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French Manifestations of Durkheim's Collective Effervescence: The Dreyfus Affair and Islamophobia

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Abstract

The rise of Islamophobia in France has been a hot topic of discussion in recent years. This thesis will explore its precedence in the Dreyfus Affair of 1880s and attempt to understand it as an incidence of the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim's, concept of Collective Effervescence. For the last twenty years, a debate about "the Muslim problem," and the idea that Islam will always clash with the French values, has divided the French public sphere. The same type of phenomenon has happened during the Dreyfus Affair more than a hundred years ago, but the national debate was on the position of Jews in France. During the Dreyfus Affair, Durkheim interprets this phenomenon of the French society as an act of collective effervescence. In this project, we are testing if the issue of Islamophobia in France today qualifies as an act of collective effervescence, allowing us to better understand this phenomenon.

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Thesis Title: French Manifestations of Durkheim's Collective Effervescence: The Dreyfus Affair and Islamophobia

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

French Manifestations of Durkheim's Collective Effervescence: The Dreyfus Affair and

Islamophobia

by

Armel Cazedepats

April 25, 2016

The report of the investigation undertaken as a
Senior Thesis, to carry two courses of credit in
the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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Abstract

The rise of Islamophobia in France has been a hot topic of discussion in recent years. This thesis will explore its precedence in the Dreyfus Affair of 1880s and attempt to understand it as an incidence of the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim's, concept of Collective Effervescence. For the last twenty years, a debate about “the Muslim problem,” and the idea that Islam will always clash with the French values, has divided the French public sphere. The same type of phenomenon has happened during the Dreyfus Affair more than a hundred years ago, but the national debate was on the position of Jews in France. During the Dreyfus Affair, Durkheim interprets this phenomenon of the French society as an act of collective effervescence. In this project, we are testing if the issue of Islamophobia in France today qualifies as an act of collective effervescence, allowing us to better understand this phenomenon.

Dedication

To John and Rebeca for having made of this trip abroad one of the most beautiful experiences of my life.

To Didier, I would have been proud to show him this thesis.

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Introduction

After the recent terrorist attacks in the name of the “Islamic State” (ISIS), Muslims and non-Muslims from all around the world have communicated their feelings on the danger of falling into the terrorists’ goal that is to create a misidentification between the Muslim populations and the terrorists. However, these messages addressing the danger of Islamophobia (fear or hostility towards Islam) have not reduced its manifestation. In the U.S., for example, the success of Donald Trump’s anti-Muslim campaign confirms the growth of Islamophobia that was expected after the attacks. In France, while being more than a reaction driven by fear, Islamophobia has had a deep and important place in society for about the past twenty years.

On January 11th 2015, four million people were walking together in the streets of Paris showing solidarity after the terrorist attacks at *Charlie Hebdo*. This gathering was considered to be a healthy way for French people to express their mourning and show their solidarity. However, the French sociologist and demographer Emmanuel Todd, was describing this special gathering as an example of Islamophobia in France. He states that: “When four million people come together to spread the message that caricaturing the religion of others is an absolute right – and even a duty! -, and when these ‘others’ are the weakest people of society, we are perfectly free to think that we are doing something good, that we are in the right, and that we are a wonderful country. But it is not the case. Making fun of you or your own religion is one thing, but insulting the religion of someone else is different. Humiliating Islam is humiliating the weakest of society that are these immigrants” (Lancelin 2015, translation mine).

Emmanuel Todd was publically accused of being an “Imposture” (MyTF1 News 2015) by Manuel Valls, the French Prime Minister, for his thoughts on the gathering.

While the tense climate after the attacks did not stop Emanuel Todd from making his comments, the responses of the prime minister to the sociologist, and the different reactions in the public sphere, are a good example of the public exhilaration that Islamophobia represents in France. Through the “veil affair,” debate on the French national identity, and different input of the media and politicians on immigration and Islam, one cannot live in France without witnessing the interest of the public sphere on Islamophobia, and without having been connected somehow to the idea of the “Muslim problem.” The position of Islam in France seems to create a division in the society, between the people supporting the incompatibility of Islam and the dominant French values, and the people in support of the rights of Muslims in France. This project originated from a personal intellectual interest that arose from the gap between my personal experience of Islam and the way Islam seemed to have been portrayed in the media as a threat to the dominant values of French society. Growing up in the eleventh district of Paris, one of the most diverse neighborhoods of the city due to the significant amount of North African immigrants, I have experienced the function of Islam in society as peaceful, helpful in preventing individuals’ deviance, and in creating a sense of community. During the riots of 2005, the government could not stop what looked like revolutionary movements from the youth of the poor suburbs of Paris. The older generation immigrants were then invited on Television to give speeches and remind the youth of their peaceful religion and use Islam to stop the violent riots (20 Minutes 2013).

However, in France, there are about six million Muslim immigrants today, representing 8% of the French population (Simon 2010, 124). The Muslim immigrants are now associated with the working and lower social classes, and Islam is generally portrayed by the media as a problem in France. Muslims are often accused of

representing a community with values that are against the values of the French republic, and to refuse to really integrate themselves in France. Debates revolving around Islam have become a dominant issue in France. Certain influential intellectuals of the media have attempted to ban the word “Islamophobia” of the French vocabulary. These intellectuals have argued that the word was an invention of the Iranian extremists in 1970, to forbid any criticism of Islam (Mohammed and Hajjat 2014, 71). However, the sociologists Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohammed in their book *Islamophobia* prove this argument to be wrong by explaining that there are no real equivalent to the term Islamophobia in Persian, and they provide us with a different origin of the word. At the very beginning of the 20th century the term was used by ethnologists to criticize the colonial administrators’ approach of Islam in the colonies.

The issue with Islam is tightly connected to issues of immigration in France, which seem to create an obsession and open an intense debate on the different visions of French history and dominant societal values. Sometimes, the excitement of the public opinion on the different issues related to Islam in France is so great that the debate appears irrational, or disproportionate given the real position of the majority of Muslims living in France who do not seem to represent a direct “problem.” It is important to understand the reasons of this obsessive debate about Islam, in order to understand the true position of Islam in France. Why is Islam creating such an excitement in the media and in the public sphere? What is considered to be the “Muslim problem?” Is France really facing an issue with Islam it has never faced before just as it is argued through the media and argued by many politicians? But most importantly, is Islam really at the origin of this collective excitement, or could the building of this “Muslim problem” really be the manifestation of a French problem?

In this project, I intend to do an accurate analysis of the issue of Islamophobia in France to understand the real dynamics for what seems to create a true “effervescence” in the French public sphere. I will be looking at the French history and at some of the work of the famous French sociologist Emile Durkheim to understand why Islam creates such an issue in France. My argument comes alive by comparing the Dreyfus affair (1894-1906) with Islamophobia in France, and observing the similarities. The Dreyfus Affair represents an evidence for the argument that this kind of intense public movements in France that we observe through Islamophobia today are the manifestation of a phenomenon that is specific to French people, and not only specific to the population that is being targeted. The work of Durkheim will help us to understand these similar French phenomenon. These movements of French society that he calls “acts of collective effervescence” are a way for French people to affirm their identity. An analysis of the main Islamophobic publications in France, and of what has been the main arguments of the debate through the media, have required some direct translations from French to English throughout the paper. Finally, it is important to mention here that I had started this project before the recent terrorists’ attacks in Paris; the Charlie Hebdo shootings in 2014, and the November shootings in 2015. While this project considers the effects of the attacks on the visions of Islam in France, it does not only focus on the fear that is spread by terrorism. This project attempts to explain the deep effervescence that Islam has created in France for the last twenty years and what it says of the French identity.

Islamophobia and Its Manifestation in France

The current and complex issue of Islamophobia generally refers to individual or political prejudices against Islam. The phenomenon is growing in Europe and the United States, along with a global hostility or fear of Islam, based on the ideas of “clash,” between the “western world” and the “Muslim world.” However, while it is important to provide a global idea of the different stakes and tensions surrounding the issue, our goal here is not to provide an analysis of the western perception of Islam. While observing the strong and specific manifestation of Islamophobia in France, we aim to understand the origins of this national obsession. We are interested in understanding the nature of Islamophobia in France. In this chapter, we will offer a short and global perception of the issue, and focus on how Islamophobia specifically expresses itself in France, while dividing opinions.

