Counter-Islamophobia Kit

Workstream 2: Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia - France

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March 2018

Working Paper 11

Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States.

CIK Project (Counter Islamophobia Kit)

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Working Paper 11- France

CERS, 2018

Co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union

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CERS

Centre for Ethnicity & Racism Studies

About the CIK Project

The *Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States* (Counter Islamophobia Kit, CIK) project addresses the need for a deeper understanding and awareness of the range and operation of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred across the EU, and the extent to which these counter-narratives impact and engage with those hostile narratives. It is led by Professor Ian Law and a research team based at the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, UK. This international project also includes research teams from the Islamic Human Rights Commission, based in London, and universities in Leeds, Athens, Liège, Budapest, Prague and Lisbon/Coimbra. This project runs from January 2017 - December 2018.

About the Paper

This paper is an output from the second workstream of the project which was concerned to describe and explain the discursive contents and forms that Muslim hatred takes in the eight states considered in the framework of this project: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and United Kingdom. This output comprises eight papers on conditions in individual member states and a comparative overview paper containing Key Messages. In addition this phase also includes assessment of various legal and policy interventions through which the European human rights law apparatus has attempted to conceptually analyse and legally address the multi-faceted phenomenon of Islamophobia. The second workstream examines the operation of identified counter-narratives in a selected range of discursive environments and their impact and influence on public opinion and specific audiences including media and local decision-makers. The third workstream will be producing a transferable EU toolkit of best practice in the use of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred. Finally, the key messages, findings and toolkits will be disseminated to policy makers, professionals and practitioners both across the EU and to member/regional audiences using a range of mediums and activities.

Contents

1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to categorise the dominant counter-narratives to Muslim hatred in the context of France, to examine the form these counter-narratives take and the way they operate in different discursive environments. The report's findings also serve to highlight the impact of identified counter-narratives on public opinion and specific audiences. The data presented in this report was collected via semi-directive interviews of policy-makers, practitioners, researchers, journalists, activists and representatives of civil society organisations active in the field. In addition, a review of academic literature, online and paper media outlets, social networks, blogs and websites was completed. These provide resources essential to the development of a toolkit of best practices to counter narratives of Islamophobia.

The second part of this report gives a brief account of the methodology used to categorise the counter-narratives. It also provides an analysis of respondents by group and explains some of the challenges linked to the identification and ranking of counter-narratives. The third part examines the counter-narratives to Muslim hatred from the colonial period until today. It provides an insight into their formation against the backdrop of mobilisation of Muslim communities and their allies in key moments in history. The fourth part of this report gives a detailed account of the most prevalent counter-narratives identified through interviews and completed by a wide range of sources. Their deployment in different discursive environments, their form and the way they operate are equally analysed. The counter-narratives are organised in clusters according to hate narratives they tackle. The report's major findings are summarised in the last part of the report, which also includes a schematised list of dominant counter-narratives.

2. Methodology

In order to identify and rank the counter-narratives into categories according to their preponderance, we employed the relational methodology conceptualised by Dikötter (2008) and Goldberg (2009). Goldberg posits that racism and racial thinking were characterised by the "globalisation of the racial" – the circulation of racial ideas, their importation and application in local contexts. A relational account, which underlines "interactive relation between repressive racial ideas and exclusionary or humiliating racist practices across place and time, unbounded by the presumptive divides of state boundaries" (Goldberg 2009: 1273) is preferred over the comparativist approach, which merely indicates in what way racist ideas and practices in one place differ from racist ideas and practices elsewhere.

The data that served as a basis for the analysis of the counter-narratives were obtained from data sources ranging from political, media and NGO discourse. The report's findings and ranking of counter-narratives are also based on the data collected through qualitative research: semi-structured face-to-face interviews with a selected sample of national actors involved in development and utilisation of counter-narratives, including elected officials and policy-makers, journalists, academics and activists.

The fieldwork was undertaken between June and October 2017 in the Paris area.[1] Each interview lasted on average between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on the informant's response style and the extent of their experience. The interview guide was designed so as to cover all the core topics that

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[1] Due to time and financial constraints, face-to-face interviews were limited to a local geographical area – Paris and its suburbs. While the majority of respondents are local, the sample contains respondents from other geographical areas as well. These were interviewed by telephone or videoconference.

could help identify the nature of counter-narratives, their content, deployment and significance. It also included questions on the possible improvement of the situation that the informants noticed after the deployment of the counter-narrative. Informants were divided into groups according to their professional background and experience. Interview questions were then adapted to each group of informants. Most interviews were conducted in person. In rare cases when the informant's availability or location did not allow face-to-face meetings, interviews were conducted by phone or videoconference. All interviews were carried out in French. All of the interviews were recorded and relevant sections were transcribed for analysis.

We typically started the interviews with an explanatory note on the purpose of the research, on how and to whom its findings would be reported, as well as on the informant's role in it, as to conform to the ethical guidelines of the project. It was also made clear to the informants that they could withdraw from the project until the deadline[2] without giving a reason for doing so. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form and were provided with a copy for their own records. In order to protect identity and personal data of some participant aliases have been used.

When identifying potential informants, stress was placed on their shared characteristics. We considered several selection criteria: a) commitment to produce narratives challenging Islamophobia, b) media exposure and c) capacity to appeal to a larger public and/or the Muslim community. All informants were also asked to identify appropriate respondents from their personal and professional networks. As a result, a significant proportion of informants were recruited for the interview on the basis of a recommendation from their peers. Snowball sampling[3] seemed particularly relevant in cases when counter-narratives we identified targeted the Muslim communities with the aim of empowering its members rather than raising awareness among the larger public.

