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The Muslim vote and Muslim lobby in France: Myths and Realities

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Abstract:

This paper presents an analysis of Muslims in France to counter the myth of a Muslim lobby, particularly relating to foreign policy. Assumptions of a Muslim lobby rely on the existence of a homogenous voting block which requires: (1) the homogeneity, unity and efficient organisation of Muslims, (2) the crucial role of faith in determining their political participation and behaviour as well as (3) their strong interest in foreign policy issues. The central question is then: are these conditions fulfilled in the case of French Muslims? Is there a Muslim voting block? The study emphasizes three elements to answer this question: the heterogeneity of what is understood as 'Muslims', the absence of an ethnic vote, the absence of foreign policy issues in determining the vote.

If the literature on ethnic groups and foreign policy is vast when it comes to the United States, it seems this relation has been quite overlooked in Europe (Aggestam & Hill 2008). It is an American scholar, Francis Fukuyama, who put forward the hypothesis that France opposed the 2003 war in Iraq because of its important Muslim community[1]. According to the United States National Intelligence Council, "ongoing societal and political tension over integration of Muslims is likely to make European policymakers increasingly sensitive to the potential domestic repercussions of any foreign policies for the Middle East, including aligning with the U.S. on policies seen as pro-Israeli" (United States National Intelligence Council 2008, 25). The idea of a Muslim lobby in Europe, especially in France, has been essentially developed by some neoconservatives in the United States and is known, under its extreme form, as the 'Eurabia' thesis[2].

The political impact and foreign policy opinions of Muslims in the West constitute a growing topic of research (Radcliffe Ross 2009, 1). The closer perspective to studying ethnic groups and foreign policy deals with security issues in the post 9/11 context. The situation of European Muslims is apprehended through the international context and this collusion between Islam as an international political threat and Muslims within European countries contributes in explaining different tensions (Cesari 2002). The political participation of immigrant or ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims, is itself perceived as a threat (Vogel 2008, 18). Aggestam and Hill place at the core of their study the relation between

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[1] Fukuyama wrote: "The French government's stance against the Iraq war and US foreign policy more generally seeks in part to appease Muslim opinion" in the *Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2004.

[2] The Eurabia theory conceives Europe as a dependency of the Arab world and usually considers Muslims and Islam generally to be a threat to Europe. Projections are often made in order to predict domestic and foreign policy implications of a higher number of Muslims and consequently of Muslim voters (Kauffman 2008). The result, usually embedded in the clash of civilizations framework often emphasizes increasing ethnic cleavages (Kauffman 2008) and more cautious European states from fear of their "Muslim Streets" dictating domestic and foreign policy. In the same vein a segment of the literature goes so far as to foresee the consequences on transatlantic relations: the Muslims' role may even, through elections, lead to the degradation of such relations (Taspinar 2003). Justin Vaïsse provides a snapshot of the most representative works of the Eurabia thesis such as *Eurabia: the Euro-Arab axis* (2005) by Bat Ye'or which essentially theorizes the idea. American literature includes explicit titles such as The *Last Days of Europe* by Laqueur (2007*), Menace in Europe* by Berlinski (2006) or *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (Caldwell 2009). European commentators mentioned are Oriana Fallaci's controversial pamphlet *The Rage and the Pride* (2002) and Melanie Philips' *Londonistan* (2007) (Vaïsse 2010).

multiculturalism and foreign policy as they consider the 2005 London attacks perpetrated by "home-grown" people and more generally Europe as a potential target of terrorism (Aggestam & Hill 2008). In light of these debates, the question of the relation between Muslims and foreign policy in the framework of European contexts deserves to be asked.

This paper focuses on Muslims in France to counter the myth of a Muslim lobby, particularly relating to foreign policy. The French assimilation model, emphasizing individual integration into a civic culture, rejects any recognition of groups on an ethnic, cultural or religious basis (Bertossi 2007, 8). The term lobby also logically holds a strong pejorative connotation (Birnbaum 1990, 229). Having said that, French authorities are today aware of the multicultural aspect of French society whose model seems very isolated in comparison with other European countries (Withol De Wenden 2003). The consideration of groups on an ethnic, cultural or religious basis in French social sciences is unfavourably perceived and in the worst case, it can even be accused of hiding racist intentions and dividing society (Poutignat & Streiff-Fenart 1995, 9).