After World War II, for France as for many other countries that were in the process of letting go of their colonies, decolonization was peaceful in some countries while being a source of major conflicts in others. The Algerian war, originating from the resistance of the “pied noirs” (French people that were living in Algeria) to the Algerian’s independence movement, is still known as one of the major traumas of French history. This conflict between France and parts of North Africa (as France had other colonies in North Africa such as in Morocco) led to a strong North African immigration in the 60s and 70s (Derder 2012). However, while it could have been easier for these populations to assimilate in France as they were already socialized under the French dominant culture in their countries of origins, these populations were not well assimilated in France. The trauma of the lost war for French people that had special connections to Algeria, created a certain resistance toward the North African assimilation in France. Through many

institutions, there are stereotypes and prejudices applied to all North African immigrants from Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. Often called “les arabes,” (the arabs) which is a misconception of their origins, North African immigrants, were discriminated based on their names or their religions, in the job market, school, and in many other parts of French society. The sons and daughters of these immigrants who became French citizens have criticized French society for the failed assimilation of their parents. In the second, or third generation immigrants who came of age in the 90s, problems became visible. With the debates around French identity and the effects of immigration on French society, Islamophobia grew and became popular around the same period. Today, Islamophobia is a global phenomenon, and confusions between extremist groups and Muslim populations are prevalent. These confusions are also based on a degradation of Islam as an ideology and culture. In France, concerns on the clash between Islam and French society became a national obsession. The core of the debate is focused on “what makes us French” and on the essence of French values, to prove Muslims’ incompatibility or compatibility with the French culture.

Islamophobia as a World Issue

In one of his papers, *Catholic and Muslim in Comparative Perspective*, the sociologist Jose Casanova gives us a global vision of the problem and the realization that the issue of Islamophobia is not new. He compares the current “clash” between the Muslim and Western world with the clash of Catholics and Protestants in Anglo-Saxon societies (Casanova 2005a, 2). Both religions responded to “modernity” through extremist groups and the formation of nation states. However, positive examples based on the evolution of Catholic political democratization seem to never be brought up when it comes to Muslim societies. The idea that Islam has an unchangeable core essence, and

that there is no space for religion in Western countries outside of the private sphere, seem to be an important factors of the popular worldview.

In Europe, there is a refusal to see Muslim societies other than fixed and unable to coexist with the West and secular world. In one of his books, *Public Religion in The Modern World*, Casanova explains the process of secularization that exists in the “modern world” that is based on science industrial revolution, capitalism, and differentiation that divides institutions in society such as the state and religion. In this process, the only place for religion is in the private sphere (Casanova 1994, 11-40).

The secular world has founded itself on hostility towards religion. In *Stillborn God*, Mark Lilla, goes back on the “Hobbesian revolution” and shows the importance of being able to think of a functioning society without religion, for the Enlightenment and all the founding ideas that have established the bases of modern Europe (Lilla 2007, 75-76). Even though religions have been in the public sphere for millennia, there is today a fundamental secular resistance to accept religion outside of the private sphere, creating the myth of “clash civilization” between the secular and religious world.

Muslim democracies that have tried to adapt and coexist with the Western secular world have had a complex history. Turkey has been trying to enter Europe for over a decade with no success. Casanova states that in Turkey, only in “November 2002 have the structural conditions been created to introduce the kind of constitutional, legal, and democratic reforms that makes EU membership possible. The paradox, therefore, is that only the rise of Muslim Democracy in Turkey has created the conditions for real democratization and authentic Europeanization” (Casanova, 2005a, 10).

Islam is one of the main factors that have barred Turkey from entering the E.U. While having a secular parliamentary representative democratic republic, it is considered in Europe that Turkey “is not a mature European-style democracy” (Debating Europe 2014). Even though there are many factors in favor of Turkey’s acceptance in the E.U, Islamic manifestations in Turkey always seem to play against their chance to mix in with the Western secular world. This non-negotiation of the western “global hegemony” contribute to creating this impression of a necessary “clash” between Islam and the Western secular. Casanova states that

“After September 11, the global war on terror, and the ever more visible proliferation of global Muslim discourses and networks, as well as of global discourses on Islam (e.g. Veiling, and on Islamic fundamentalism) in Europe all those developments have contributed to a panic that can only be characterized as ‘Islamophobia’” (Casanova 2005a, 14).

Here, the concept of Islamophobia refers to the global fear of the “clash” between the modern west-secular world and Islam.

The Place of Islam in France

As a French person growing up in a neighborhood of Paris whose population largely originated from different waves of immigration, I was exposed to the specific and current issue of Islamophobia in France. The space occupied by Islam in French society, as an identity factor for a large population of French citizens originating from Muslim countries (mostly from North Africa), has divided opinions beyond the usual political disputes. The “Muslim problem” (Mohamed and Hajjat 2014, 13), that has generated many discussions within my own family appeared to have created a real “effervescence” in France. It involves complex issues revolving around patriotism, immigration, class

struggle, racism, xenophobia, etc... Our goal here is not to look or try to analyze the pros and cons of this national debate, but to understand why Islamophobia is so present in France, and identify its function.

The veil affair represents one of the most important manifestations of Islamophobia in France. The “Islamic veil” is considered to be an important issue that nourishes the idea of clash civilization. It is an example for the argument that Islam represents the undoing of the enlightenment revolution and the French secularist values. The series of events that have created the “veil affair” have justified the presence of Islamophobia in France. The most famous and discussed conflicts of the Veil affair all happened when the veil was carried out in the public sphere, often in school, the public space in which the Veil was first banned. In 1989, some teenagers were expelled from their school for not having taken off their veil when asked by the dean as it was considered an “ostentatious” religious sign. A month later, the young Muslim women were admitted back in the school after agreeing that they will take off their veils during classes. This event was at the origin of many debates and interests as it was taken over by the media who called the event the “Veil affair.” This wave of public discussions and general excitement was at the origin of the creation of the Council of Integration at the end of 1989, whose general goal is to be able to offer useful answers to all the questions regarding the integration of immigrants or of second or third generation French people. Following this affair, a debate on the law of 1905 on disestablishment began and lasted for years. In 2004, the law on the religious signs in the French public schools is proclaimed. The law states that in schools “wearing religious signs or outfits through which a student could manifest his religion are forbidden”.

In 2008, a kindergarten teacher was fired for wearing her “hijab” (Islamic veil). The school argued to have only respected the principles of secularism when firing her. This employee sued the school, arguing that the way she was laid off was unfair. The vast majority of the media targeted the court case that lasted until 2014, while opening the public debate to the question of the “niqab” (the integral veil), also called “burka” by the majority of the French journalists. It is in this context that the law forbidding the hiding of faces in public spaces was made in 2010. In 2011, Nicolas Sarkozy creates a “secularist mission” through the Council of Integration. Gradually, following these laws and regulations, more and more women wearing the veil were arrested, which was at the origin of riots in the Parisian suburbs. It is under this tense climate of riots and rebellion against the laws that the government created the Observatory of Secularism.

The affair of the two girls in middle-school that were expelled from their school in Creteil in 1989, or the affair of “la crèche Baby Loup” where an employee sued the school after being fired, are famous examples that were based on the same principles: The issue of wearing the Islamic Veil in French, public places. The most recent event concerning the exposition of the Veil in public places, happened in a suburban town of Paris called Trappes in 2013. The majority of Trappes’s population is composed of working class Muslims. After cases of aggression and arrest of Muslim women wearing the Islamic Veil, many revolts and different kind of insurrections took place in the city.

Since 1989, when the veil affair became a national preoccupation and the “Muslim problem” became the source of many public debates, most French politics and the media have discussed the threat of the presence of Islam for the French dominant and fundamental values. In this context, Islam is seen as a closed-minded cult coming from underdeveloped countries, whose main goal is to take over the secular world. The mix of

the most extremist Islamic groups' ideas, shallow analysis of the Quran, and images of a growing immigration from underdeveloped countries, has created a caricature of Islam for French citizens. The power of the media plays a huge role in this hostile vision of Islam. In the introduction of his book, *Imaginary Islam: the media construction of Islamophobia in France, 1975-2005*, the French sociologist Delatombe explains that "between the decolonization and the current globalization, it is through TV that French people rediscovered the "Muslims:" 'working strangers' before, 'French Muslims' today" (Delatombe 2005, 2). He focuses on the power of media in creating a specific image of Islam for French people. More than the selection of news or shocking video, it is the power of words in the media that seem to have the greatest influence in creating an image of Islam for the population. As he quotes Bourdieu:

"With ordinary words, we do not impress the aristocrats nor the working class people. We need extraordinary words. In fact, paradoxically, the world of image is dominated by words. The picture is nothing without the footnote that indicates what to read, footnotes that can often make you see anything. Labeling, as we know it, is allowing to seem, it is creating, bringing to existence. And words can often create ravages: Islam, Islamic, Islamist – Is the Veil Islamic or Islamist?" (Delatombe 2005, 3, translation mine).

Through the media, the presence of Islam in France is seen as a threat for the country to go "backwards." Islam is seen as unadaptable to what has been selected by the media as the main principles of French society. According to the *Riposte Laïque* blog, the presence of Islam in France threatens the French separation of church and state of 1905, and threatens many others fundamentals the French people have "fight" for through history (Letailleur 2012). Oppositions from this kind of visions bring back the 1791 constitution

that instituted the “liberté des cultes” (freedom of cult), a freedom of practicing any cult as long as it does not go against the public welfare in France, and claimed an overall tolerance. Nevertheless, when it comes to Islam, the main interest of the French media is to discuss “the conflict” between the French identity and Muslims in general. The right wing blog *Fdesouche* stated that “In 1989, 31% of a sampled population were opposed to the Islamic Veil in the street, while they are 63% today [...] 76% of French people consider that Islam has become too powerful in France” (Rieu 2014, translation mine). The blog *Riposte Laïque* uses the trope of “invasion” and explains what should be the real perception of Islam in France through a few references to the French secular and anti-religious history and an exposition of the danger that Islam represents. France is then seen as a completely secular country while the known and numerous influences of Catholicism on the French VI Republic are never mentioned.