The target sample size was a minimum of 30 participants. The requests for qualitative interviews received a response rate of 50.8% - the total number of persons contacted was 59. Breakdown according to occupational categories (although in some cases respondent's activities covered several categories) reveals a preponderance of activists and representatives of civil society (13) among the respondents. Elected officials and researchers were almost equally represented, with respectively 7 and 6 respondents. With 4 respondents, journalists are the least represented category of the sample. Although no priority was given to women informants, with 56% they slightly outnumber men.

Challenges

Although well-established national Muslim representative bodies were considered for interviews, their activities were not within the scope of our research. Priority was therefore given to those grassroot initiatives and individuals whose mission statement or work explicitly focused on challenging anti-Muslim prejudice, stereotypes and Islamophobia.

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[2] Informed consent protocol approved by the University of Leeds advises researchers to clearly state the date after which withdrawal of participants will no longer be possible because data will have been anonymised and/or amalgamated. As indicated in the informed consent declaration, the final date for withdrawal from present research report was 31st December 2017.

[3] In order to reduce the possible bias resulting from oversampling a particular network of peers, we used the above-mentioned selection criteria and cross-checked the relevance of the respondent's counter-narrative against a variety of sources (media, community websites, social networks). As a rule, priority was given to respondents from different backgrounds to guarantee the representativeness of the sample.

Due to legislative elections that took place in late June 2017 and were preceded by an intense electoral campaign, certain national policy-makers contacted did not respond to requests for interviews. Moreover, the counter-narratives produced by the national policy-makers seem to be less significant than those produced by local elected officials. Several respondents suggested that it appeared to be uncommon for national politicians to voice their concerns about the impact of discrimination on the Muslim populations or denounce anti-Muslim hate crimes and Islamophobia.

Several factors explain why the so-called 'Muslim agenda' is not receiving a proper treatment on the national level. First, as it was already explained in the Workstream 1 report, France has for a long time preferred the policy approach of assimilation, which does not recognise cultural heterogeneity of identities. As historian Suzanne Citron (2003) put it, "the history of France is not the memory of the difference of origins and cultures of the French people. Memory of the State integrates them by erasing them […]." The republican model of political representation favours colour-blindness, encouraging political parties and candidates to put forward shared republican values rather than ethnic agendas (Geisser 1997; Michon 2011; Tiberj & Michon 2013). This model, together with the principles of universalism and *laïcité*, prevents the French political candidates and elected officials from displaying cultural or religious differences and forces them to appear neutral. As a result, elected officials, especially those with minority background, seem to be reluctant to support what is generally perceived as partisan political matters and ethnic groups interests.

In addition, the presence of candidates from minorities, though steadily increasing, remains limited. This can be inferred from the fact that the latter only exceptionally assume senior or leadership positions. Geisser and Soum (2008) even argue that the role of candidates labelled as coming from 'diverse background' is neither to represent the diversity of the population, nor to combat discriminations, but functions as a sort of distraction that allows the political elites to maintain the status quo. Those elected officials who accepted to be interviewed and share their experience with us suggested that one of the reasons why individuals holding public office choose the strategy of avoidance with regards to the issues related to Islamophobia is not to be subjected to a torrent of verbal abuse and unsolicited media attention. Indeed, harassment, verbal threats, slander and intimidations of persons denouncing anti-Muslim narratives have become particularly virulent since some sections of media and certain politicians contributed to the normalisation of Islamophobic discourse.

As in Workstream 1 report (Bila 2017), we faced a number of methodological challenges as to the identification and classification of the counter-narratives. The ranking was based on the narratives' impact and significance, as it emerged from the fieldwork and other data sources used for assessment. Due to the subjective choice of informants and inexistence of quantitative data confirming impact of particular counter-narratives, we acknowledge that the ranking may appear subjective and impressionistic. Rather than using a quantitative method to establish the ranking, we focused on the most significant and impactful narratives produced in the public arena, across the spectrum of political, media and NGO discourses.

3. Background: the formation of counter-narratives to Muslim hatred

In the Workstream 1 report on the formation of anti-Muslim hatred, we analysed the chronological development of various hate narratives and established their formation starting from early encounters with the Muslim countries. We also outlined the most significant social and political events occurring during the colonial period until the recent past that could have an impact on the development and spreading of Islamophobia. Naturally, many narratives of hatred, and those attempting to counter it, are interdependent as they are often deployed in response to each other. Therefore, the defining moments of Islamophobia also the highlight the mobilisation against it and

vice versa. Their deployment however, depends also on the agency and the capacity of the communities targeted by the narratives and their allies to voice their concerns, formulate strategies and mobilise resources.

From the beginning of the mass migration of North African workers to metropolitan France in 1914 and until the early 1970s, Muslims appeared in the media and political discourses framed as North African immigrant workers. Throughout this period they were kept physically separate from the majority population and were virtually absent from the media and public arena. They were cast aside in slums and workers' homes in the industrial suburbs, with few opportunities to be seen or exist publicly (House, MacMaster 2006). With the start of the war in Algeria in 1954, however, the situation changed rapidly and the media started dedicating more time and space to the issue. Due to the state censorship in force since 1955, however, mass media were submitted to strict control.[4] The "Manichean war rhetoric which boast[ed] the nobility of French action" (Eveno 2005) contributed to general disinformation about the military operations led by the French army and encouraged a biased, dehumanising portrayal of the sympathisers of the Algerian independence movement. As the war dragged on, aware of the gravity of the events the public became more divided on the issues of the war: while in August 1955 only 5% of the people surveyed were interested in news coverage of current affairs in Algeria, in April 1966 this figure rose to 65% (Ageron 1976). Moreover, prominent public figures, university professors and intellectuals took a public stand against the war, in particular when the acts of torture against Algerian prisoners committed by the French military were disclosed.[5]