In this context, the hypothesis of a Muslim lobby is unlikely. Assumptions of a Muslim lobby usually rely on the existence of a homogenous voting block which requires: the homogeneity, unity and efficient organisation of Muslims, the crucial role of faith in determining their political participation and behaviour as well as their strong interest in foreign policy issues. The central question is then: are these conditions fulfilled in the case of French Muslims? Is there a Muslim voting block? This paper emphasizes three elements to answer this question: the heterogeneity of what is understood as "Muslims", the absence of an ethnic vote and the absence of foreign policy issues in determining the vote.

1-Muslims in France: a heterogeneous group

Defining Muslims

France has the largest Muslim population in Europe. There is no official figure as ethnic statistics are forbidden by French law[3]. The recurrent figure is usually 5 million, which represents about 7 or 8 % of the total French population (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 18: Godard & Taussig 2007, 24). About 3 million are French citizens (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 24). The population can be divided along four main groups: 1.5 million of Algerians, 1 million Moroccans, more than 400 000 Tunisians, nearly 340 000 Sub-Saharan Africans and 313 000 Turks (Godard & Taussig 2007, 454). Immigrants still represent a majority in the Moroccan (77% of immigrants) and Tunisian populations (71%). The proportion is even higher for Sub-Saharan Africans (88%) (Godard & Taussig 2007, 26). There are around 40 000 converts (Godard & Taussig 2007, 28). The Muslim population is younger than the French general population (IFOP 2009).

Estimations also differ according to the criteria chosen to define Muslims. Indeed, one can have a broad view and build estimation solely on the basis of a 'Muslim background' without taking into account religious practise. On the contrary, one can choose to have a more focused estimation which would take attendance to the mosque as the main criteria (Godard & Taussig 2007, 24)[4]. The common use of the term 'Muslims' often refers in fact to individuals with a Muslim background independently from their religious practice[5].

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[3] The provision of the *Loi Hortefeux* allowing for census on race and ethnicity was deemed unconstitutional (Schain 2008, 87). Though the last census on religious questions was taken in 1872 and the law forbids keeping track of any ethnic statistics, some derogations of the law allow for some estimates (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 175). A report submitted in February 2010 by a commission of experts (Committee for the measuring of diversity and evaluation of discrimination) to the Diversity Commissioner , Yazid Sabeg, suggested to keep this framework, whereby "definition of an ethno-racial referential" remains forbidden but the use of "subjective" data such as "the feeling of belonging" are allowed (*Le Monde*, 2 February 2010).

[4] This criteria was used by the Ministry of Interior to estimate the number of practising Muslims: the estimate established 220 000 practising Muslims on the basis of the mosque's attendance criteria which would mean that

Muslim immigrants were not perceived as Muslims first but were identified by their ethnic or national origin and the Muslim lens only came later on, in the eighties (Silvestri 2007a., 162). Three phases can be identified; the figure of the "Arab immigrant" of the seventies mostly concerned with residency rights and visas, the "civic beur" of the eighties who mobilised in associations against racism and discrimination, and finally, the figure of the "Muslim citizen" claiming for the right to a Muslim identity and expression of this identity (Geisser & Kelfaoui 2001: Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 6). Religion has constituted a growing dimension in self-identification as from the seventies onward, Islam has been progressively rediscovered by immigrants as the sole variable which allows them to mobilise collectively (Dargent 2003, 6). The common experience of exclusion also explains the crystallisation of a collective identity (Césari 1994, 115: Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 16). This, possibly along with the growing visibility of Islam on the international scene (especially with the Iranian Revolution), has legitimized the belonging to Islam. This process of normalisation has entailed an increase in self-declared Muslims identifying themselves as believers (Dargent 2003: Godard & Taussig 2007, 29) and a stronger identity assertiveness and self-declaration in younger generations (Dargent 2003, 19: Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 82). Therefore, Muslims have a more intense relationship with religion than the general French population[6] (Brouard & Tiberj 2005, 30) as proven by the heavy identification with religious Islam (around 78% of the community, 16% adhering more to its cultural form) though not all are regularly practising their religion (Frégosi 2008, 164). Only 10% of the French consider

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5% of the 5 million Muslims are regular practising Muslims (Godard & Taussig 2007, 31). However, the criteria itself can be debatable as attending the mosque is by no means an obligation, it can conflict with work, facilities may be more or less provided and easy to access, and women usually attend less (Godard & Taussig 2007, 29).

[5] Laurence and Vaïsse approach stands for the common use of the term: "Although this book refers to "Muslims", what is actually meant are those individuals who, by dint of their national origin or ancestry, are of Muslim culture or sociological background. The population of course includes many secular-minded citizens who would object to being primarily classified as Muslims" (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 74).