Cartoon on the blog *Riposte Laïque*, January 23, 2012

This picture of the article represents a French woman that is being attacked and forced to submission for being secular. She has a sign that says secularism and is being injected a product on which Veil, Sharia, and submission is written. Finally, for Nicolas Sarkozy the problem comes from the number of Muslim immigrants as he states that in France, "Immigration threatens the way we live". The ex-president holds discourses on how French people should not fear to defend their values. The speeches seem to be less of factual sources, than on an overall anxiety and feeling that France is being "invaded" through an immigration growth. (France TVInfo 2014)

However, while the idea that France is being invaded more and more by a current and growing immigration, data shows that France has diminish its immigration. In his paper, *Immigration and the New Religion Pluralism*, Jose Casanova states that:

"In 2004 Spain and Italy, which only three decades earlier had been immigrant sending countries, received the largest number of legal Immigrants in Europe, ca. 500,000 and 400,000 respectively, while traditional immigrant receiving countries such as Germany, France and Great Britain were able to reduce drastically their legal immigration to 100,000 entries or less" (Casanova 2005, 3).

This statement, which is in 2004, during the popularization of Islamophobia and during the Islamic veil affair in France, contrasts the idea that France is being invaded and is "carrying" more immigrants than the rest of European countries. The Muslim immigration in France appears to have been more controlled over the years in France. However, the intensity of the reactions regarding the Muslim immigration in France seems to be growing independently from what is actually happening. If there are no direct and concrete threats from Islam that justify this collective reaction, how does Islamophobia justifies its manifestation in France?

The Complex and Precise Manifestations of Islamophobia in France

The two French sociologists Marwan Mohamed and Abdellali Hajjat illustrate in the book, *Islamophobia*, the popularization of the issue by explaining the case of Sirine in 2012. Sirine, a 15-year-old French girl from a working class family, was the victim of a series of persecutions due to her, supposed, public “outing” of her being a Muslim, leading to an expulsion from her public school. As she was taking off her hijab before entering the school every day, Sirine kept a scarf covering two-thirds of her hair and wore a long scarf inside the school. After being individually persecuted by her professors, forced to take classes alone, and finally being asked to leave the school, Sirine became the origin of many institutional debates. While Sirine was suffering anxieties from being discriminated against at school and having to see psychiatrists to fight her depression, her parents, after experiencing the intransigence of the school administration, relied on the “Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France,” an association of protection against Islamophobia in France. The case became mediated, and the school justified Sirine’s exclusion through the law of March 15 2004, banning the Veil in public school as a form exhibiting religious signs. The expulsion was also justified by specific school rules that happened to have been specifically rearranged by the school before the case. Based on a few centimeters that separated what would be considered a scarf from a religious sign, Sirine was officially expelled by her school. It was declared at the National Embassy that Sirine was the product of dogmatic associations and that her religious outfit was against the French law. Marwan Mohammed quotes Vincent Peillon, the socialist minister of the national education, explaining that he considered “the hypothesis of an extremist Islamic conspiracy” and that Sirine’s clothes were “religious ostentatious signs, we are prepared when facing this situation, and the nation has to come together into an agreement when we have to rely on justice to apply the respect of our principles”

(Mohammed and Hajjat 2014, 10). This case illustrates the popular agreement of the “Muslim problem.” How do political parties, opposites in their vision of society, fall into agreements when it comes to this issue? What really justified the “dehumanization” of Sirine? (Mohammed and Hajjat 2014, 12) Why does the construction of an anti-Muslimism archive get created, with laws and regulations persecuting Islam? Why is Islam capable of creating such collective reactions in France?

The general debate seems to revolve around French problems that have become “Muslim problems.” Mohamed and Hajjat define Islamophobia as the issue “corresponding to the complex social processes of racialization supported by the signs (real, or assumed) of belonging to the Muslim religion. These manifestations vary depending of the national contexts and historic periods” (Mohammed and Hajjat 2014, 19). In other words, the manifestations of Islamophobia are never fixed and they are tangled with issues of Arab-phobia, immigration, and visions of social classes that vary through time. The problem of immigration and class struggle that became a media obsession in the 90s has been transferred over the years to the “Muslim problem.” The industrial shift and the tertiary revolution have shaped the public opinion into viewing immigration as an expensive and burdensome weight for the country. However, problems of strikes and riots that were attributed to class struggles in 1968 are now criticized and justified by the dominant religion of the lower working class. Muslims workers, whose religion was not an issue before, are now seen as unadaptable to the French working world, and to different French institutions. Problems of work conditions that are not fixed are justified by the religion of the workers. Marwan Mohamed states that “It is not by chance that the first political movements of the Muslim question in France appears at the moment where the immigrant workers claim equality with French

workers towards the work conditions and terminations” (Mohamed and Hajjat 2014, 21). Islam is merely the religion of an entire social class. It seems to be constantly targeted when the social class appears to be a source of problem. Problems that were before treated as internal problems of French society are now treated as the product of an external, Islamic invasion. For example, issues of productivity that were once blamed on communist ideologies and class consciousness leading to strikes, are now blamed on the religious rituals, such as the prayers during the day that are considered to go against the functioning of an efficient economy. A large part of the public opinion has qualified this obsession towards Islam as a rejection of the basic egalitarian principles of France. What we are trying to understand here is the real place of Islam in these French public debates. Why is there a collective reaction around Islam, which is constantly targeted as a major public problem? Where does this national obsession against Islam, as an explanation for most of the societal problems, come from? To what extent can the issue of Islamophobia be a repeated French issue revolving around French identity and religion?

As Islamophobia seems to have a particularly intense presence in France, that is not always found in other countries of Muslims immigration. I have wondered which part of the issue of Islamophobia in France actually comes from Islam, and which part actually comes from France. I have found my answer by looking back to a major event of French history where the same kind of public movement was found. However, in this affair, the fixation was on another population, and the debate had nothing to do with Islam.

Durkheim and the Dreyfus Affair

Towards the end of the 19th century, after periods of industrial revolutions and urbanization, modernity shaped societies as complex systems. With big cities came economic growth and scientific progress. However, the crime rates in cities also augmented, along with poverty, suicide rates, and other human reactions to the feeling of being misplaced in these more crowded and less coherent societies.

One of the founding fathers of Sociology, Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), dedicated his life's work to look at how societies were functioning in modernity. He focused on the origins of human societies and how they are organized to maintain their coherence and unity. Following the work of the first French sociologist, Auguste Comte, Durkheim thought of society through institutions that work together and have different functions just as organs in the human body. For Durkheim, in order to function, all societies must provide a sense of belonging and some kind of solidarity for humans.

When it came to religion, Durkheim only became curious in the function that religion had in society, not in religion itself. He was interested in the origin of the human choice to practice religion and the need for the religious institution in society. As a social scientist, Durkheim wondered about the place occupied by religion in society after the Dreyfus affair in France. The religious components of the Dreyfus Affair that started in 1894, became a personal interest to Durkheim for what it said about French society. The Dreyfus affair gave voice to the problems of xenophobia and anti-Semitism in France. More complex than the typical political oppositions, the conflicts around the different values that the affair entailed became a national priority and divided the public sphere. The media's reaction and the rise of different opinions during the affair left no other choice for Durkheim than to expose proudly and defend his Jewish origins. The

sociologists looked at French society through the affair and described the reactions as an act of collective effervescence in France. Later in his life he would write *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, a focus on ancient, religious tribes to understand the essence of the function of religion for human societies. In this chapter, we will first look at the place of religion in Durkheim's life through the Dreyfus affair. Secondly, we will look at his vision of religion in society through the *Elementary Forms of Religions*, and finally, his perception of collective effervescence around religion in France during the Dreyfus affair.

The Dreyfus Affair

The Dreyfus affair was an event that created a political crisis and divided France for over a decade, from 1894 to 1906. France had just lost the Franco-German war in 1871, which was an important defeat. Alfred Dreyfus, a captain of the French army was accused of treason for selling military secrets to the Germans in December 1894, thirty years before World War One, at a time when the tensions between the two countries were growing. From the beginning, the case became important through the media in a common agreement that the captain Dreyfus was guilty. The French encyclopedia of the history states that “early publicity surrounding the case came from anti-Semitic groups (especially the newspaper *La Libre Parole*, edited by Edouard Dumont), to whom Dreyfus symbolized the supposed disloyalty of French Jews” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014). However, as the affair became popular, it became more and more clear that the captain was innocent. Another guilty officer, Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy, was acquitted of treason in 1898. Alfred Dreyfus was found guilty and exiled to the famous prison of the Devil's Island in the French Guiana. Attempts of the Dreyfus family to reverse the sentence were soon supported by many individuals, “among them journalists Joseph

Reinach and Georges Clemenceau – the future World War I premier – and a senator, Auguste Scheurer-Kestner” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014). The official ideological divisions and complete popularization of the problem came from “J’accuse,” a published letter of the famous French writer Emile Zola, to the French president. After this public response to the Dreyfus affair, where Zola accused the army of covering up the mistaken conviction of Dreyfus, the author was brought to trial in 1898. Zola “was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 francs after being found guilty of libel. As a result of the new attention focused on the affair, Dreyfus underwent a new court-martial” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014).