Protests and strikes organised by Algerian migrants on a regular basis since 1952 and, more often than not, violently repressed by the police, constituted another exception to the silence of the press on their account.[6] Accounts of the particularly deadly demonstration of 17 October 1961 – organised in Paris by the French federation of the National Liberation Front (FLN) to protest the curfew imposed on Algerians in the context of the tensions provoked by the Algerian war of independence and multiple attacks on the police agents committed by the FLN – published by the local and national press were presented in contrasting ways. Several, mostly right-leaning outlets, repeated the official version of events evoking the "violent North African demonstrations" and "Muslim terrorism" and attributing the bloodshed to "ringleaders" and "assassins" among the protesters (Abdallah 2000:125). The leftist media testified about the police brutality against the protesters whose behaviour they described as nonviolent, but several chose to give a watered-down version of

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[4] Most French media served the state propaganda, which never used the term war, but spoke of "events" or "pacification operations" in order not to alarm public opinion. Authors and media outlets whose message diverged from the official version of events, were subjected to enforcement proceedings through confiscation of publications and broadcasting bans. Authorities regularly arrested journalists and kept them in custody as a preventive measure. Intimidation and economic pressure pushed a number of media towards self-censorship. See Eveno (2005).

[5] Articles revealing the use of torture by the French military in order to gain information and, in turn, suppress the Algerian nationalist movement first appeared in January 1955. While the press remained prudent and extremely reticent to publish affairs of torture because of the financial loss provoked by the confiscation of copies or the moral dilemma – pointing the finger at the army would necessarily undermine the government's position and complicate the negotiations –, many publishing houses, however, decided to fill this void and publish testimonies of torture. Pierre-Henri Simon's *Contre la torture* was published in 1957 and Henri Alleg's account *The Question* in 1958. See Thenault & Branche (2000).

[6] For further information about the media coverage of the police repression of the demonstrations see House & MacMaster (2006), Amiri (2004) and Einaudi (1991).

the facts due to the censorship (Ibid.). Small journals and militant publications gave the most accurate account of the events and anchored them in the collective imaginary as "pogroms" and "*ratonnades*" (racist attacks) (Ibid.).

The 1970s oil crisis brought high levels unemployment and lowered the need for foreign labour. Consequently by 1974 the Chirac government ended the labour migration programmes and suspended immigration to France. In 1977, a return bonus was granted to those immigrants accepting to leave France permanently and by 1980 a new legislation (the Bonnet law) increased the possibilities for expulsion of foreign nationals. As soon as François Mitterrand was elected in 1981, the new leftist government took a contrary approach: 130,000 undocumented migrants were regularised, the return assistance programme was suspended, the Bonnet law was repealed (the expulsion of foreign nationals born in France and those who arrived in the country before the age of ten years was prohibited) and decrees on family reunification, which facilitated the settling of these populations, were put in place. The number of immigrants from former colonies showed a steady rise until 1983, when the changes in policy brought more controls, identity checks and reintegration assistance programmes. Non-European (and in particular North African) immigration became a major political issue and an important and timely topic for the media given the government's measures seeking to curb illegal immigration.

This new visibility made the larger public more perceptive to issues related to immigration. The media, however, through the themes and stories they chose to cover – immigrant workers strike in 1983, immigrants framed as undocumented migrants abusing the social system, insecurity and violence of suburbs, marginalisation and sectarianism, unemployment and social dislocation, religious fundamentalism and formation of the French Islam – nourished the myth and stereotypical perception of these populations. A study of the lexical field of newspaper articles dealing with immigration published between 1974 and 1984 notes a certain homogenisation of the narratives across the political spectrum and a progressive trivialisation of xenophobic discourses in the media (Bonnafous 1991). It also shows how the media framing of immigration shifted from empathic portrayal of immigrant populations towards putting a divide between 'them' and 'us'. Accounts of immigrants' living and working conditions were gradually replaced by articles pointing out the difficult coexistence between immigrants and the French people and questioning their integration (Ibid.: 296).

The High Council for Integration was created in December 1989 as proof of State's intention to pursue a policy of integrating immigrants. Its mission was "to advise and make any appropriate proposal at the request of the Prime Minister or the Inter-ministerial Committee for Integration, on all matters relating to the integration of foreign residents or people of foreign origin" (Décret N°89-912). Its 1992 report, for example, stressed the importance of secularism in French society but at the same time pointed out "the lack of transparency" (Chronologie 2012) of representatives of city councils to meet Muslims' demands, especially those of building mosques.

The "Second generation" of immigrants - mobilisations against marginalisation and exclusion

Meanwhile, the generation of descendants of immigrants from North Africa, who considered France their home, was coming of age. Though political and media discourses portrayed the North African

youths as social outcasts who underperformed at school because of learning and behavioural difficulties, struggled to access the job market and were at risk of delinquency (Bila 2017), the social research dedicated to the study of young immigrant populations attempted to refute some of these stereotypical views. The study of school performance of children of immigrant background invalidated the hypothesis that students' cultural and ethnic background determined their academic trajectory and labelled sex and social background as major determinants (Boulot & Boyson-Fradet 1984). Research data also confirmed that only a small proportion of children of immigrant background suffered from language problems (Bastide 1982) and that delinquency among youths of immigrant background was not higher than among the French youths (Dubet 1985). Sociologists became also interested in institutional discrimination towards minorities and reported discriminatory practices on several levels. A study into police and judiciary discrimination and bias suffered by ethnic minorities when involved with the criminal justice system revealed that youths of North African background were held in custody for longer periods, their cases were less likely to be dismissed for lack of evidence, their pre-trial detention was longer, sentences more severe and imprisonment more likely (Malewska-Peyre 1984).

