* and LICRA against LDH and MRAP, while it is also reflected in tensions within each of these organisations.

2. *Anti-Semitism in France and the Emergence of the Split*

In the autumn of 2000, France witnessed an explosion of anti-Semitic violence, unprecedented since the Second World War. This wave of anti-Jewish acts persisted, and peaked again in 2002 and 2004, making it the major form of racism, at least in terms of recorded violence, in France. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that many acts of racism against other minority groups go unreported. In any event, these acts of violence precipitated a debate on the emergence of a new anti-Semitism, which coincided with a wider discussion about the perceived problems France faced in relation to its Muslim population (Peace 2009). Indeed, it is often forgotten that the decision to appoint the Stasi Commission was not simply a response to Muslim girls wearing headscarves, but also a reaction to wider concerns about the *banlieues* (the suburbs where disaffected families of migrants often live), such as violence against women and anti-Semitism (Bowen 2007).

The problem for anti-racist organisations was that these acts of anti-Semitism were no longer solely the preserve of the extreme right, but were now also caused by people of North African extraction. This created a problematic situation for many anti-racists. If one stigmatised group was responsible for attacks on another, how should anti-racists react? In contrast to past episodes of anti-Semitism in France, which seemed to galvanise the anti-racist movement, this wave of attacks represented a genuine dilemma. Thus while the bombing of a Paris synagogue in 1980 and the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in Carpentras in 1990 were followed by marches against anti-Semitism and fascism involving parties from across the political spectrum and all anti-racist associations, a massive debate ensued in the 2000s as to whether anti-Semitism should be condemned in its own right, or be opposed as part of a wider fight against racism, including Islamophobia, a concept that would itself become highly contested.

Those reluctant only to condemn anti-Semitism were motivated by four main concerns. The first was the fear of painting victims of racism (those of North African origin) as racists, thereby contributing to compounding the negative image these citizens were already suffering from. The main issue here was that this might lend credence to the notion that people of North African origin were alone responsible for the upsurge in anti-Semitism, when the evidence to that effect was far from conclusive. Another concern was that the far-right would seek to exploit the situation by

trying to fuse their racist discourse on the presumed criminality of immigrants with these acts of anti-Semitism. Added to this, there was a concern that solely denouncing anti-Semitism would draw attention away from the fight against anti-Arab and Muslim prejudice. Finally, many anti-racists were reluctant to join demonstrations against anti-Semitism because of the link with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; they were concerned that demonstrating against anti-Semitism might be construed as supporting the actions of Israel. Indeed, notable surges in anti-Semitism coincided with the Israeli Defence Force's incursion into the West Bank in April 2002, or with its confrontation with Hamas in Gaza in January 2009.

This reluctance to condemn anti-Semitism outright led to a paralysis of the anti-racist movement, which could not seem to agree on an appropriate way of protesting against the surge of anti-Semitic violence. The absence of such a protest, traditionally coordinated by anti-racist organisations, infuriated Jewish groups, many of which had been claiming that anti-Semitism in France was being ignored. As a result, in April 2002, the *Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France* (CRIF - Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions) and other Jewish organisations decided to organise their own protest march, with a strong pro-Israel flavour. Many prominent anti-racists, including Jewish intellectuals such as Rony Brauman, Gisèle Halimi or Pierre Vidal-Naquet felt unable to align themselves with such a demonstration, and refused to be involved with anything that could be construed as being akin to supporting the policies of Ariel Sharon (*Le Monde*, 6 April 2002).