In July 1906, a civilian court of appeals rehabilitated Dreyfus after the president of the Republic pardoned him in order to officially calm the repercussions and movements that the affair had generated. However, since the Dreyfus affair happened to be a matter of principles, the army, an institution opposed to the “Dreyfusards,” an association of individuals in defense of the captain Dreyfus during the affair, did not publicly declare his innocence until 1995. In twelve years, the Dreyfus affair was at the center of one of the strongest public events in French history. It generated the most famous pieces of writings and created the most shocking forms of stigmatization and racist cartoons. The public sphere was divided in two camps: the camp of the Dreyfusards, the ones supporting the individual rights of Dreyfus in the affair and also criticizing and denouncing the nationalistic and xenophobic ways of French society on one side, and on the other, the French nationalists who refused the assimilation of Jews in France and mocked the Dreyfusards. Politically, the paradox is that the left wing movements exposed themselves as defenders of individual freedom within the society, while the right wing movements defended the interest of the people as a whole by siding

with the French army. The effects of the affair were essential for French society and the construction of the French identity through the third republic.

“With the Dreyfusards in the ascendant, the affair marked the start of a new phase in the history of the Third Republic, a phase in which a series of Radical-led governments pursued an anticlerical policy that culminated in the formal separation of church and state (1905). By intensifying antagonisms between right and left and by forcing individuals to choose sides, the case made a lasting impact on the consciousness of the French nation” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014).

This division of sides that originated from the affair into the public sphere reappeared throughout the Third Republic during different political movements or ideological changes that created debates and concentration of opinions. The events of May 1968 in Paris¹, or the insurrections of 2005² were at the origin of an emersion of similar actions and thoughts on political principles that divided the French public sphere. The French historian Christophe Prochasson in his document “*Dreyfusards et Antidreyfusards*” states,

“Since the Dreyfus affair, two political traditions are opposed in France. The first one, emerging from the Dreyfusards, adopts the republican monopoly of Justice and Liberty, even if the French left wing, after Mai-68, transformed the heritage for values that were more radical. The second one, made of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-

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1. May 1968 in Paris was an important moment of the French history where Parisians started major strikes and riots. Parisians were revolting and being « fed up » of the traditional and rigid French values. Society was divided and this month of May felt like a small, or missed, revolution.
 2. The riots of 2005 originated from story of Zayed Benna and Bouna Traore who were young teenagers who died while they escaping from the police. After their death, violent riots emerged in the city where they were from which resulted in direct fights with the police forces. Riots emerged in many places around and within the city of Paris. The anger of the youth came from complaints about the overall conditions of immigrants in France, and this affair created a national debate dividing the public sphere.

intellectualism, and of nationalism, marks a deep tendency of political life. From the nationalism of the 1910 years, to the facism of the in-between world war period, to the extremist patriots of the Algerian war, and to the national front of Jean-Marie Le Pen, we find a political and cultural stream that originated with the antidreyfusards” (Prochasson 1988, 36, translation mine).

Even though Emile Durkheim was of Jewish background and attended the synagogue when it was considered necessary by his mother, he aspired to be assimilated with no other ethnic origins than the ones of a “Frenchman, loyal to La Nation and to the Third Republic – just that” (Pickering 2002, 1). However, the Dreyfus Affair affected the Jewish community in a way that it was important for Durkheim not to deny his Jewish origins. With the affair, Durkheim came to the realization that it was not right for Jewish people to live hidden, having to reject their norms and values in order to be integrated into French society. Joining the “Ligue des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen,” (Pickering 2002, 2) defending liberty and equality in society for all humans, Durkheim was first involved in the Dreyfus affair to defend the basic humans rights that were being violated. Durkheim’s involvement became gradually more and more important by the time of his two letters of 1898 that were written in response to the French government’s position on the affair. Through his letters, Durkheim argued that the government that was not representing all French people’s rights by protecting the army and engaging in anti-Semitic actions. This clarified where he stood as an intellectual Dreyfusard.

Durkheim would later describe this division of French society as “collective effervescence” in his *Elementary forms of Religious Life*. While making his Jewish origins official and criticizing the conducts of French society, Durkheim’s sociology was influenced by the strong social movements that the affair created in France. Through his

questioning of why individuals seem to need to take sides and get involve in society, Durkheim became interested in religion for its social power in creating bonds within societies.

Durkheim's Vision of Religion in Human Societies

After the Dreyfus affair, Durkheim developed interest in the institution of religion, its origin, and function that it plays in society. His goal was not to wonder about the existence of God, nor to look at the core of religion from a theological perspective, but to wonder about the function of religion for humans. Why is religion always present in human societies? What is the human need for religion? Durkheim, one of the fathers of sociology, was motivated by the Dreyfus affair in order to try to understand the questions regarding the relationship between societies and religion. The key findings of his study are in the social force of religion and in the idea that society creates religion, as religion is necessary to its survival (Rammstedt 1988, 142-152).

All his life, Durkheim was concerned with the issues of order in society, solidarity, and what brings humans together. Durkheim was not interested in religious questions but his interest for religion developed for what it said about the human nature and human societies in general. In his book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he studied the most primitive forms of religion within simple societies to understand its true essence. His goal was to understand the purest form of religion in society, before the institution of religion changed by evolving in different societies throughout history (Durkheim 1912, 1).

Durkheim observed that religion's essence, the common point between all religions, is not the idea of a god, but a set of rituals and beliefs that is held socially. By having people believe in the same things and performing the same actions, religion

creates solidarity. For Durkheim, this social force is the cardinal importance for human societies (Durkheim 1912, 330).

The famous sociologist seemed to have a Hobbesian vision of human nature: in the state of nature, with no society, humans are selfish and hostile to each other. However, Durkheim argues that humans have the capacity to create religion, which allows them to live in a structurally sound society. The morals that society needs to stay alive are brought up to humans through religion (Sadri 2015).

As society needs religion to stay alive, Durkheim also shows that religion holds the social concepts that human societies need to move forward and make sense of the world. Life concepts such as time and space become an accepted reality only when they are commonly believed in through religion (Durkheim 1912, 335). However, Durkheim, just like most thinkers of his time, believed that science or society as a whole may replace the function of religion of putting these commonly accepted concepts forward and create a sense of reality for individuals in societies.

As societies became more complex, Durkheim believed that the social force of religion would be replaced and eventually disappear. The progress of science in secular, modern societies could suppress the need for religion. Can humans have their own morals, knowledge, and organizations without religion? What was the need that brought religion back to our modern societies? These are questions that the sociologist wondered about when he thought about “collective effervescence” (Durkheim 1912, 245-251). Collective effervescence is at the origin of religion as it is the mean for people to gather and have common beliefs and rituals. In Australian clan, in the most primitive religions, it is this sort of public excitement that allowed consistent religious ceremonies. For

Durkheim, these rare gathering, capable to assemble the whole while creating exhilaration, are still needed in modern, non-religious societies.

“It is this succession of intense periods of ‘collective effervescence’ with much longer periods of dispersed, individualistic economic activity, Durkheim suggested, which gives rise to the belief that there are two worlds -- the sacred and the profane -- both within us and within nature itself” (Jones 1986, 135).

As Durkheim focused on the lack of solidarity through division of labor in organic, non-religious societies, he explains French society’s need for collective effervescence during the Dreyfus affair.

Collective effervescence is then described as the force capable to bring society together through common thoughts and actions and create an overall excitation, impacting individuals while being recognizable in the public sphere. The sociologist Hans Joas, in his paper “Durkheim et l’extase collective”, explains that:

“The experience of losing yourself in the collective trance – Durkheim talks of ‘collective effervescence’ - is at the same time the experience of a force, of an extraordinary strength that takes an individual and transport him in another world. The effectiveness of this force is not to be doubted, it is real. For Durkheim, this force represents nothing else than the effect of the fusion of individuals to a collective entity” (Joas 1997, 4, translation mine)

Therefore, for Durkheim, the Dreyfus Affair was only a symbolic event allowing French people to feel like belonging. By creating a collective effervescence around a national debate, the Dreyfus affair showed the need of French society to debate over its principals and its values, to debate over its identity.