Several studies (Myrdal 1944, Martens 1982, Arendt 1984) have demonstrated that discrimination and certain forms of racism against an ethnic group usually developed once the ethnic group in question was showing signs of assimilation into the receiving society, discrimination being the only means of differentiation. Lapeyronnie (1987) explained that racism and discrimination against the immigrants of North African origin should not be understood as a culture clash but as a side effect of their assimilation into the French society. He also remarked, that unequal treatment, discrimination and exclusion caused a feeling of frustration and constituted a basis for mobilisation among North African youth.

The ability of groups to mobilise resources, i.e. to mobilise political resources for the sake of their collective goals, is one of the indicators of impact of public actions. The resource mobilisation theory (with widespread influence in the 1960s and 1970s) rejects the idea that each collective action is spontaneous; in contrast, it posits that with regard to mobilisation each action is pre-organised and rational (Ferree 1992).

Several internal and external factors such as unity of the movement, shared objectives, political climate or presence of allies determine its force. The political opportunity structures approach analyses the ways in which state institutions and political structures encourage or hinder groups' mobilisation in the political arena. According to this approach, with reference to minorities, certain political regimes promote better public policy than others. The characteristics of regimes, whether that of unitary or that of federal government, and factors such as the electoral system, the separation of powers, and the position of the most powerful political elites, all exercise an influence on the condition of social groups (Fetzer & Soper 2005:10). The centralisation of power and the institutionalisation of relations between religious groups and the state in France, however, reduced the flexibility of Muslim communities and their ability to mobilise (Ibid.).

Social activism of the young North Africans developed through the membership in civil society organisations. Formed since the mid-1970s[7], they constituted a local response to exclusion or racism (Lapeyronnie 1987). A new law guaranteeing freedom of association of foreigners drafted in September 1981 eased their formation. This measure, allowed people of foreign origin to mobilise as a group, provided an impetus for collective public actions based on shared grievances and favoured

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[7] A certain number of protest movements of immigrant workers were organised in the 1970s; there were hunger strikes to obtain residence and work permits, rent strikes in the Sonacotra shelters housing immigrants, strikes in factories organised by the labour unions, etc. For a detailed account of the movements see Saliha & Saïd (1991).

an emergence of a collective identity. The new subcultural identity *"beur"* introduced by the suburban youth of the North African descent has asserted itself in response to a stereotyped vision and the prejudices of the public opinion.

Police brutality was at the origin of numerous collective actions that attempted to challenge racism, discrimination and negative stereotyping of their communities on a regular basis since the 1970s (Hajjat 2006). The March for equality and against discrimination organised in 1983 provoked the biggest media resonance, the authorities nevertheless failed to answer the grievances of the marchers. The exploitation of the movement for political ends and accusations of cronyism drove a wedge between the movement's elite and the base and contributed to its running out of steam (Saliha & Saïd 1991). Growing mistrust and disillusionment towards the political parties, the Left in particular, made many North African leaders abandon the national political scene and become involved in grassroots and religious organisations.

Towards institutionalised forms of Islam

Until the end of the 1980s, the French government saw its engagement with Muslim communities exclusively through the prism of its relations and alliances with predominantly Muslim countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey.[8] Without family or cultural reference points, early immigrant Muslim communities gathered in community centres and makeshift mosques that provided them with practical help and religious guidance and hoped to return to their home country after they had saved enough money. Faith-based organisations, established by the first-generation to instil a sense of community in Muslims of different backgrounds, began to federate the practicing Muslims since the mid-1980s. They are still operating although their influence is disputed by the generations of Muslims born in Europe (Fregosi 2009).

In order to improve the practical conditions of public practice of Islam in France, the government launched an initiative to create a structure that would unite all national Muslim federations in a single representative body.[9] The official body representing French Muslims, the *Conseil français du culte musulman* (French Muslim Council, CFCM), was launched in February 2003 by the then Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, following fifteen years of consultation between the authorities and the representatives of Islam in France.

The early years of the CFCM's activity, symbolising the period of "consular Islam" (Geisser 2012), were

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[8] Organisations operating during that period functioned as diplomatic liaison officers between the state authorities and the embassies of these Muslim countries; regarding the former, the issue was dealt with according to its importance on the relevant level of the state hierarchy – from the Interior Ministry faith unit to the President. Relations with Muslim organisations mirrored France's ties with these countries.