SOS-Racisme, despite not being an organisation specifically committed to the fight against anti-Semitism such as LICRA, had been at the forefront when condemning this new wave of anti-Semitic attacks. However, it began to distance itself from other anti-racist organisations, which it believed had not taken a clear stance on the issue. *SOS-Racisme* collaborated with UEJF in publishing a book cataloguing a list of anti-Semitic incidents that occurred in France (UEJF and *SOS-Racisme* 2002). The whole issue came to a head when a demonstration against anti-Semitism was organised by *SOS-Racisme* in May 2004, in the wake of the desecration of a Jewish cemetery, an initiative supported by LICRA and UEJF. LDH, MRAP, PCF, LCR and the Green Party all insisted that the march should condemn all forms of racism, and when the demonstration went ahead, the representatives of these organisations marched at the back of the cortege, forming a separate demonstration (*Le Monde*, 14 May 2004). Months later, MRAP and LDH organised a protest march against racism, anti-Semitism and discrimination on 7 November 2004. This time, *SOS-Racisme* and LICRA refused to join due to the involvement of the *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (UOIF - Union of Islamic Organisations of France, the French chapter of the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe and one of the groups that make up the French Council of the Muslim Faith, the CFCM). Dominique Sopo, president of *SOS-Racisme*, declared that his organisation could not march alongside those that oppose gender equality and are "not clear on matters regarding secularism, homophobia and anti-Semitism" (*Libération*, 6 November 2004).

Indeed, Sopo (2005) was so incensed that he wrote a booklet condemning the current state of the anti-racist movement in France, titled: *SOS antiracisme*. This short piece provides a fascinating insight into the logic of his position in the debate. Sopo analyses the split within the movement as a battle between those who remain faithful to traditional (i.e. Republican) anti-racist principles and those who have decided to abandon them (a similar assessment is provided in the autobiography of Patrick Gaubert 2009). Sopo considered many anti-racists to be suffering from post-colonial guilt and a new white man's burden, and deplored what he saw as the encouragement of a victim mentality among ethnic minorities. He defined this as the "communitarian approach to anti-racism" (Sopo 2005: 26) as opposed to the universalist/Republican (and therefore truly French) approach of *SOS-Racisme*. Note that in French political discourse, *communautarisme* means encouraging separateness or identifying with one's own community at the expense of national unity. Therefore to be classed as *communautariste* is a serious accusation, as it is anathema to traditional French Republican ideology.

Sopo saved most of his critique for the phenomenon of 'Islamism', which he portrays as malevolently waiting in the wings to exploit the discrimination faced by young people. In France, outside of academic circles, this term is not applied solely to those who combine Islam and politics, but rather to any practice of Islam perceived to be in conflict with French secularism (*laïcité*). Anyone considered as not being moderate enough is frequently derided as either an

Islamist or a fundamentalist (*intégriste*). In the popular imaginary, the classic example of an Islamist is Tariq Ramadan. The decision to invite the Swiss intellectual to the European Social Forums in Paris (2003) and London (2004) was deplored by Sopo as a stab in the back for those fighting for democracy in the Muslim world. So-called Islamists, such as Ramadan, are described as the enemies of equality between men and women, while Sopo (2005: 74) also chastised those on the Left who refused to condemn the anti-Semitism found in the poorer suburban neighbourhoods and/or by those of immigrant origin:

There is no room for negotiation when it comes to condemning anti-Semitism ... When one professes to defend young people of immigrant origin, one does not go about it by allowing a small proportion of them to lapse into acts of hatred, of which they are moreover usually the first victims. That would allow them to think that beating up a Jew, held up as a symbol of the oppressive system, would be some kind of short cut to social emancipation and individual fulfilment ... Saying that condemning new forms of anti-Semitism would mean stigmatising Arabs/Muslims is like saying that opposing Le Pen would stigmatise white people.

Blaming the Left for its inability to condemn anti-Semitism and/or for encouraging anti-Semitism became a familiar theme around that time (Finkielkraut 2003, Lacroix 2005, Taguieff 2002, 2004). Indeed, the leader of CRIF indirectly accused the Green Party and LCR of anti-Semitism, when he spoke of a 'red-green-brown alliance' at an annual dinner in January 2003. Politicians attempted to outdo each other in their condemnation of anti-Semitism, and even used the issue to score political points against adversaries. Pierre Lellouche of the ruling UMP party –instigator of a law mandating more severe penalties for violent crimes committed by virtue of the victim's membership of a particular ethnic group, nation, race, or religion – suggested there was a problem of left-wing anti-Semitism.