Durkheim's collective effervescence in France after the Dreyfus affair

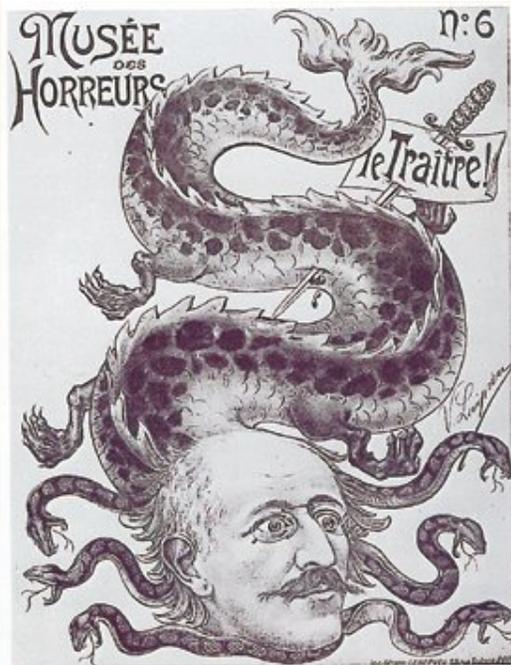
Just as religion had the power to bring people together in societies and engage similar thoughts and actions, the Dreyfus affair was a secular replacement for the collective effervescence that religion used to produce. In secular and atheist societies such as French society after its disestablishment in 1905, expressions of collective effervescence are necessary in order to replace the function of religion in bringing people together. While dividing French society in two camps, it created solidarity and a sense of reality for French people by making them feel like belonging to a society that they share with others.

In the Dreyfus affair, the collective effervescence created intense and violent obsession against a targeted group. Antidreyfusards came together over the agreement that Jewish people were ruining French society. Edouard Drumont, an anti-Semitic author that became popular during the affair Dreyfus wrote *La France Juive* in 1870, which explains why Jews were a danger for French society. The portrayal of Jews in the book grew popular in a period where France had lost the Franco-Prussian war. The country was in need of patriotism, and the third Republic was following a policy of secularization. The book was divided in three parts, one that is racial, another financial, and the last one was religious. He argued that Jews would destroy the country's economy by describing them as sneaky individuals who controlled finance and capitalism. The third part addressed the Jews "hidden" involvement in the death of Jesus. In France, social tensions were growing in a new, liberal economic system. For Edouard Drumont Jews were the ones to blame for this social malaise. He stated that:

"Today the Jews think that there is nothing else they can get from us, aside from the last honorary baubles from the World's Fair. They know our cashboxes are empty, that the

savings banks will be unable to reimburse the billions that were confided to them. They know the depths of the abyss hidden by the false décor of our budgets. They are preparing to liquidate France the same way they liquidated Spain” (Drumont 1898, 39, translation mine).

Anti-Semitism was popular and spread through Europe. Their culture was seen as a threat for the common values of European countries that had a “real history”, while Jews only had greed to define them.



“The traitor” a lithograph depicting Dreyfus, V.Lepneveu, 1899

This cartoon was one of many published by the media. It is the sixth of a series of cartoons called the “Museum of Horrors.” Here, it represents the captain Dreyfus as a snake with a knife in his body and a note that says “The Traitor.” Even though the general public knew that Dreyfus was not found guilty, he was considered a traitor for being Jewish. A large part of the public opinion developed a fear of Jews in France, and the anti-Semites came out as defenders of the society:

“If the anti-Semites don’t manage to save France by the means used by Danton during the French revolution the decadence will happen ‘in the blink of an eye.’ The moment has never been more serious. We are going to witness; we already are witnessing a sharing out of the world. The question is: are we going to intervene in this sharing out or will we be excluded” (Drumont 1898, 39-40, translation mine). The French scholars, who stood on the side of Dreyfus, and who defended the rights of Jews in France, were at the origin of the term “intellectuals.” This word was invented and used pejoratively by antidreyfusards to describe the defenders of the rights of Jews, who were not defending the interest of the army in France. Intellectuals were insulted through the media and considered to be “feminine” and soft (Conner, 2014, 3).

Divided by fear, perceptions of their identity, and political opinions, the involvement of individuals in the public debate grew during the affair. The majority of the people living in France felt responsible to take a side in the affair, to protect their vision of French society.

UN DINER EN FAMILLE

(PARIS, CE 13 FÉVRIER 1898)

PAR CARAN D'ACHE



A family Supper, cartoon by Caran d'Ache, 1898

This illustration is a good example of how the Dreyfus affair was known to divide social classes, generations, and (as we can see it here) families. In this cartoon, we can also see the intensity of the dispute, which is meant to show us how engaged were the people and how violent the debate could be. The cartoon is called “A Family Supper,” and it was made February 13, 1898. In the first frame, the man at the left end of the table says, “Above all! Let’s not talk about the Dreyfus affair!” This does not seem manageable as we move into the second frame. This willingness to want to be a part of a group of thoughts and be engaged in similar action with a group is what Durkheim has defined as “collective effervescence.”

For Durkheim, religion served as a common guidance, necessary for society to function. In secular societies, this function of religion is replaced by these manifestations

of collective effervescence. In his book, *Collective Effervescence and Communitas: Processual Models of Rituals Society in Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner*, the religion professor Tim Olaveson looks at the function of Durkheim's collective effervescence and states, "At any rate, "collective effervescence" can be interpreted as having the power of symbolization = faculty of symbolization" (Olaveson 2001, 163). Throughout history, French society has experienced many moments of collective effervescence. The solidarity that it creates can be extremely powerful in creating social change. As Edward Triyakian, professor of sociology at Duke University, states, "The events of '1968', which ultimately must be thought of as a cultural revolution that challenged the legitimacy of established authority everywhere" (Triyakian 1995, 268).

These secular expressions of collective effervescence that come back through French history seem be specific to the French identity. While collective effervescences are common in different societies throughout the world, the core of the debate that originated from the Dreyfus affair is specific to the French identity. Issues of nationalism, definitions of the third republic, tolerance, immigration, assimilation, and social mobility are always at the center of the debate. The traditional values of the French extreme right wing were founded during the Dreyfus Affair. To this day in France, carrying a flag or having a flag on a window is considered to represent a political position and different values of nationalism that are often associated with racism. Our goal here is to look at the place of collective effervescence in the context of the growing issue of Islamophobia in France today.

Islamophobia in France, an Act of Collective Effervescence

If the presence of Islamophobia in France came from an act of collective effervescence, as collective effervescence has happened in the past in France, Islamophobia would originate from something different than just the idea of an unfixable “problem” between France and Islam. Islam could then only represent a sort of pretext to satisfy a need for nationalism and reassure the French identity. As this kind of public debate and public effervescence have existed in the past in France, issues of French identity could be playing a key role in this conflict, a more important role than the position of Islam in France. Just as for Judaism in the Dreyfus Affair, debating and focusing on the position of Islam among French people would become a way to feel “more French,” to feel like belonging to one society by rejecting or protecting “others.” However, while I have felt a sort of obsession among my friends and family or throughout intense debates on TV, I wonder if one can show that what is happening today with Islam is comparable to what was happening a hundred years ago during the Dreyfus affair. In order to make the argument that some of the movements surrounding Islam came from identity issues within French society rather than being particular to Islam, the role of collective effervescence ought to be defined and measured. As we have developed an idea of what collective effervescence looks like through Durkheim’s visions of events of the Dreyfus Affair, we will now try to find its essence and see if it is applicable to the phenomenon of Islamophobia today.

First, we will look at the social and economic context that created the combative environment during the Dreyfus Affair, and see how it compares with the social and economic context during Islamophobia today in France. Secondly, we will look at how the manifestation of anti-Semitism at the time compares with the manifestation of

Islamophobia. Finally, we look at how the popularization of Islamophobia transcends the differences of political parties just as during the Dreyfus affair.

Social and Economic Context

The anti-Semitic wave in France that was at the origin of the context of the Dreyfus affair was mainly composed of an economic crisis that most capitalistic countries experienced in the 1880s. The crash of the General Union Bank in 1882 was an important factor creating insecurities within French society. (Porchasson 1988, 38) Furthermore, this crisis was also at the origin of the massive waves of immigration of Jews from East Europe escaping the “pogroms” (attacks of non-Jewish population towards Jews), in Russia and Central Europe. The economic context created uncertainties for the French working and middle class that were compounded by unemployment issues. The idea of progress that was associated with the bourgeoisie was now threatened. The just arrived Jewish immigration that was physically visible by French people, started to constitute a target. The Jewish immigration was treated as a scape goat for what was happening economically in the country. The majority of the French right wing became anti-Semitic, and the Jewish immigration was compared to a barbarian invasion. (Lanchon 2005, 66)

The context of economic crisis, and the targeting of an immigration problem, throughout the growth of Islamophobia in France at the end of the 2000s, is similar to what had created the growth of anti-Semitism and movements of collective effervescence during the Dreyfus affair.

The growth of Islamophobia in France, measured through negative opinions and attitudes towards Muslim have necessitate the creation of the National Observatory of Islamophobia in 2011. The economic crises of 2008 have made unemployment the main focus of the French people. Even though the wave of immigration is not as massive as

during the Dreyfus affair, the role of the Media, through the riots of 2005 for example, is comparable. The words that were then used to describe the youth of the ghettos by Nicolas Sarkozy (Guibert 2005) such as “power washer” to take the “riffraff” out of the projects, and the right wing creation of a National debate on national identity, are similar responses to a similar context, creating a “problem” for French society to fix.