[9] The consultation process looked to formalise the government's relations with French Muslims, albeit through an interventionist approach. Besides hindering all early attempts at bottom-up Muslim political mobilisation in view of creating a representative body the process also intensified rivalries between the Muslim grassroots organisations. So, rather than promoting cooperation, the process of federating Muslim organisations into one representative institution intensified the dynamics of competition between the biggest organisations. And even though no group or personality chose to leave the consultation, some members challenged the government's initiative either from the inside or via a media channel.

marked by conflicts[10] and domination of Muslim countries[11] for which obtaining the leadership of the representative body was a guarantee of political benefits and religious control over French Muslims. Moreover, the member organisations of the Council regarded it as a stepping stone towards the recognition within the Muslim community and an involvement in national politics. The stakes were high since the federation that would take control of this organ would enjoy political advantages, have control over *halal* certification, places of worship, etc. The State intervention in the creation of the French Muslim Council (CFCM), however, betrayed its desire to "rationalize the Islamic landscape" (Fregosi 2009: 42) by the top-down choice of its interlocutors and control over the process.[12]

The role of the new representative body was well delineated by the secular framework. The latter imposed a separation of political power and religious organisations, the cadres being able to act exclusively as representatives of practicing Muslims and consultants on Muslim affairs. Despite the fact that the CFCM was not mandated to settle political issues, the government frequently petitioned the organisation to arbitrate problems related to security and public order.[13] Considered "too institutionalized to be close to the believers" (Quel dialogue 2008), the Council made only a meagre input into the production of counter-narratives due to lasting internal quarrels and its dependence on the government. Its confusing modus operandi, indefinite role and incapacity to address issues of young Muslims suffering from unemployment and discrimination discredited it in the eyes of the Muslim base.

Mobilisation against the headscarf ban and emergence of Muslim identity

In the 1980s, the urban riots and outbreaks of violence were the "sole means of expression" (Lapeyronnie 1992: 82) of the socially and economically marginalised, mostly immigrant, population deprived of political representation. Descendants of immigrants (as they continued to be perceived despite the fact that they were born in France) were often objects of media attention, but were rarely given voice until the mobilisation against racism and police violence in 1983 and the collective actions – strikes, marches, concerts among others – for recognition of their rights that followed (Muxel 1988). In the middle of the 1980s, the goals and forms of mobilisation shifted from racial equality to religious affirmation and Islam became a new catalyst for action. The reason for this shift have been linked to the failure of secular organisations combating racism which concurred with the pre-eminence of the religious identification among the activists starting from the 1990s (De Galembert 1995). Kepel (1994) considers the first Islamic headscarf controversy as a turning point in the mobilisation of young people

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[10] The first elections to the Council were troubled by a turf war between the FNMF backed by Morocco and the Paris Mosque having close ties with the Algerian government. The FNMF won 16 out of 41 votes thanks to its control over a large network of mosques. The Paris Mosque, being a historical ally of the government but lacking a genuine support base, opposed the elections. The mosque rector Dalil Boubakeur, one of the most influential Muslim personalities, was appointed president although his organisation came third with only 6 votes.

[11] The embassies of Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey and the Muslim World League were informed on the regular basis about the progression of the creation of the national representative body by the then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, who led the project through its final stage. See Terrel (2004).

[12] Since none of the organisations had an absolute majority, government mediation proved vital in preventing an impasse. For instance, Sarkozy intervened on several occasions to avoid President Boubakeur's resignation, and, in 2005, he personally supervised the CFCM elections.

[13] For instance, when riots in the suburbs broke out in October 2005 (triggered by the tragic death of two boys, Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna aged 15 and 17, electrocuted in an electricity transformer where they were hiding allegedly following a high-speed chase with the police) the authorities, having identified the two young victims as Muslims, did not hesitate to address the Muslim authorities with a request to appease the rioters.

of North African origin and as a cornerstone of their affirmation as Muslims. De Galembert (2009: 46) observes that these protest movements not only consolidated Muslims' media visibility, they also reinforced their collective identity:

> "Appearance of Muslims on the social scene in this case is not unrelated to the transformation of the prism through which we perceive the populations who were previously approached mainly as temporary labour force, North African, Arabs or beurs. […] While heteronomous factors helped to bring Muslims into social existence, the latter are not passive agents of an unfathomable process. What we are witnessing here, following the logic of the reversal of stigma and its transformation into emblem, is a chaotic and uncertain emergence of Muslim "conscience", Islamic actors and common interests."

Exclusion of Muslim schoolgirls wearing headscarf, which became front-page news and eventually resulted in the law banning religious symbols in state schools, provoked many violent reactions and strong oppositions from faith-based associations. The legacy of the 1905 law played an important role in ongoing headscarf controversies as opinions clashed and the Islamic headscarf became a symbol of the grip backward and obscurantist Islamist ideology exercised on French Muslims (Vigerie & Zelensky 2003). The legislation gave an impetus for the creation of the collective *Une école pour tous-tes* (One school for all, CEPT) federating a variety of feminist networks such as *Collectif féministes pour l'égalité* (Feminist collective for equality, CFE) and *Les Blédardes* founded by Houria Bouteldja that included within its structures long-time feminist leaders, secular activists, far-left groups and veiled and non-veiled Muslim activists (Dot-Pouillard 2007).

Mobilisation in favour of Islamic headscarf, creating an ever-greater divide in secular France where visible practices like the headscarf (*hijab*) or the full-face veil (*niqab*), were considered incompatible with French values, appeared to mark a return to religiosity. The CEPT, however, presented social justice, equality and the right to education as its key incentives (Collectif 2004). This strategy allowed it to sufficiently enlarge its pool of adherents and constituents (McCarthy & Zald 1977) and provide an impetus for organisational change within the feminist movements and shifts in position regarding the French colonial past, the issue of religion or the role of schools in promotion of republican values (Dot-Pouillard 2007).

New forms of Muslim engagement

Young generations of French Muslims embraced new forms of mobilisation reflecting the modernity of the mainstream society and culture (what Boubekeur (2005) refers to as "cool Islam"). They reclaimed their Islamic identity by going against the nature of the social activism of their parents' generation. It seems that mobilisation of young Muslims does not take place solely within the faith-based organisations but also through shared social and cultural experiences. Young Muslims tend to express their religiosity through alternative forms, such as arts or cultural activities but also a commitment to social concerns such as exclusion, delinquency, unemployment and globalisation (Fregosi 2009).