[6] 66% of the French with North African origin declare themselves as Muslims, 8% Catholic and 20% without religion (Brouard & Tiberj 2005). As to the whole French population, 65% declare themselves as Catholic (Brouard & Tiberj 2005, 30). However, only 36% of people with Muslim background (*personnes de culture musulmane)* declare themselves as practising and only 15% go regularly to the mosque.

religion very important in their lives (The Pew Global Attitudes Project 2008, 5). European Muslims tend to identify more strongly with their faith than the general populations but this does not mean they do not identify strongly with their country of settlement, and this is particularly true for the French case (Gallup 2009, 8). 42% of French Muslims see themselves as national citizens first while 46% see themselves as Muslims first : this is very different from views of their co-religionists elsewhere in Europe, especially in Great-Britain where 81% of British Muslims see themselves as Muslims first (Allen 2006). 83% of the French general public see themselves as national citizens first rather than Christians (Allen 2006), which is not surprising as 10% of the French general public consider religion to be important in their lives (The Pew Global Attitudes Project 2008, 5). Indeed, French Muslims appear to be the most European compared with other European Muslims (Schain 2008, 88).

There is no single picture of Muslims. Given the national and ethnic diversity as well as the countless forms of belonging to Islam, a dynamic approach is most suited to apprehend the Muslim community, or rather communities, in France (Frégosi 2008, 12). Cesari's typology distinguishes three poles[7]:

- "Popular and calm" Islam which refers to primo-migrants who have been in France for a long time.

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[7] This typology overlaps with Fregosi's typology where several figures again can be depicted:
-Liberal Muslim: refers to a privatized Islam, with no political ambition. It insists on contextualization and the alliance of faith with rationality and is best represented by Muslim intellectuals (Frégosi 2008, 138).
-Subjective Islam of non-practising believers: The trends that would mostly characterize this type are the rejection of pure ritualism, an individualization of beliefs (a global trend widely analyzed by Olivier Roy) and a secularized Islam (Frégosi 2008, 149). This trend would characterize 42% of French Muslims of whom 14% are practising Muslims (Frégosi 2008, 148).
-Pious and devout believers' visible Islam: where practise is central and which is heavily based on rites. It would correspond to 36% of the entire population (Frégosi 2008, 153).
-Minimalist Islam: This would best correspond to the vague denomination of people with a Muslim background (Frégosi 2008, 157). Identification is mostly socio-cultural and has often little to do with the practise of religion. Then, the denomination of Muslims here is more an assigned identity which is also reflected in the use of the term *arabo-musulman* (Frégosi 2008, 159).
-The last category comprises the rejection of Islam by ex-Muslims and is less visible in France. Some associations have emerged in other European countries.

- Secular Islam where Islam constitutes more of a cultural than a religious reference and which rather concerns younger generations.

- A process of re-islamicization which also concerns younger generations, usually engaged in political militancy against racism and discrimination (Dargent 2003, 16).

Given these conditions, searching for a unitary representation of Islam is an illusion (Frégosi 2008, 166). However, as we shall see, this has not prevented French authorities from calling for the creation of a representative body.

Muslim organisations and divisions

If most studies assume a 'uniform discursive framework' when it comes to Muslims (Soysal 1997, 518), they are in fact fragmented in several organisations not only between the different European countries but also within each country (Warner & Wenner 2006). The absence of any clergy in Islam is one of the factors explaining its lack of organisation and the obstacles to building a representative instance (Zehgal 2005, 3). The decentralized structure of this faith is reinforced by divisions along countries of origin and attempts by homeland authorities to maintain contact with their population, all the more Islam cannot be dissociated from ethno-national identity, especially for primo-migrants (Cesari 2002).

French Islam is predominantly organised on the local level (Godard & Taussig 2007, 40). This is explained by the fact that the first most spontaneous organization was the mosque[8] (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 144). In parallel, diverse associations had, at the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties, started lobbying at the local level. These associations have evolved from structures initiated by new French Citizens of North African origin,

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[8] There would be more than 1800 mosques on the basis of different data from the Ministry of Interior, regional committees of the French Council for the Muslim Faith and regional studies (Godard & Taussig 2007, 116).

putting forward Arab ethnicity, to young Muslims associations operating on the field (Geisser & Kelfaoui 2001).