Rochdy Alili, one of the main authors of several works on the vulgarization of Islam, describes the phenomenon that spreads out in French society as “Anti-Semitic Islamophobia” (Alili 2000). In his chapter *the anti-Semitism* in the book of Vincent Duclert, a current historian and specialist of the Dreyfus affair, Nicolas Weill states, “when society suffers, writes Durkheim, there is a need of finding someone on whom it can relieve its pain on whom it can express its deceptions’. What is at stake is a mechanism of vengeance. ‘The pariah serves as scapegoat’” (Weill 2009, 65). Just as with Jews during the Dreyfus affair, since the years 2000s, Islamophobia as a phenomenon of collective effervescence triggered by immigration has been noticeable through the main political themes of the French right wing; the “non- controllable” Muslim immigration, creating a “Muslim problem.”

Moments of collective effervescence that bring society together while pushing individuals towards similar thoughts and actions can be measured in different ways. Here we have selected expressions of collective effervescence within the Dreyfus affair and Islamophobia in France, and we will try to see how they can be compared. We will focus on three expressions of change within French society that seem to be similar in both cases: Physical actions of the population at the demonstrations and changes in politics and public opinions. This will allow us to see if the “problem” of Islam today in France is

specific to the population targeted, or an act of collective effervescence that has happened in the past and could be specific to French society.

Manifestation of the anti-Semite/Islamophobia (physical actions, Demonstrations)

In January 17th 1898 in Nantes, 3000 young people were in the street, screaming death threats. They were destroying the stores belonging to Jews and trying to break into the synagogue. The same night in Nancy, the Synagogue was besieged. In Paris, people were demonstrating by holding signs with the words “Zola at the gallows. Death to the Jews” (Bredin 1994, 267). Following the publications of Zola’s letter “*J’accuse*”, France went through a wave of anti-Semite agitation that lasted for about 18 months. In the large provincial cities, this agitation was apparent through demonstrations and riots in the streets that were often violent: Attacks on storefront of Jewish stores, and breaking of the doors of synagogues. These spontaneous movements were founded on the diffused anti-Semitism that had grown in French society (Prochasson 1998, 41-48).

Today, we seem to be witnessing a similar agitation with Islamophobia. The latent Islamophobia only manifests itself by isolated demonstrations of extreme right wing groups. In 2012 for example, the “Figaro,” a right wing newspaper, reported on October 20th that young people of the “Identity Generation” occupied the construction of the new mosque of the city of Poitiers. Surveys on opinions showed that only 26% of French people have a good image of Islam (published by Harris in 2013), 63% consider Islam as in compatible with the values of French society (published by Ipos in 2014), and 55% believe that Islam is too noticeable (published by Odoxa in 2015). However, when a “touchy” subject is spread out in the news, the manifestation of Islamophobia changes dimension. The National Observatory Against Islamophobia reports that in January 2015, right after the Paris attacks of January 7th and 9th, the attacks towards Muslims have

increased of 110% compared to January 2014. Throughout the days that followed the attacks, there were 28 actions against religious buildings, such as burning of mosques, or diverse vandalism, and 88 threats, such insulting graffiti, or dead pig left in front of Arabic businesses. The Observatory explains that these acts are naturally under reported and can only be counted through the testimony of victims, and many Muslims do not press charge as they consider the process useless as they don't usually help their situations. Furthermore, the announcement of the welcoming of Syrian refugees in France last summer was at the origin of street protests in September 2015, called "Demonstration against the migration flood" by its organizers. For the organizers, the goal of the protest seemed to have been political, the goal was to have a protest that would influence the government's decisions towards the welcoming of refugees. However, the protest quickly became a pretext for Islamophobic slogans such as "Islam out of France." Other slogans were typical of the extreme right slogans, such as "France for the French people," which before being the main device of the National Front party, was the one of the anti-Semitic league of France founded by Edouard Drumont in 1889 during the Dreyfus affair (Perrotin, 2015). When the speakers mentioned that Muslims were present on the French territory, and when participants started yelling, "We need to shoot them all," the episode recalled the violent protests of 1898, where the principal slogan was "death to the Jews".

Today, while participants in these types of protests risk to be persecuted by laws for promoting racial hate, this type of protests stays relatively rare. Vincent Tiberj, sociologist of immigration at the institute of political science explains that the reason for this decrease is also that the extreme right has lost this tradition of "coming down to the street" as it the actions of the French left wing. He also mentions that today, people who are islamophobic use social media and the Internet in order to mobilize their supporters

(Tiberj 2015). The national Observatory against Islamophobia concludes that the demonstrations, described as “cyber hate,” through messages or tweets, have increased tremendously.

Political Popularization of Xenophobia

The anti-Semitism that characterized the Dreyfus affair at the end of the 19th century and the Islamophobia at the beginning of the 21st century, seem not to have been originated in any constituted political parties. Even though anti-Semitism and Islamophobia were ideologies that were adopted by the French right wing, these ideologies were independent, and so dominant in French society that they also appeared within the French left wing. On the other hand, the antidreyfusard ideologies have defined the French extreme right wing, which has adopted the Islamophobia movements as one of the identities of the political party today.

The Immortal Values of the French Extreme Right Wing

In both cases, “collective effervescence” can be recognizing in the rise of the extreme right through these movements. As the historian Christophe Prochasson explains in his article “Dreyfusards and Antidreyfusards” (Prochasson 1988, 36), the antidreyfusards ideologies have created the political discourses that will define the French extreme right for generations. Until today, the dominant themes have not varied from the time of the Dreyfus affair: Nationalism, xenophobia, anti-intellectualism. The antidreyfusards presented themselves as the guardians of French identity. The principal political argument of the extreme right today is that only their ideologies are able of guarantee the respect of the French identity, which is also made of an attachment to the Catholic religion. It seems that Jews are also a part of Islamophobic movements. Last December, during the campaign for the regional elections in France, Marion Marechal-Le

Pen, a leader as well as the granddaughter of the founding father of the French extreme right (the National Front), declared: “France is a land that is culturally, and was for a long time spiritually, Christian” and that “Muslims cannot be at the same exact rank as those who are catholic” as it is reported by the Huffington Post on November 21st 2015. Throughout her electoral campaign, many images were published of her next to fundamentalist members of the Catholic Church.

While the anti-dreyfusism was founded on nationalism, along with the argument that France was “threatened” (Prochasson 1988, 40), “defenders” of today’s right wing and of the national identity clearly developed the same theme. As in the 19th century, where the Jewish immigration was a threat given to the antidreyfusards, France is today to defend itself from an exponential Muslim immigration. Nicolas Sarkozy, declared during one of his speeches, in October 2014, that “Immigration threatens our way of life. Our values must be defended when facing a fanatic Islamism” (France TV Info 2014). In the public sphere, without being directly related to politics, a conspiracy theory called “the big get together,” was developing the idea that slowly but surely, in a “logical” fashion, the French population would be entirely replaced by a population of Muslim in a few decades. This theory was then fed by different publications of writers who were in agreement with the extreme right political party. For example, the book of Guillaume Faye, *European Colonization of Europe: real speech on immigration and Islam*, published in 2000, was popular by targeting an extreme right population.

The “identity” theme³ of the extreme right started to be spread out and discussed on the different blog of this conspiracy theory. Therefore, we can read on the website *Fde*

³ During the 2000s, values of nationalism of the French extreme right wing gave birth to an “identity” movement. In 2003, this movement became known politically as the “Identity Block.” The growth of

Souche (French people with no other immediate origins than their French origins), the article, *Immigration of replacement: The UN and EU organize the disappearing of nations* (FdeSouche 2013). The other website “Identity Generation” discusses an “insane” immigration that will have colonized everything soon, and discusses what it is to be obliged to live under the status of an unwanted stranger in his own country (Rieu 2014). Finally, according to the website *Boulevard Voltaire* French people are in a situation of having to fight to survive: “It is our responsibility to impose limits to what France can accept without having to deny its culture and its values. It is matter of survival” (Albeck 2013, translation mine).

While these websites can be seen as a sort of media effervescence that is comparable to the publishing of antidreyfusards newspapers at a time, the strongest similarity is in the expression of this “complot” of Muslims today, but of Jews during the Dreyfus Affair. The historian Vincent Duclert explains that the Dreyfus Affair is at the origin of today’s use of the complot theory. He explains that the complot theory is a starting point for the idea that the “adversary” is composed of an antagonism of race where the theme of the complot becomes politically explainable (Duclert and Simon-Nahum 2009, 134-5). Finally, as it was done by the right wing anti- Semitics, the consequences of these paranoid and defeatist visions of today’s dominant extreme right thinkers, is the specter of the civil war (Prochasson 1988, 39).