With the affirmation of Muslim identity in the public space, different forms of mobilisation have emerged. Fregosi's (2009) typology includes three categories: 1) religious, 2) socio-political and 3) mobilisation along cultural identity lines. Religious mobilisation – by formulating demands such as financial aid for construction of the mosques, sections in cemeteries reserved for Muslims, faith schools, etc. – ensured optimal conditions for religious observance, spiritual attainment of the devotees or institutional representation. Socio-political mobilisation strove for societal changes in accordance with Islamic ethical and moral values. There has been, however, very little incentive for the well-established Muslim organisations falling into these two categories to support mobilisation

against Islamophobia[14]. It was the third type of mobilisation – based on the perception of Islam not as a religious, but as a cultural identifier linked to a series of values and historical references – that gave rise to movements promoting civic participation through education or social and cultural action. It also led to formation of groups denouncing inequality, police violence and negative stereotyping of suburban youth (increasing after the 2005 riots) and discrimination against Muslims.

Starting from 2003[15], new organisations led by ethnic and religious minority activists were formed to raise awareness about Islamophobia. Their emergence was triggered by the mobilisation against the law banning conspicuous religious symbols at schools, perceived as discriminatory against Muslims, and by the refusal of civil society organisations actively engaged in the areas of discrimination and racism to recognise the phenomenon and admit it should be dealt with (Hajjat & Mohammed 2013). While mobilisation against Islamophobia was at the beginning limited to abuses linked to the headscarf ban, organisations progressively enlarged their spheres of action to other types of discriminatory behaviour (De Galembert 2009). The mobilisation against Islamophobia is on the increase thanks to the work of activists and organisations that emerged in the first decade of the 21st century – *Le Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France* (CCIF) founded in 2003, *Le Mouvement des Indigènes de la République* founded in 2005, *Les Indivisibles* founded in 2006 and *La Coordination contre le racisme et l'islamophobie* founded in 2008 (Hajjat & Mohammed 2013) – and have been powerful advocates for Muslims through a number of initiatives (platforms, campaigns, networks). International civil society organisations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Open Society Institute) together with academics, journalists[16] and practitioners, became their regular partners and a driving force of the enforcement of the rights of Muslims' in all spheres.[17] We are going to examine their work and the narratives countering anti-Muslim hatred they produce in the following section.

4. Dominant counter-narratives to Muslim hatred

Association with Terrorism

The emergence of a global "Islamic norm" (Cesari 1998), which emphasised the divide between 'us and them', has translated into negative media portrayals of people of Muslim faith (Deltombe 2005). Whenever a criminal act or a global conflict involved persons of Muslim faith, French Muslims could feel the negative repercussions such as suspicion, social exclusion and verbal attacks (Santelli 2008). Double allegiance of French Muslims came again to the forefront with the emergence of Daesh and a threat of terrorism. Faith-based organisations and imams would **systematically condemn all terrorist attacks** and on many occasions appeal to Muslims to "distance themselves from the terrorist ideology" (Le Monde 2015) by taking part in protest marches and gatherings, online petitions and

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[14] Our definition of the term is based on Sayyid's (2010) understanding of Islamophobia as a set of actions and attitudes that affect the well-being of the populations designated as Muslims. He divides activities described as Islamophobic into six clusters: attacks on persons, attacks on property, acts of intimidation, institutional Islamophobia, comments that disparage Muslims or Islam and state Islamophobia.

[15] See Ameli, Merali & Shahghasemi (2012) and Hajjat & Mohammed (2013) for initiatives considered as precursory in the fight against discrimination against Muslims. One of the first such groups was the network *Mouvement de l'immigration et des banlieues* (1995), followed by organisations that became involved in or stemmed from the headscarf debate such as *Commission « Laïcité & Islam »*, *Comité 15 mars et Liberté* and the collective *Une école pour tou.te.s*.

[16] Virtual communities gather around the online media such as *Oumma, SaphirNews* and *MeltingBook* whose broad coverage of issues reflects the diversity that prevails in the French society. *Contre-attaque(s)* is an online media reporting and mobilising against Islamophobia.

[17] For more details about their activities see Workstream 1 report on France (Bila 2017).

campaigns.[18] Some organisations, such as the CCIF refused to be coerced into denouncing acts of terrorism for which they did not feel any responsibility: "Muslims must not play the **Islamophobic game which involves identifying them as culprits and ideal suspects**, pushing them constantly to justify themselves for actions of third parties" (CCIF 2014). What is more, such injunctions contributed to essentialisation of Muslims and further victimisation of a community targeted similarly by acts of terrorism and by anti-terrorist measures (Grzybowski 2015).

The former president of *Etudiants musulmans de France* (EMF), Anas Saghrouni (2017), admits the organisation received a fair amount of demands from the print, radio and television media and has made numerous appearances after each terrorist attack (Ibid). Rather than a justification, Saghrouni perceives it as an **expression of solidarity with the victims**: "We tried to ease the tension. We were affected like everyone else, so we expressed our sadness and pain." Moreover, he felt that **a strong media presence and a targeted message were necessary to balance the hate narratives**: "Our take was that if we did not answer, other people would. We had to be heard, because our message is balanced and thoughtful" (Ibid.). EMF, together with a number of civil society organisations and public personalities, was among the signatories of **the call for unity** after the Paris attacks which warned against the scapegoating of the Muslim community for the crimes "of which only the perpetrators are guilty" for it may cause the country to "fall into the trap of a programmed and orchestrated division" (Nous sommes unis 2015). The call resulted in the launch of the collective *Nous sommes unis* (We are united) and the eponymous social media campaign. EMF also joined forces with *Coexister*, a youth organisation promoting interfaith understanding, in media-savvy **awareness-raising campaigns to promote a message of solidarity and social cohesion** (Ganousse 2015).