A series of issues brought French Muslims to the front of the public sphere at the end of the eighties: the first headscarf affair, the Palestinian Intifada and the Gulf War (Withol De Wenden 2003, 78: Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 43). These events contributed to raise the French authorities' awareness of the need for the recognition of the Muslim faith (Zehgal 2005, 5). A driving incentive for the involvement of the French state in the emergence of a specifically French Islam has been to decrease foreign influences and financial dependence on foreign sources (Cesari 1993: Zeghal 2005). The agreement on the composition of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) signed in 2002 by the three big federations (the Paris Mosque-GMP, the Union of Muslim Organizations of France-UOIF and the National Federation of French Muslims-FNMF[9]) is the result of a long process which had started at the beginning of the nineties (Zehgal 2005, 9). The first French CFCM was elected in April 2003 with 80% of the prayer spaces participating (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 149). It comprises regional councils.

The CFCM is supposed to be exclusively dedicated to religious issues, not political representation (Zehgal 2005). The Council has been most prominent in issues related to the certification of halal meat, the organisation of the Hadj and the nomination of Muslim chaplains in prisons (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 155). The Council's commissions have shown poor efficiency because of a lack of coordination, of investment and of material facilities (Godard & Taussig 2007, 180). Another problem concerns representation: it is

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[9] The Great Mosque of Paris (GMP) is the oldest institution and is strongly tied to the Algerian government. The GMP is being perceived as the most moderate institution (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 102). The Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF) is a strong grassroots force. It comprises 250 civil associations, controls 13.5 % of prayer spaces (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 105) and is theologically affiliated to the Muslim brotherhood. Its relative success comes from networking at the grassroots level on the one hand and its embedment in transnational networks on the other hand (Zehgal 2005, 5). The National Federation of French Muslims (FNMF) is under Moroccan influence. The Rally for Muslims in France (RMF) which won the last elections in 2008 was created in 2006 by dissidents of the FMNF (*Le Nouvel Osbervateur*, 23 June 2008).

accused of being under excessive foreign influence at the expense of younger generations and of being dominated by conservative groups (Salvatore 2004, 1026). Dounia Bouzar, one of the six experts appointed by the government, resigned on account of the fact that "For 20 years, Muslims have been asked to leave their religion at the border in order to integrate, and now, we define them solely by their religion!" (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 161). In reaction to the CFCM, talks about a representative organisation for secular Muslims had been initiated by then Minister of the Interior Dominique de Villepin[10] (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 161). This again shows the multidimensional aspects of the population designated under the term 'Muslims'.

In relation to foreign policy, the hostage crisis involving two journalists in Iraq in 2004 episode showed the potential of the Council as the voice for French Muslims on the international scene (Fregosi 2008, 324). In fact, as the kidnappers were demanding the cancellation of the 2004 law banning religious signs, including the headscarf, in schools, Muslim leaders united in one voice calling for the respect of the law and denounced the kidnappers (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 171). A diplomatic mission was even sent to Baghdad by the CFCM which could be interpreted as a strong and unambiguous sign of support from the Muslim leaders.

It seems that the influence of political Islamic organisations over Muslim populations is limited (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 3). If the UOIF tries explicitly to create a Muslim lobby, attempts to create Islamic parties or Muslim lobbies have failed. Lists with an emphasis on

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[10] Examples of these associations include the French Council of Secular Muslims (CFML) or the French secular Muslims' Movement (MMLF) (Frégosi 2008, 392). These secular associations highlight cultural and ethnic aspects of belonging to Islam and do not claim any religious practise. However, they are also very fragmented (Frégosi 2008, 413). These secular groups claim to speak on behalf of the "silent majority" (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 99) and have emerged around the end of the nineties (Godard & Taussig 2007, 91).

issues related to minorities and ethnic communities such as the "Euro-Palestine"[11] list did not have much success (Giry 2006: Bertossi 2007).

To conclude, assuming a 'French Muslim community' as implying a homogenous, organised and coherent body represented by a unitary organization is problematic. On the individual level, the term 'Muslims' recovers multiple realities and different ways of being Muslim, from a simple detached cultural reference to a regular religious practise. On a collective and institutional level, the CFCM cannot be considered as a spokesperson for this community given its heterogeneity and its competencies exclusively devoted to specifically religious issues.

2- A Muslim Vote in France?

Laurence and Vaïsse reckon that:

"as an abstract concept, the notion of a "Muslim vote" has captivated the imagination of French politicians (many of whom pursue it) and of some French and US critics, who fear that the government is being held hostage by France's Muslim population, which threatens it with electoral punishment (or social unrest) if foreign policy is not to Muslims' liking" (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 195).

Muslim voters represent 1.5 million voters which would correspond to 3.75% of all French voters (Vaïsse 2007). This number becomes significant provided we show that all these voters labelled as 'Muslims' vote homogenously.