This discourse of the 'anti-Semitic Left' prompted the scholar Vincent Geisser (2003: 91) to note ironically that, "the French Left, by its silence and complacency regarding 'young Muslim delinquents' is supposedly largely responsible for anti-Semitism in the 21st century." Another collection of essays that refuted this assertion was edited by the Marxist philosopher Etienne Balibar (2003). However, criticism meted out to the Left continued, and it was not only the preserve of the Right. For example, *Le Monde* journalist Nicolas Weill (2004) criticised the tendency to make excuses for anti-Semitism in the *banlieues*. A report commissioned by the Prime Minister's Office also suggested that anti-Zionism could lead to anti-Semitism by proxy (Rufin 2004). Discussions about anti-Semitism also came to the fore during the public debate that preceded the introduction of the Headscarf Law in 2004. It was this controversy that left the biggest scar on the anti-racist movement.

3. *The 'Headscarf Law' and the Battle over 'Islamophobia'*

When it became clear that the government was considering a law banning conspicuous religious symbols in state schools, anti-racist organisations were for the most part united in their opposition. The presidents of all four anti-racist organisations were interviewed by the Stasi Commission, which was tasked with compiling the report that led to the eventual introduction of the law (Stasi 2003). MRAP was a key player in the debate because Laurent Lévy, the father of the two sisters who instigated the headscarf affair of October 2003 in Aubervilliers, was a lawyer for the organisation (Lévy 2010). MRAP was thus clearly opposed to any proposed legislation, and its president Mouloud Aounit cleverly attempted to persuade the Stasi Commission that a ban on headscarves would lead to an increase in private Muslim faith schools. Echoing comments by Aounit, Patrick Gaubert (LICRA) argued that such a law would stigmatise Muslims in France, and Michel Tubiana (LDH) described the issue of the headscarf as a smokescreen to avoid discussing other problems in society.

Sopo gave a rather equivocal testimony by stating that he saw such a law as an advantageous means to protect Muslim girls who did not wish to wear headscarves. Yet, he also voiced his doubts about a move that would effectively single out black and Arab citizens, and therefore proposed a circular as a compromise measure. At this point, *SOS-Racisme* was still regarded by most observers as an opponent of a law against headscarves, along with most religious groups and trade unions. When the very first French headscarf affair erupted in 1989, *SOS-Racisme* denounced the virulent campaign that was being waged in the French media, and the then

president of the organisation Harlem Désir declared that to be against the veil was to be racist. Yet, by the time this issue had flared up again in 1994, the organisation had made a complete *volte face* and was calling for the kind of legislation that would eventually be implemented 10 years later (*Le Monde*, 27 October 1994).

In 2003/2004 the organisation was divided on the subject. Francis Terquem, co-founder and long time lawyer of the organisation, voiced his opposition to Sopo's sympathies regarding the law, and eventually defected to MRAP in January 2004. By this time, *SOS-Racisme* had declared its official support for the law, following the consensus that had slowly developed in France during the auditions for the Stasi Commission and in the national media. This consensus saw the headscarf as a threat to France's secular order, an expression of *communautarisme*, an obstacle to achieving gender equality and a means for Islamists to dictate their rules in the *banlieues* (Deltombe 2005).

By early 2004, the divisions between the various anti-racist organisations had become relatively clear on this issue. Nonetheless, organising a demonstration against the law proved problematic, as even LDH and MRAP were aware of the fact that not all of their members supported the official position. This created an opportunity for the highly marginal (but also vocal) *Parti des musulmans de France* (PMF - Party of the Muslims of France) to organise a demonstration, which both MRAP and LDH were keen to distance themselves from. Indeed, these organisations were very careful not to be seen as promoting the wearing of headscarves and thereby endorsing a pro-religion agenda.