Educational tools and promotion of public knowledge of Islam are also used to refute framing of Islam as a religion of violence. One such initiative, *Parle-moi d'Islam* (Talk to me about Islam), produces educational videos and articles broadcast on YouTube channel and social networks. The organisation's objective is to counter the Salafist and extremist ideology which had a strong presence on social networks by occupying otherwise empty space on the Internet and offering **an alternative narrative on Islam and an approach we should have to religious texts** (Bahloul 2017). One of its founders, Kahina Bahloul, explains that the purpose of their activities is twofold: "Our project strives to give appropriate information about Islamic practices to young Muslims seeking to understand Islam and to Non-Muslims who hold preconceptions about Islam" (Ibid.). In a language and form adapted to young generations targeted by their message, the videos debunk the rhetoric used by Daesh and the radical movements to indoctrinate young people: "We start from the subjects used by Daesh such as *hijra*, *jihad[19]*, the place of women in the religious texts and we deconstruct their arguments. We review all these basic notions whose meaning has been distorted by these movements" (Ibid.). According to Bahloul, the feedback has been positive and the videos, which have reached a wide audience[20], have sparked a genuine debate about Islamic values and teachings.

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[18] Atrocities committed on Iraqi civilians by the Daesh militiamen in September 2014 triggered online mobilisation which resulted in petitions and campaigns like #NotInMyName and its French version #PasEnMonNom. Rallies and marches were also organised after the Charlie Hebdo and Hyper casher shootings in January 2015, one month after the Paris attacks, in December 2015 and more recently in July 2017.

[19] The radical movements use the concepts of *hijra* (migration of Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina) and *jihad* (internal struggle) falsely evoked as a tool to make young people believe it is their duty to fight against the 'aggressors of Muslims' and incite them to migrate to Syria.

[20] The videos have more than 169 000 views on YouTube. For more details see https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaEEZ6pgyBMlOANQt57JPLQ

Although national leaders warned against conflating mainstream Islam with terrorism in the aftermath of the 2015 terrorist attacks, the government introduced administrative measures and provisions to specifically target Muslims. Special policing powers were employed to monitor Muslim communities, thereby further stigmatising them (the dangerous drift of these measures has been detailed in the Workstream 1 report). The *Etat d'urgence/antiterrorisme* (state of emergency/anti-terrorism) network that federates civil society organisations, lawyers and academics, appealed to the French parliamentarians to abstain from voting the extension of state of emergency and to reject the new anti-terrorism bill.[21] Among other reasons, they considered that extended policing powers such as placing suspects under house arrest, house raids and searches "may be **used against demonstrators or activists, unrelated to terrorism**, as has been the case in recent months" (Etat d'urgence 2017).

The parliamentarian Danièle Obono (2017) believes there is a need to deploy **a strong and inclusive political narrative to reassure the communities targeted by the counter-terrorist measures**: "We must not desert politics because this is where the decisions are made." Her party, *La France insoumise,* opposed the new counter-terrorism bill, and in particular its article two which provides for closure of places of worship on charges of incitement to violence. Obono considers it will allow excessive surveillance of the mosques, which are implicitly targeted by the article (Ibid.). In cooperation with the civil society organisations she proposes to set up a strategic monitoring body to ensure good application of the law: "The conflation between Islamic practices and terrorist ideologies that exists in the public and political discourse on Islam is stigmatising. We refuse the political use of secularism for racist purposes and stigmatisation. We are extremely vigilant about it and do not give in to the pressure" (Ibid).

Fouad Sari (2017), a city councillor of Vigneux-sur-Seine, notes that **political action that fosters the feeling of unity** can be an effective way of countering narratives that accuse Muslims of condoning terrorism: "It is more about acts than about narratives. We should not react or justify ourselves, but reclaim national symbols to further reinforce national cohesion."

Nassim Lachelache (2017), deputy mayor of Fontenay-sous-Bois responsible for urban policy and the spokesperson of the collective *Stop le contrôle au faciès,[22]* observes that failing to provide a legal safeguard against police abuses might pit communities against each other: "France has been condemned, but the new counter-terrorism legislation allows for even more identity checks. There is evidence that particular populations – black people and North Africans – are targeted; the police, however, deny engaging in racial profiling. […] **By discriminating against its own population, the state plays into the hands of Daesh and other terrorist groups.** It creates a vicious circle." Lachelache's political mandate allows him to raise the political priority of the fight against Islamophobic narratives. He, for instance, refused to present an action plan to fight against Islamic radicalisation: "Whether one is Muslim, Catholic or Jewish, one can become an extremist. There are extremists of all kinds, we should not focus only on Muslims."

Senator Esther Benbassa (2017), who was one of the twelve senators who abstained from voting the new anti-terrorist law, warns that "we must stop targeting Muslims every time something goes wrong." According to UN experts and anti-discrimination agencies, the new law "may have

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[21] The law on the reinforcement of national security and of the fight against terrorism (N. 2017-1510) was enacted on 30 October 2017.