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[11]The Euro-Palestine list programme was essentially to denounce the occupation of Palestinian territories and it ran candidate in the Ile-de-France region in the 2004 regional elections (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 202). It only received 1.83% of votes (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 203).

What most distinguishes them is their relative lack of participation. Voter registration is much lower for the French of African or Turkish origin, especially for younger people: 23% say they are not registered whereas this figure is just 7% for the whole French population (Brouard & Tiberj 2005, 49).

This segment of the population is heavily situated on the left of the political spectrum (Dargent 2003) as confirmed by a poll on the eve of the 2007 presidential elections on the political orientation of French Muslims (IFOP 2007). 64 % of French Muslims declared their vote for Ségolène Royal (Socialist Party candidate), 19 % for François Bayrou (UDF/centrist candidate) and 1 % for Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP, main right-wing party)[12].

An essential condition increasing the probability of an ethnic vote is the geographical concentration of the group. Immigrant and second-generation populations are geographically highly concentrated, especially in big cities like Paris, Marseille, Lyon and their outlying suburbs. 60% of all immigrants are concentrated in Paris and its surroundings (Ile-de-France region). 35 to 40% of all French Muslims live in the Ile-De-France region, 15 to 20% live around Marseille and Nice (PACA region), 15% in Lyon and Grenoble and 5 to 10% live around Lille (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 22). Concentration in the industrial and urban areas is explained by immigration flows since the sixties when migrants tended to settle in areas where factories were in need of labour (IFOP 2006: Dargent 2003, 22). Despite the high levels of concentration in some cities, there are very few circumscriptions where immigrants represent more than 10% of the population which means that in electoral terms, there are few incentives to reach out for the immigrant or ethnic vote.

The constraints of the Republican model also affect the strategies of ethnic or Muslim organisations. The assimilation paradigm stressing political integration as well as the

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[12] *La Croix*, 24 April 2007. The CSA Institute notes however that the results should be taken with caution because of the very small size of the sample. Only 3% of the 5 009 people interviewed declared themselves as Muslims.

involvement and weight of the state place these groups in a hesitant and therefore weak position regarding their mobilisation. This dilemma is clearly apparent in the following statement made by the President of the French Muslim Students Association at a UOIF meeting:

"The Young Muslims have passed the stage of a 'communitarian vote' in favour of a personality who claims to represent them. Their preoccupations are those of the whole French society" (quoted in Schain 2008, 108).

As these associations do not really frame their political participation in terms of ethnic vote, there is little pressure from below on political parties to open their doors to more minorities' candidates (Schain 2008, 117). For Withol de Wenden :

"the French model seems reluctant to implement multiculturalism because the Maghrebis are themselves playing a very republican card in their negotiations with French institutions. They are expected to receive delegated authority from public powers to maintain order and assume cultural identities within the French framework. This equilibrium, which looks like a French compromise, can be defined as 'multiculturalism à la française'" (Withol De Wenden 2003, 86). Indeed, the strategy of these groups is not to establish themselves along ethnic lines, for example via ethnic parties but rather to be considered by main established political parties (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, XV).

Despite all of these elements, the increasing naturalizations as well as the access of younger generations to vote have shed light on Muslims as potential voters: this has brought about electoral strategies, at least at the local level, as well as increasing attention to Muslims' claims (Godard & Taussig 2007, 110). Seductive strategies aimed at community leaders in order to attract ethnic votes take place essentially at the local level (Geisser 2007). Sarkozy's strategy in approaching Muslims, Jews and Asians as voting blocks was quite innovative in the French Republican context because of its relative transparency (Giry 2006).

As a result, if one may talk about any Muslim or immigrant vote, it is more certainly at the local level because of the concentration of the population in some areas (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 198). In this context however, the global debates about Islam do not seem to impact the vote (Godard & Taussig 2007, 110).

At the national level, state efforts to organize Islam, the creation of the CFCM and the appointment of government members having immigrant origins can be interpreted as signs of the decision-makers' expectations towards the Muslim communities and as a process of recognition of a collective entity (Leveau & Mohsen-Finan 2005). The shift noted earlier from ethnic to religious mobilisation is also reflected in candidates' perceptions: they develop strategies to get constituencies they used to perceive as 'Arab' or 'Maghrebi' and that they now perceive as 'Muslim' (Godard & Taussig 2007, 110).