Therefore, when they took part in a demonstration organised by the campaign group *Une école pour tous-tes* (School for Everyone), they made sure that the protest was not structured around the issue of religious freedom (as was the case in other countries), but around the prospect of girls being denied an education by being excluded from school (Lévy 2010). *SOS-Racisme* responded with their own (failed) group called *Laïcs, retrouvons-nous* (Secularists, unite!) and called for a demonstration in favour of the law on 6 March 2004. Malek Boutih, president of *SOS-Racisme* between 1999 and 2003, declared that the Headscarf Law was the first important defeat of the Islamists in France, and criticised MRAP and LDH for sympathising with 'fundamentalists' (*Le Figaro*, 5 February 2004). In circumstances such as these, the inability of anti-racist organisations to march together against anti-Semitism a few months later appears entirely explicable. Relations between *SOS-Racisme* and MRAP continued to deteriorate, and MRAP even refused to march in a demonstration organised by *SOS-Racisme* to protest against the murder of a young Jewish man, Ilan Halimi, in 2006. However, the official reason given for their absence was the participation of Philippe de Villiers, a right-wing politician notorious for his critical comments about Islam in France. However, *SOS-Racisme* and LICRA had already made statements opposing the participation of Le Pen and de Villiers.

Many of those who opposed the Headscarf Law did so because they considered it to be an example of Islamophobia. In France, this term had not been widely used, and racism directed at Muslims was usually subsumed under the category of anti-Arab racism. However, since 2003, Mouloud Aounit (MRAP), had been campaigning for the recognition of a specifically anti-Muslim variety of racism, which he argued had become increasingly apparent since 9/11. In September 2003, he even organised a conference on Islamophobia at the French National Assembly, which coincided with the launch of a book by Vincent Geisser (2003) entitled *La nouvelle islamophobie* (The New Islamophobia), thereby paraphrasing the title of Pierre-André Taguieff's (2002) book *La nouvelle judéophobie*. However, not everyone was convinced about the appropriateness of using the term 'Islamophobia'. Some people argued that using it might lead to confusion between racism directed against Muslims and the critique of Islam as a religion. According to them, using the term could constitute a threat to freedom of expression. Others opposed the term because they saw it as essentialising people in terms of a 'Muslim' ethnic identity, when some people of Muslim heritage do not even practice the Islamic faith. The following examples help illustrate the controversial nature of the term.

On 24 October 2003, the editor of *Le Point* magazine and member of the *Haut Conseil à l'Intégration* (HCI - High Council for Integration), Claude Imbert, declared in an interview that he was quite Islamophobic. The philosopher Pascal Bruckner (*Le Figaro*, 5 November 2003) also entered the debate, deriding the term 'Islamophobia' as being dangerous, and criticising Geisser's book, describing it as intellectual propaganda. Journalist Caroline Fourest also warned of what she perceived to be the dangerous nature of the term, claiming that it was invented by Mullahs in Iran

to denounce women who did not wear headscarves after the revolution (*Libération*, 17 November 2003). Finally, a leaked report prepared by the French watchdog on racism and human rights, the *Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme* (CNCDH - National Consultative Commission on Human Rights), was also critical of the term.

Within France, and particularly within the anti-racist movement, the debate about this term grew in intensity. Richard Serero, vice-president of LICRA, described Islamophobia as “a concept invented after 11th September by those who cannot accept criticism of Islam. We have the right to challenge Christianity and Judaism but we can’t challenge Islam without being accused of racism” (*Le Temps*, 19 March 2004). The internal debate within MRAP was particularly fierce, and many members were unhappy about their leader using the term. In May 2004, MRAP’s national council decided to ban the use of the term ‘Islamophobia’ until its national congress in December, when the issue could be properly debated. In fact, the issue dominated the event, with some arguing for the necessity of fighting Islamophobia and others proposing a motion to ban using the term permanently. A compromise was reached, and a motion was passed stating that MRAP would continue to oppose Islamophobia within the framework of the legal definition of incitement to racial hatred. In February 2005, a conflict emerged between MRAP, LICRA and the teacher’s union *UNSA-Éducation*. The latter two opposed the use of the word ‘Islamophobia’ in a document prepared for the national educational week against racism. UNSA general-secretary Patrick Gonthier (Agence France Presse, 5 February 2005), justified his position in these words:

Islamophobia can only mean a fear of Islam; it therefore cannot not be associated with racism. This poses a number of questions: should blasphemy of Islam be regarded as a crime and should we leave Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen to the mercy of fatwas?