Even though these writings promoting the racial conflict and the idea of a hostile complot have some influence on the French extreme right today, the extreme right, in its dominant political speech, mostly focuses on the themes of the religious invasion. They

support their argument by the growth of Islamic signs in France during the last decade. For example, the Newspaper *Valeurs actuelles*, which is often considered as a symbolic newspaper for the French extreme right wing, published in 2013 a cover presenting an rearranged and photoshoped edited photo of “Marianne” (the emblem of the French Republic) with an Islamic Veil, with the title “the invasion that they hid from us” (Hopquin 2015). The next year it is written in the magazine that “when it comes to Muezzins, they would only need a municipal authorization. More and more Muslims are elected, there is a Muslim population that becomes a majority in many communities: Logically, it is only a matter of time before the Muezzins start appearing in our parts” (Dandrieu 2014, translation mine). For the president of the National Front, Marine Le Pen, the Muslims’ “prayers in the street” are comparable to an occupation, and her niece Marion Marechal Le Pen, also a member of the party, tweeted last November 12 that “in the suburbs, it is sometimes no more the law of the Republic anymore, but it is the law of the Imam!”

The theme of the immigration “problem” has become particularly important to the right wing since the presidency of Sarkozy and the creation of the minister of the national identity, on the other hand, for the extreme right, it represented some advantages to have transferred the theme to a religious problem. First, this theme is based on subjective opinions: In France, statistics on people belonging to a religion and its rituals are forbidden, therefore, a quantitative approach to the problem is impossible. Secondly, supporting the religious “problem” is a way to target the population in which the principal voters of the extreme right are found: The Catholic practitioners, just as the anti-Semitism of the 19th century had found followers in the traditional anti-Judaism that was spread among the catholic community. Furthermore, as the sociologist Raphael

Liogier, who is in charge of the religious section of the Observatory, explains: “All the external signs of Islam will be considered as confrontational signs and not as spiritual signs anymore” (Dautry and Verduzier 2015)

In 1925, in the *Scenes and Doctrines of Nationalism*, Maurice Barres, editor of the anti-drefusard journal, *l'Action française*, summing up all the dominant arguments of the Dreyfus Affair, addresses the decadence of the country. The “mystique” presence of Jews in France was used to illustrate this decadence (Winock 2001, 68). Therefore, the anti-Semitic moment developed itself on the idea of a modern world in decadence. This idea accompanies the phenomenon of Islamophobia that we can observe in France today. Journalists through the media, personalities of the traditional French right wing, and different free writers, have all contributed to the development of the popular idea of a French decadence, a country that is losing its values due to an increasing Muslim immigration. The strongest example that and the most wide spread throughout the media are the book by Rene Marchand (2002) *France in Danger of Islam*, and one by Eric Zemmour, *The French Suicide*. Through its title, the book of Malika Sorel who was a member of the council of integration under the presidency of Sarkozy, represents well this idea of decadence, *The French Decomposition: How did we get here?* Today, in a country with a high unemployment rate, which the right wing governments as well as the left wing governments are unable to reduce, these books contribute to the political views that describe the Muslim immigration as exponential, and impossible to integrate due to its religious values. Essentially, the idea is that this immigration will be expensive for the government in terms of social aids that would be abused and only benefits this French population “of origin.” As some specialists of the *Valeurs Actuelles* mention “we are feeling the audacity of the Muslims, from whom the weight in Europe, particularly in

France did not stop to increase” (Tribalat 2013). However, it is important not to forget that during the elections of 1889, one of the main arguments of the French right wing was that the Jews would take the jobs away from the French people (Prochasson 1988, 49). On the websites of our generation, we find the suggestion that the government would not resist the Muslim “pressure” and give increasing social aids to the “Immigrants and children of immigrants that always want more” (Albeck 2014). Here, we can recognize the image of the “parasite” Jew that was used by the antidreyfusards (Ponton 1990, 82).

Xenophobia and Left Wing Political Parties

As the anti-Semitism spread out during the Dreyfus affair as the main element of that episode of “collective effervescence” by dividing most institutions of French society, it was also found in the left wing political parties. Today, left wing personalities have adopted Islamophobic opinions. Just as the left wing had anti-Semitic ideologies back then, it has now adopted Islamophobic ideologies.

In the 1880s, France was inundated by an anti-Semitic wave. One of the most symbolic elements of this wave was the publication of the best seller *The Jewish France* by Drumont. However, at the same time, the utopic socialists such as Fourier and Proudhon also revolted against Judaism and created petitions for the abolition of synagogues. Even some of the left wing anti-capitalists, adopted anti-Semitic attitudes by arguing that the capital was controlled by the Jews, and therefore Judaism became as evil as capitalism. Furthermore, left wing movements that were anti-clerical started pointing out the Jews in France for the threat that their religious believes represented.

During the last decade, some Islamophobic speeches, sometimes the most radical of them came from left wing intellectuals. Here, it is the secular values of the French republic, the “French laicity” which opposes itself to Islam. As the sociologist Raphael

Liogier points out, it is the “islamo-paranoia” that is at the origin of the growing debate on the concept of the French laicity (Dauty and Verduzier 2015). The best illustration of the phenomenon concerns Pierre Cassens, a supporter of secular and social left wing values, who developed an editorial on line, *Riposte Laique*, which became very hostile to Muslims. All the main Islamophobic arguments can be found on the website: The invasion of the Muslim immigration, provocation, decadence, and portrays of an obscure and evil Islam (Verduzier 2015). In 2012, one of the active participants of the website wrote that:

“France should and must have the right to stop an exponential immigration [...] Islamists keep provoking our undividable and secular Republic, to the point where they triggered hostility and confrontation between communities [...] France has an history that we do not want to change that came out of an obscurantism in which Islam would like to get us back into” (Letailleur 2012, translation mine).

However, it is important to notice that this tendency for xenophobia is a minority in the left wing. Just as during the Dreyfus affair, the xenophobic personalities who start from the left wing, transfer to the right wing, and sometimes towards the extreme right wing (Joly 2007, 63). Sociologists and political analysts believe today that the Islamophobes from the left wing are now considered to be part of extreme right movements.

Even though positions of Islamophobia are not as represented at the left wing than at the right wing, the position towards Islam is at the origin of many public debates for every institution in France. The Dreyfus affair had embarrassed the left wing: The most extreme socialists did not know what attitude to have towards Dreyfus at the beginning, who was considered like a bourgeois, so a potential enemy of the working class. The affair had triggered deep ideological differences among socialists (Duclert 2008, 117).

Today, the situation is just as complicated for the left wing to deal with. The historical, anti-religious nature of the French left wing creates an opposition to religious including Islam, but on the other hand, the Muslim population in France represents a lower class population that has traditionally represented the basics of left wing voters. Therefore, we will focus on the Islamic Veil affair in order to illustrate this debate among the left wing.

The Veil Affair

The “Veil Affair”, also known as the “scarf affair,” comes from an association of different headlines about events situated in “the banlieue” (the poor suburbs of Paris). For the last twenty years, headlines about Muslim women wearing a veil have created a true excitation of the media and the public opinion. The effervescence generated by the news has been so important that they are at the origin of two laws and different bodies such as the Committee of Integration and the Observatory of Secularism. For us, there are three different reasons to approach this affair; its influence on the wave of Islamophobia that we have previously described, its similarities with the Dreyfus Affair, and it is an example of Durkheim’s “collective effervescence”.

Similarities with the Dreyfus Affair

In both cases, and for over twenty years, these two affairs have created violent polemics that agitates the public sphere and influences the political life. While describing the veil affair in 1989, the sociologist Françoise Gaspard writes in her book *The Scarf and the Republic*, that debating about this affair has the same effects than debating about the innocence or guilt of the captain Dreyfus. She explains that even in the most unified groups of society, the two affairs created an incapacity for people to get along because they became incapable to listen to one another (Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995, 11-12). An example of the effervescence that was produced by the veil affair can be found in the

general media and in all the academic essays that were published about the veil affair in the department of humanities. The researcher Claire de Galember counted 2,287 articles concerning the veil and more than 10 academic publications in 2004 during the enactment of the law on the veil (de Galember 2008, 14).

Furthermore, the strongest similarity between the two affairs seems to lay in the fact that in both cases, we are witnessing an inversion of the right and left wing values. In both cases, the major conflict seems to come down to a conflict between the individuals and traditional values that are usually hold by the right wing, and the institutional and collective values that are usually hold by the left wing. Durkheim was a member of the League of the Human Rights, an association that was founded in 1889 to support the individual rights of Alfred Dreyfus. The League also tried to oppose against the law of 2004 about the Islamic veil for the same reasons of individual rights (Grupper 2004). Throughout the conflicts, the values that were supported by the two parties were opposite from what they traditionally support. The antidreyfusard ideology, by defending the interest of the army, was supporting a social institution over an individual case, while the left wing was in support of the individual freedom by supporting Alfred Dreyfus (Winock 2001, 68). During the veil affair, the inversion of values was of the same nature: On one side, the left wing, defenders of the individual freedom by protecting the right of some people to wear the Islamic veil, and on the other, the right wing, supporting of the republican collective values and secularism. The right wing ended up supporting the law against the veil in school, arguing the secular nature of the French public school, which is originally a symbol of left wing and of the republican model (Roman 2012, 55).