The paradox is that these strategies are developed while the consensus is that there is no Muslim vote at the national level (Withol De Wenden 2003, 84: Godard & Taussig 2007, 110). Though the Muslim vote seems to constitute a concern for the politicians and the media, we cannot talk about a Muslim vote unless the religious variable determines the choice of the candidate but religious preferences do not seem relevant to understand Muslims' political positions (Giry 2006). There seems to be no causal relationship between ethnicity and voting which is done according to traditional partisan cleavages (Bertossi 2007). The heterogeneity of the population also prevents it from acting as a voting block (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 195). The preference for the left is driven by economic and social exclusion.

The adoption of an ethnic lens by politicians, more than ethnic dynamics, leads to the creation of ethnic candidates (International Crisis Group 2006). This can be considered as a

self-fulfilling prophecy whereby ethnicization[13] results less from the ghettoization of minorities than from perceptions of decision-makers (Withol De Wenden 2003, 85: International Crisis Group 2006, 24). The Muslim/maghrebi/Arab vote seems to be more an imaginary construction leading to the islamicization of this part of the electorate[14]. Therefore, Muslims would constitute a homogenous community only in the eyes of politicians creating a tension between the theoretical unity of the republic on the one hand and political strategies of mobilising potential and specific electorates on the other hand (Giry 2006).

There is no Muslim community, but rather fragmented communities and the Muslim vote is less grounded in reality than in politicians and media representations. Nonetheless, do Muslim communities cast their vote on the basis of external affairs?

6-Global issues: a remote concern

Foreign-policy: a non-issue?

The increasing presidentialization of power under the Fifth Republic translated into the '*domaine réservé'* which crystallizes foreign-policy making in the hands of the President. The French institutional and political context, already poorly propitious to the expression of specific interests, is characterized by a strong consensus on foreign policy issues (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 217). Indeed, the presidential campaign in 2007 was marked by very few debates on this theme.

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[13] Ethnnicization "comes from the representations and incentives of municipalities, political parties and public powers than from associative leaders or local elected young elites themselves: they have been chosen as the "Arabe de service" (token Arab) to give visibility to public policies, and they are required to stick to multicultural aims in the republican frame but not to apply for more ambitious and non-ethnic jobs or goals" (Withol De Wenden 2003, 85).
[14] Chat online, *lemonde.fr*, 28 February 2007.

There are very few studies dealing with the influence of foreign policy on the vote in France[15]. Foreign policy in general has never been a priority for French voters and does not raise voters' expectations (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 218: IFOP 2006). In a 2006 poll, the place of France in the world was ranked last in the list of issues that French people expected to be developed by presidential candidates, far behind economic issues, education and security (IFOP 2006, 4). The two dimensions deemed as priorities were related to development aid (32%) related to the traditional universalistic ambition of reducing North-South inequalities and the French leading role in the European Union (28%) (IFOP 2006a, 4). Expectations in terms of foreign policy are closely correlated to the age and political tendency of the respondents: younger generations and left sympathizers were more inclined to insist on the development aid and international solidarity dimensions (IFOP 2006a, 5). Beyond these cleavages, a strong consensus emerged as to the transatlantic relationship, a consensus which was unfavourable to the United States: 72% favoured a foreign policy distant from the United States whereas only 25% favoured a policy close to the United States (IFOP 2006a, 6).

Economic and social issues constitute the top priorities for the majority of the population, Muslims included. Muslims in Europe are first and foremost concerned with economic issues and especially unemployment (The Pew Global Attitudes Project 2006). In a 2002 poll, voters that had self-identified as Muslims cited as issues of concern to them in decreasing importance: social inequalities, employment, security, education, immigration and finally, in the last rank, international politics: then, foreign policy is not a determinant variable when voting (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 211). In 2006, 52% of French Muslims said they were very worried about unemployment and an additional 32% said they were somewhat concerned (Allen 2006). In the 2007 presidential bid, the Socialist Party candidate, Ségolène Royal

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[15]Chat online, *lemonde.fr*, 28 February 2007.

mobilised 21% of her electorate from African origin on the basis of her projects over unemployment (IFOP 2007). Other voters motivated their choice in relation to education (17%), social protection or the fight against discrimination (15% for each of these topics), immigration or purchasing power (10% for each). Muslims' concerns are then very similar to the whole population's which means there is no ethnicization of political priorities.

Having said that, the paradox identified earlier still holds: despite its minor role in voting, politicians still seem to think that their foreign-policy making can bring them additional votes (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 211). This was clearly exemplified by the "Boniface Affair" in the Socialist Party. As some people, especially students of Arab origin who would normally vote for the Socialist Party said they did not do so in 2002 on account of then Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's position in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Boniface reckoned that the Socialist Party should be more critical about Israeli policies, which should not be confused with anti-Semitism (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 2006). The memo implicitly and unquestionably assumed the existence of a Muslim voting block-, that it could be co-opted and that foreign policy was central (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 212).