Dominique Sopo (2005: 78) of *SOS-Racisme* agreed, and believed that the introduction of this term was part of a sinister plan by ‘Islamists’:

As a means of avoiding criticism of their reactionary aims and their strategy of gaining influence, the extremists go about denouncing ‘Islamophobia’ of which even the slightest criticism of them would be a sign, thus profoundly distorting the philosophy and language of anti-racism.

French anti-racists also campaigned against the institutionalisation by the UN of ‘Islamophobia’ as a distinct type of racism. In 2007, two years before the Durban Review Conference, LICRA published a report about the malicious intentions of the UN Human Rights Council and their position on Islamophobia (LICRA 2007). One year before the conference, it launched a petition, which called for the boycott of Durban II. In this petition, signed by many of France’s most celebrated intellectuals, it claimed that the UN was trying to kill off human rights, 60 years after the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*Le Monde*, 28 February 2008).

4. *Divisive Episodes, Internal Tensions and Amicable Relations*

The controversy surrounding the caricatures of Muhammed printed in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005 continued to open up the wounds of division amongst French anti-racists. The newspaper *France Soir* republished all 12 caricatures, and was taken to court by MRAP for incitement to racial hatred, which led much criticism and ridicule by much of the French press. The satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, which itself became involved in a similar court case, even referred to the organisation as the *Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l’Amitié du Prophète* (Movement against Racism and for Friendship of the Prophet). The outrage provoked by MRAP’s decision illustrated just how sensitive the subject had become. In 2001, MRAP and LDH brought a case against the writer Michel Houellebecq for comments he made on Islam, while in 2002 MRAP, LICRA and LDH took the publisher of Oriana Fallaci’s *The Rage and the Pride* to court for the same reason. In both cases, there was no public uproar, as these organisations were simply applying the 1972 and 1990 anti-racist laws designed to outlaw the incitement of hatred against a religious group (Bleich 2003). By 2006, of course, the climate had altered remarkably. *SOS-Racisme* supported the publication of the caricatures and went on the offensive by organising a debate (later cancelled) at a Parisian university to defend freedom of expression. Dominique Sopo expressed his support for *Charlie Hebdo*, and its editor-in-chief, Phillipe Val.

Caroline Fourest, along with former minister Corinne Lepage and Pierre Cassen - founder of the secularist website *Riposte Laïque*, initiated a petition entitled *Contre un nouvel obscurantisme*

(Against a new obscurantism), which aimed to fight against all expressions of racism, sexism, homophobia and fundamentalism. This petition was signed by a number of anti-racists, including Sopo, Françoise Seligmann (honorary president of LDH) and several high ranking members of MRAP, including Alain Callès (ex-president), Emmanuelle Le Chevallier (administrative council) and Nadia Kurys (national executive). Nevertheless, Jean-Pierre Dubois, Henri Leclerc and Michel Tubiana of LDH criticised the petition, stating that dialogue with certain elements of political Islam was actually needed (*Libération*, 16 May 2006). Yet again though, it appeared that a significant number of figures within the organisation's central committee disagreed, and Philippe Lamy, Cédric Porin and Antoine Spire hit back a few days later by publishing an article citing their approval of the petition (*Libération*, 30 May 2006).

This kind of public argument between prominent figures within the same organisation had, as yet, been unheard of. The same battle lines were drawn when philosopher Robert Redeker published an opinion piece critical of Islam in *Le Figaro*, and was subsequently forced to go into hiding due to death threats he received. Mouloud Aounit condemned these threats, while also criticising the offensive language Redeker had used in his article, reminding him of the limits of freedom of expression. LDH took a similar line and, in response, *SOS-Racisme*, along with CRIF and *Charlie Hebdo*, organised an evening in support of Redeker and freedom of expression. LDH's response led Cédric Porin and Antoine Spire to leave the organisation, publishing their resignation letter in *Le Monde* on 24 November 2006:

The straw that broke the camel's back was the Redeker affair. Instead of defending the freedom of expression of a philosopher at all costs, someone who has received death threats for criticising Islam, LDH firstly made known its rejection of his "disgusting ideas" before eventually conceding that "whatever we think of Mr Redeker's writing, nothing justifies what he has had to go through." However, the ambiguity and timidity of this support does not fit well with the necessary intransigence the fight for freedom of expression demands of us.