In these two major moments of collective effervescence in France, the origin of the exhilaration has come from a popular debate on the French identity. Throughout the

last twenty years of Islamophobia in France, as well as during the Dreyfus affair, one group of nationalistic people, defenders of the French traditional values, have accused the “intellectuals” or the “pro-Islamic” to defend individual rights of some individuals over the principles of the French republic. These intellectuals are then considered to be a threat to the nation by accepting anything based on individual rights. Their visions of individual freedom does not fit with the most basic principles of the republic, which is that individuals must adapt themselves to the common, here secular, values. This difference of visions on what must be the French identity seems to be the key element triggering these moments of collective effervescence in France.

During the Dreyfus affair, Durkheim responded to these accusations on the “individualistic motives of the intellectual Dreyfusards. He explains that an important confusion lays in the perception of individualism. There is a fundamental difference between “the utilitarian and narrow egoism,” (Durkheim 1898, 4) individualism of the economists, and the individualism of the intellectuals. The individualism of the intellectuals is the one of the defenders of the human rights that applies to every individual and therefore starts with the defense of individual rights. He explains that one can only truly believe and support the universal human rights when he understands that these rights first apply to his own individual rights. Hans Joas, explains Durkheim thoughts that collective feelings must come through individualism and states that:

“In its contribution to the debate on the Dreyfus affair, Durkheim clearly states that for him, the most sacred element of a society, reside precisely in the principle of the inalienable rights and in the dignity of the individual” (Joas 2013, 9, translation mine).

Therefore, if Alfred Dreyfus, or the young Muslim women wearing the Islamic Veil, were not morally wrong in their actions, or did not directly threaten the republic, Durkheim

explains that it not enough to use this idea of sacrifices for the collective goals to judge their religious affiliation and to force them to adapt to another way of life.

“When we come and ask certain people to adapt themselves to believes that are not theirs, it is not enough, to convince them, to remind them of this common place along with the flat rhetoric that society is not possible without mutual sacrifices and without a particular spirit of subordination; it is needed to justify the docility that we ask from them, by demonstrating them their incompetence” (Durkheim, 1898, 14, translation mine).

Conclusion

Islamophobia in France is a serious issue as it manifests itself through different verbal and physical abuses towards Muslims living in France, or towards a whole population that is sometimes only assumed to be Muslim. It creates a vicious circle by stigmatizing an immigrant population and maintaining its non-integration. As we have looked at the nature of the debate on the Muslim integration in France, the role of French colonies in creating these waves of North African immigration has never come up. It is as if Muslim immigrants were randomly coming to France. Then the debate gets created between those who assume that they have come for the strong values of equality and fraternity that France represents, and those who assume that they have come to take advantage of the opportunities that the country can provide them. There are as many North African immigrants living in France today, than they were Europeans living in North Africa towards the end of the colonies. And while opinions towards immigration became negative in the 50s when families settled in to indefinitely live in France, it seems that the majority of the French public sphere was quick to forget their role in this affair. The call for cheap labor of 1959, for example, stimulated immigration, but there seem to be little sense of solidarity for a lot of these people who were then encouraged to stay.

Some Muslim immigrants, who are not integrated, and who are discriminated through most institutions of society, end up in a situation of social exclusion. As they enter states of extreme social deviance and develop different physiological issues, many young second or third generation immigrants, who can be categorized as “gang bangers,” have left the country to join ISIS. This represents the turning point where for many people, understanding the origin of the popular debate on Muslim immigration becomes important. After the attacks, they were a strong movement of expressions of “freedom”

through social media. To deal with the trauma of the attacks and their fears, most young people had the natural reaction of reaffirming their rights to drink, to go out, and have nudity into their lives. However, while reminding the world that terrorism was an attack towards what we are, and not an attack towards what we do, French people were slowly drifting away from understanding the implication of France in Syria for example (Bouderbala 2015). It was another step away from understanding why France is really aimed by the terrorists. Yes, France is only victim of an opportunity for terrorists, but France is also a fragile society that misinterprets Islam, which is exactly what terrorists want. Reaffirming secularism as an answer to the attacks is also a way to shift the focus from understanding the real problems, the position of France in Syria and the danger of a misconception of Islam for Muslim people in France.

However, this provocative secular reaction, which was criticized by some, is only the expression of the French people's visions of their identity, a vision that is at the origin of the "clash" with the Muslim population in France. French society has based itself on secularism. The enlightenment, which led to the ideas of the revolution in France, was first marked by the ideological revolution of Hobbes against "the Kingdom of Darkness" in the *Leviathan*. Hobbes had shown the way to a functioning society where religion did not belong. Then, the values of the modern French society that were built by the French philosophers of the Enlightenment were secular and based on beliefs about the scientific revolution. Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, and the other founding fathers of French society had a secular vision of what the modern French citizen should look like. Along with Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, "Laïcité" (secularism) implies that "only characteristics the French hold in common constitute society" (McCauliff, 2012, 19). While values of tolerance in France allows the practice of any religion in the private

sphere, religious signs in the public sphere are seen as a threat to society, and a threat to French society. On the other hand, the French identity that grounds itself on liberty, equality, and fraternity accepts and defends these communities while understanding their particular socio historical context. Therefore, the identity issue that come out in the shape of collective effervescence around these population comes from a clash between the different visions of the values of French society. While there is a movement of collective effervescence when people come together against Islam in France, there is another movement of collective effervescence when people come together and defend the rights of Muslims in France. However, when this public signs of belonging to a religion are labeled as a major problem, when they are at the origin of some individual dehumanization, and when they are assumed or based on physical attributes, they seem to only become the scapegoat for a French identity trauma.

Today, this identity trauma that manifests itself as a national debate on the position of Islam, creates movements of collective effervescence and divides French society. This popularization of Islamophobia have allowed the extreme right wing to change their messages of hate and bounce back politically. As we have seen Islamophobia is infused in the society and is a source of debate, but is never classified as wrong or dangerous by the elites. In France just as in most European countries, the “Muslim problem” have allowed the extreme right wing to regain some popularity (Mohammed and Hajjat 2014, 259). For the extreme right, spreading Islamophobia and using its popularity to galvanize people is more “politically correct.” It replaces the issues of brutal racism or anti-Semitism that are politically labeled as dangerous and are deeply unpopular today. In other words, the collective effervescence from Islamophobia in France represents a blur in society that allow the extreme right wing to reinvent

themselves and support directly, or sometimes indirectly, extreme violent groups and messages of hate. As this quote of Hannah Arendt expresses explicitly, the growing danger of the popularization of Islamophobia, which is used politically by the extreme right wing, is not to take lightly:

“While they had no consciousness of the growing tension between the state and society, Jews were the last ones to realize that the circumstances had placed them at the center of the conflict. This is why they were never able to really understand anti-Semitism or, more precisely, were never able to feel the moment where the social discrimination had transformed itself into a political argument. For more than a hundred years, anti-Semitism had slowly infiltrate almost every social layer of almost all European countries, until the day where it suddenly became the only question capable to create an almost complete unification in the opinion” (Arendt, 1958, 56).

In France today it has become imperative to move forward on the issue of the French identity and on the position of Islam. While being a secular country, carrying values of the enlightenment, but with catholic traditions, part of French society finds a way to reinforce their identity through a violent reject of Islam. After different economic and social crisis, it is not surprising that French people need a way to understand who they are again in society. However, while a part of society exists as French people in their hostility towards Islam, another part of the population finds a sense of their French identity by doing the opposite. The defenders of the values Islam, of the right for French Muslims to live peacefully, find their arguments in values that they consider to be specifically French. Could the French values of the enlightenment, and of a tolerant republic, be enough for French people to gather and “feel French” while rejecting terrorism, and protecting peaceful Muslims?

It has become apparent the way to combat terrorism is to understand that the “problem” of Islam in France does not depend on the essence of the religion and of French society, but it is a question of approach and perception (Mohammed and Hajjat, 2013, 263). Here we have tried to show how an intelligent sociological and historical approach of the situation brings us to understand that France is not facing a constant threat with its Muslim population, but that some of the reasons of this national debate can be found in a recurrent issue of French identity, bringing moments of collective effervescence. It is time for Islam in France to be looked through social facts analyzing the real position of Muslims in France, not through thoughts about the essence of Islam and the idea of a necessary “clash civilization.” It is fundamental for French society to understand the real causes of this excitation around Islam in order to defend properly the human rights of the individual Muslims who suffer from Islamophobia. Depending on the accuracy of the perceptions, Islam in France could only be the sign of a healthy democratic society, which grows with different cultures and communities. Islam is not necessarily a factor of non-integration, but it could be the expression of the bright future of French society.

“The individualist who defends the rights of one persons, defends at the same time the vital interests of society; because he stops the criminal impoverishment of individualism, the last saving of ideas and collective feelings that are the nation’s very own soul” (Durkheim 1898, 14, translation mine).

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