The confusion also comes from politicians themselves as they were expecting the CFCM to play a mediating and moderating role in the *banlieues* for example in 2003. After the invasion of Iraq, the CFCM issued a statement calling for "calm and dignity", and no incidents related to this external event were reported (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 209). This comes as an echo of the Gulf War, when French decision-makers also developed specific strategies of communication and control[16] directed to Muslims as the French Ministry of the

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[16] Regarding the security aspect, some ethnic radios were controlled and some newspapers financed by or in favour of Iraq were closed in France (Blanc, Loisel & Sherrer 2005, 133). The adviser to the Prime Minister at that time will say: "the Muslim street was a daily obsession. Permanent cells were on alert (…) Reports over some mosques were immediately ordered (…) Everything had to be strictly controlled" (Blanc, Loisel & Sherrer 2005, 133). The second aspect emphasized dialogue and communication with main Muslims leaders and complements the security aspect in distinguishing between "radicals" and "moderates", forbidding public debate to some currents while legitimizing others. The ultimate goal was reached for decision-makers as proven

Interior was then worried about possible repercussions of the conflict in French Muslim populations (Blanc, Loisel & Sherrer 2005, 133).

There is no evidence that the pursuit of policies which would be favourable to Muslims would pay off and this includes foreign policy choices (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 198). This is again exemplified by the war in Iraq episode which highlighted the convergence of views of French Muslims and the French population in general. The Iraqi crisis undoubtedly constituted a shift: the strong presidentialization of French foreign policy resulting in the association of French opposition to the war in Iraq with former President Chirac lead to a "personalized allegiance to the President" (Leveau 2004, 8-9). Having said that, even though former President Chirac was already very popular in Muslim communities after his altercation with Israeli security services on his 22 October 1996 visit to East Jerusalem, a popularity reinforced by his opposition to the war in Iraq, this did not translate politically into a shift in favour of the Right. These events had no impact on voting behaviour (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 213).

The question of loyalty

Eurabia thesis' assumptions rely on the idea that French intervention in a Muslim country could lead to social unrest. This is precisely the reasons that were advanced by some commentators when Chirac opposed the war in Iraq. Decision-making in France would then be held hostage by the divided loyalties of Muslims whose first allegiance is assumed to go to the umma. 80% of French Muslims but only 44% of the French general public think Muslims are loyal to the country (Gallup 2009). 35% of the French general public do not think Muslims are loyal to the country (Gallup 2009).

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by the absence of riots. A member of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that: "nothing moved, at least, nothing of what we feared. Everything remained under control: Muslims, firms, public opinion. Some demonstrations, but no riots. We maintained control and I conclude we have perfectly managed the Gulf War." (Blanc, Loisel & Sherrer 2005, 133).

The increasing Muslim identification identified earlier has brought increasing identification or feeling of belonging to the *umma*, the "global community of the faithful" which includes all Muslims (Salvatore 2004, 1015: Silvestri 2007a, 169: Cesari 2009). This is an essential element in connection with international issues. The maintenance of links and networks with the countries of origin implies modes of identification that go beyond the national context, even while residing permanently in France: these modes of identification question the state sovereignty and traditional national allegiances (Cesari 1993, 48). Two global trends can be identified in this regard: a diasporic Islam linked to the country of origin and transnational Islam where the relation to the umma is emphasized (Cesari 2009, 167). European Muslims are mostly to be situated in the second trend, and this is especially mirrored in younger generations' experiences. Satellite television has contributed to the reinforcement of the feeling of international solidarity with Muslims (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 92: Godard & Taussig 2007, 226). Besides Al-Jazeera success, homeland channels also contribute to maintaining transnational relations. However, the web has been now the major instrument in fostering links to the homeland or to the umma[17]. A process can even be identified whereby all the Middle East conflicts pictures conveyed by the media fuel mobilisation through "the globalisation of perceptions" and through this mobilisation of solidarities, the group is more visible (Leveau & Mohsen-Finan 2005). These populations identify with other regions in conflict resulting in social "imaginaries" which are difficult to handle for decision-makers and for Leveau, this difficulty comes from the unsatisfactory integration policies (Leveau 2004). Hence there would be a connection between the level of integration of these populations and the identification towards other regions in the world (Leveau 2004, 1). Some develop a parallel between their living conditions and those of the Palestinian youth engaged in the intifada (Cesari 1991, 3).