However, certain campaigns still managed to unite anti-racist organisations. In early 2007, a debate emerged about the introduction of ethnic statistics in order to fight discrimination (see the special issue of the journal *French Politics, Culture, and Society* edited by Sabbagh and Peer 2008). The need for these statistics was promoted by the recently formed *Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France* (CRAN - Representative council of Black associations of France), and the issue also became important during the presidential election. In February 2007, the leaders of MRAP, LICRA and *SOS-Racisme* all signed a petition against the introduction of such statistics, in the name of their shared ideal of colour-blind anti-racism, or 'anti-racism without races' (Bleich 2004).

Relations between these organisations also improved in the wake of the 'affaire des Vosges', when a woman asked two Muslim women to take off their headscarves while staying at her holiday home. This case was brought to court and won by MRAP, LDH and LICRA in October 2007. The offender received a suspended sentence of four months in prison, a €1000 fine and was forced to pay €7400 in damages. In March 2008, these organisations were again united in their condemnation of a number of events, including an anti-Semitic assault that took place in Bagneux; the Chinese repression of the Tibetan liberation movement; and the release of controversial Dutch MP Geert Wilder's anti-Islam film *Fitna*. They also undertook a joint action against the comedian Dieudonné after he made anti-Semitic comments at one of his shows in December 2008, and they were unanimous in their condemnation of his anti-Zionist list for the European elections of 2009. Still, this unity was occasionally broken, such as when MRAP deplored the lack of action organised in the wake of the desecration of Muslim graves in a war cemetery in northern France in April 2008, or during the Siné affair in July 2008. Siné is a political cartoonist who wrote a satirical article about Jean Sarkozy (son of the president) in *Charlie Hebdo* that was deemed anti-Semitic. Philippe Val fired him from his position, and LICRA took him to court for inciting racial hatred. *SOS-Racisme* supported these actions, while LDH and MRAP refused to comment.

Although relations between France's anti-racist organisations had improved remarkably since the period between 2002 and 2006, there remained internal divisions within them. Problems within MRAP date back to November 2004, and relate to the decision to demonstrate alongside the UOIF. This prompted anti-colonial writer Albert Memmi to leave the organisation, and at the national conference the following month, the organisation's annual report of activities was approved with only the narrowest of margins. From this moment on, Mouloud Aounit increasingly came under attack and dissidents within the organisation created blogs voicing their concern about

his leadership. The decision to bring the case against *France Soir* to court was unpopular and singer Jean Ferrat became the second major figure to leave the organisation in protest. Senior figures in MRAP subsequently formed an internal opposition group named 'MRAP Pluraliste'. In May 2007, they officially asked Aounit to step down from the leadership, claiming he no longer respected the universalist and secular values of the movement (Agence France Presse, 24 May 2007). In the same year, a long-time member published a history of the organisation, severely criticising the direction it had taken in the last few years (Winykamen 2007). In January 2008, many local sections boycotted the annual conference, where only 131 out of 286 delegates were present, and where Aounit was himself re-elected by the narrowest of margins. Later that year MRAP decided to introduce a *Collège de la Présidence* meaning the organisation was led by four co-presidents. This was widely interpreted as a move to save the organisation.

When asked about these divisions within his organisation and in particular the battle around 'Islamophobia', Aounit, during a personal interview I held with him in Paris in December 2008, responded:

I think history will show that we were right and that one day this struggle, which is today tarnished and stigmatised, will be recognised as legitimate. It's a fact we can't ignore. The other day, I went to a demonstration against the desecration of a cemetery and the leader of the Jewish community spoke of Islamophobia. I was happy that when the President [Sarkozy] went to Algeria a few months ago he said it was necessary to fight against anti-Semitism *and* Islamophobia! I'm also happy that the European institutions are calling for and recommending that Islamophobia be tackled. My aim is to try to get this recognised as a form of racism [in France].

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to chart the divisions that have appeared within the anti-racist movement in France, which were largely due to debates and concerns around the issue of Islam. These divisions are not only inter-organisational but also intra-organisational. However, these issues are of course not uniquely French. If we take the example of Islamophobia, we see that this term has also been hotly debated amongst anti-racists in other countries. The equivalent of MRAP in Belgium, the *Mouvement contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et la Xénophobie* (MRAX) has been divided on the issue, and its president Radouane Bouhlal received similar criticisms to those received by Moulod Aounit in France. Similarly, Kenan Malik (2009), who was very involved in anti-racist struggles in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, criticised the term 'Islamophobia', expressing concern that it might be used not only to describe anti-Muslim prejudice, but also as a prescription for what may or may not be said about Islam.

The divisive nature of Islam for the Left in France is no doubt related to the importance of the concept of *laïcité*, and to the fact that the Left sees itself as the standard bearer of this principle. Every time *laïcité* had been perceived to be under threat, the French Left mobilised to save it. French debates about Islam, such as the numerous headscarf affairs, take on monumental proportions, because they are always framed as a battle over the survival of French secularism. This, in turn, is perceived by many anti-racists to go hand in hand with the ideal of the Republican model of integration. As Sopo (2008: 19) explains:

Laïcité is both intimately and even ontologically related to anti-racism. To allow *laïcité* to decline or be "redefined" would mean weakening the possibility for different groups – who are today discriminated against – to free themselves from a state of inferiority and reinforce this modern day tendency of seeing people close themselves off in their own identities.

The goal for many anti-racists was therefore not simply to fight against discrimination and prejudice, but also to encourage integration and discourage the formation of community identities. As Peter Fysh (1998: 209) noted in his analysis of the shortcomings of the anti-racist movement in France, "there has been no explicit break with the lay Republican tradition which claims that France has successfully integrated generations of immigrants by denying community attachments."

Anti-racism in France has thus traversed a major crisis in the first decade of the 21st century, a crisis that is far from unresolved. It is undoubtedly more serious than the soul searching that accompanied the perceived failure of anti-racism in the early 1990s. At that time, the problem was presented as racism having evolved from biological to more cultural forms, and the danger of the

extreme right using arguments about difference to support its own ends (Taguieff 1991). The proposed solution was therefore to reaffirm the Republican model of integration and end talk of multiculturalism (Guiradon 1996).

There appear to be no easy solutions to today's dilemmas and the 'Muslim question' has thrown the movement into practical disarray. How does one deal with an anti-Semitism that is no longer the preserve of the extreme right? How do we fight against increasing attacks on Muslims, if we cannot agree upon a name to describe such events? The perceived lack of response from the traditional anti-racist organisations has led to the creation of grass roots initiatives, such as the *Coordination contre le Racisme et l'Islamophobie* (CRI - Coordination against Racism and Islamophobia) based in Lyons. Other forms of anti-racist expression have also emerged, such as the *Indigènes de la République* whose members challenge the traditional organisations with a much more radical discourse about racism and its links to the colonial period.

French reticence to use the terminology of 'Islamophobia' may eventually prove futile, due to recent developments taking place in Anglo-Saxon scholarship, which seek to consolidate a definition of this term (Fekete 2009, Allen 2010, Sayyid and Vakil 2010, Shyrock 2010), and the fact that the UN, OSCE, the EU and even French government ministers all seem to have adopted it.

The need for French anti-racists to find a broader unity seems more pressing than ever. The actions taken by the now defunct Ministry of Immigration, Integration and National Identity were an obvious example. However, this has not been helped by the recent furore over the 'burqa' which again sowed the seeds of division. A further question also looms large: if ethnic statistics are to be avoided, in what way can French society provide equal opportunities for all of its citizens? These are the challenges that lie ahead, not only for French anti-racist organisations, but also for all those who are of a progressive bent in the country.

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