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[17] Some websites are frequently used by French Muslims such as saphirnews (acting as a basis for the new "Muslim consumerism"), oumma.com (with a more intellectual dimension) or Islamonline, the most prominent website, based in Qatar and with a worldwide reach (Godard & Taussig 2007, 192).

The issue of double or divided loyalties emerged with the Gulf War (Cesari 1991). In 1991, French Muslims' positions were aligned on Muslims' positions in the world concerning the conflict[18]. Polls at that time showed Muslims' fears as to an increase of racism or possible expulsions so that religious leaders felt the need to reassert that the conflict did not question the rights of the Maghrebi community in France (Cesari 1991, 3: Leveau 2004). Even younger generations at that time held positions similar to their parents': for the first time, there was a rapprochement between different generations in terms of values and feelings of solidarity (Cesari 1991, 3).

The gap between French Muslims and the French population positions on this issue had several consequences : it created a rupture with the general population, it brought suspicion on their mobilisation and claims-making, a distance had for the first time been created with the Socialist Party and finally, it revealed an "arab sensitivity" (Cesari 1991, 128). Having said that, Mitterand still kept the support of the *banlieues* despite the French intervention in the Gulf War (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006).

Politicization takes place through identification and the subsequent positioning on a particular policy or event but mobilisation does not necessarily follow as it implies organisation and resources (Bennnani-Chraïbi 2007: 152). Though solidarity with the Palestinians is heavily displayed and mostly expressed through charities (Godard & Taussig 2007, 72), it does not translate into strong political action. This is exemplified by the UOIF stance on the issue, which refuses to "import" or deal with foreign conflicts as proven by its leader's declaration in May 2004 that the Palestinian conflict will not be resolved by French Muslim or Jewish citizens' actions[19] (Godard & Taussig 2007, 52). The organisation admits

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[18] 68% of Muslims worldwide and 69% of French Muslims opposed the military intervention in Iraq (Cesari 1991, 3). 46% of French Muslims opposed French policy on the issue. Views on Saddam Hussein were however quite diverse: 55% viewed Saddam Hussein as brave, 43% saw him as dangerous, 29% as crazy and 9% considered him as a hero (Cesari 1991, 3).

[19] In May 2004, UOIF's president, Lhaj Thami Brèze stated that: « The Palestinian problem will find its solution in Plaestine with the United Nations and Great Powers' helps, certainly not through French of Muslim

no political ambition on this front. Furthermore, it is important to note again that the heterogeneity and divisions among French Muslims trump the potential unifying force of the umma concept (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 265).

Conclusion

Internal considerations related to French Muslims do not seem to constitute an explanatory variable among the determinants of French foreign policy. Three essential factors counter the myth of a Muslim lobby.

First, there is no unified Muslim community and as a consequence, no unique representative organisation. Furthermore, there is not even a unique definition of a French Muslim as there are many forms of belonging to Islam. The institutionalizing process encouraged by the French state has lead to an organisation reflecting the divisions and fragmentation of what is usually and wrongly designated as the Muslim community. In fact, there are many Muslim communities according to divisions along countries of origin, theological divisions and generational divisions.

The second factor is related to the absence of an ethnic vote. Muslim voters' behaviour cannot be explained by the religious factor. The criteria explaining the French general population voting behaviour equally apply to Muslim voters. An ethnic vote is at best a punctual and local phenomenon.

Finally, foreign policy considerations only constitute a secondary concern for Muslims whose first worries relate to their place in society. Accusations of dual loyalties are

or Jewish confession citizens' actions…Our responsibility as citizens is to know how to control our own impulses for the sake of a common Jewish and Muslim interest" (Godard & Taussig 2007, 52). He also said in an interview: "Concerning the situation of Palestine, UOIF has neither the mandate nor the power to enter into political complexities. And so we have decided to act on the humanitarian front" (Laurence & Vaïsse 2006, 105).

significant as long as multiple allegiances translate into political action and mobilisation, which is not the case.

Our conclusion reflects Warner and Wenner's claim that "the European states with large Muslim Populations do exercise a modicum of care in their foreign policies towards Turkey, Algeria and the other regions of the world from which their Muslim immigrants have come" but, taking Great-Britain's position on the war in Iraq as evidence and explaining France's and Germany's with other factors, "they do not however, allow it to determine their foreign policy, and they need not: Muslim opinion about "homeland" politics is, as we have shown, divided" (Warner & Wenner 2006, 472). The question remains whether this conclusion specifically applies to France or whether this is valid for other European countries as well.

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