[22] Founded in 2011, the collective federates organisations and activists challenging the arbitrary and abusive identity checks performed by the police through legal action. Its objective is to raise awareness about the unlawful use of ethnic profiling, abusive use of force and a lack of transparent police documentation on identity checks. In November 2016, the State was condemned by the Court of Cassation (the court of final appeal for criminal and civil matters) for racial profiling during identity checks performed by the police following individual complaints filed by the members of the collective.

discriminatory repercussions for French residents, particularly Muslims" (Chrisafis 2017). Benbassa believes that current political instability, global terrorism and ideological recruitment of young people by Daesh makes deployment of counter-narratives particularly hard: "There is a real Muslim middle class, but we never talk about it. We only talk about the burkini and the veil because these topics are politically unifying. **Terrorism justifies anti-Muslim prejudice**." She considers the security-based approach to Islam a "dead end" and advocates for policies that could have a long-term impact on the disadvantaged populations and facilitate their access to education, training and job market (Benbassa 2017).

Cultural Incompatibilities

According to an opinion poll from July 2017 (Courtois 2017), it would seem that the topics as immigration and Islam continue to cause tensions in France. 65% of the surveyed felt there were too many foreigners in France and 60% stated that France no longer had that "home-like feeling" about it (Ibid.). Moreover, only 40% considered that the way in which Islam was practiced in France was compatible with the values of the French society. Such attitudes, reinforced by the feeling of fear instilled by the press coverage of the global events (terrorism, migration crisis, etc.) and the growing visibility of Islam in France (building of mosques, demands for substitute meals in school canteens, *halal* butcheries, etc.), were attributed to the phenomenon described as "cultural insecurity"[23] (Ahearne 2017). Populations feel threatened by the presence and cultural influence of other groups and perceive them as attempts on their way of life and values. As a result, visible signs of Muslim religiosity are interpreted as "deliberate provocation" (Liogier 2017).

The CCIF attempted to denounce othering of Muslims in its awareness-raising campaign *Nous (aussi) sommes la nation*[24] (We are (also) the nation): "The idea was to send a symbolic message by reclaiming a landmark event in the history of France […]. The "too" marks an exclusion, **we remind everyone that we, the excluded, are also part of this nation**. The message is extremely positive and inclusive […]" (Charef 2017). The campaign poster, displaying women in headscarves among other characters, was banned from the public transports and sparked criticism from both members of the intellectual elite who, in a rather Freudian slip, interpreted it as a warning of impending Islamic conquest (Liogier 2015) and anti-racist movements for overlooking the racial and colonial dimension of the divide (Bouteldja 2012).

Validation of anti-Muslim prejudice in intellectual and political discourses (Marlière 2015) constructs a theoretical and ideological basis for justification of Islamophobia not only among populist and far-right politicians. It appears that such discourses have been accepted across the political spectrum: "The cultural insecurity narrative, which is an Islamophobic narrative, is adopted even by the left. They claim that the fact that 'ethnic French people' feel threatened by Islam gives them a reason to vote for far-right parties. President Macron in his inaugural speech said that 'we must defend our culture'. He uses the rhetoric of the extreme right" (Meyran 2017). By presenting culture and identity as

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[23] The term refers to "the anxieties produced by immigration, economic globalisation and post-traditional values among populations which had hitherto been the core electorates of left-wing governing parties, but who were now being pulled into the orbit of far-right populist parties" (Ahearne 2017). Established in the French public discourse since 2012, it was popularised by Gouilly (2013) and Bouvet (2015). There is, nevertheless, a debate in the French intellectual circles about the validity of the concept. Ahearne (2017) illustrates how the term, banished by the left-leaning intellectuals, was embraced by the politicians and commentators on the far right and the nationalist or 'sovereigntist' sections of the mainstream right.

[24] The 2012 campaign was based on the painting *Serment du Jeu de Paume* by Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) capturing one of the key moments of the French Revolution. David's motive was given a more contemporary touch by showing the French population in its ethnic and religious diversity.

homogenised and stable, almost frozen in time, **politicians build a vision of the nation that is white and Christian[25] and opposes French natives to imaginary enemies within**. In these narratives Muslims play a specific role: "A Muslim stands for an eternal anti-European. Islam is portrayed as contrary to women's freedoms, freedom of expression, democracy. Even left-leaning people can find an excuse in the idea that rejecting Islam stands for fighting against cultural incompatibility" (Liogier 2017). Such essentialisation of Muslims and Islam contributes to the upsurge of extreme right ideology and nationalism (Corcuff 2015). In order to fight "identity panics"[26] (Meyran, De Cock 2017), it is necessary to **break the dominant narrative on cultural insecurity by giving the voice to the opponents** capable of dismantling the intellectual and political discourse that deflects anxiety-provoking news on terrorism or economic crisis for political purposes (Meyran 2017).

In contrast, Raphaël Liogier (2017) believes that attempts to convince opponents by rational arguments miss the mark: "Europe has long been the centre of gravity, it is no longer the case. The narcissistic injury eliminates the rational behaviour, one looks for scapegoats. Educational approach is useless, nobody cares about statistics and hypotheses." Fatima Khemilat (2017) adds: "Presenting numbers as arguments is not enough, as numbers are always debatable. You have to **share your experience with others**. People may be well intentioned, but many times they are unaware of the problem. We must **create an emotional connection and get people to question their assumptions**." Bechrouri (2017) puts forth a similar perspective: "We must continue to develop narratives based on statistics and rational arguments as the CCIF does. But the narrative should also emphasize that **we are not divided, that we live and work together** on a daily basis. It has to speak directly to people, to non-Muslims."

In order to change attitudes towards Muslims, Liogier (2017) suggested putting the onus on **responsible journalism** that does not resort to sensationalism and on **deployment of alternative strategies.** In addition, activists should make use of **collective public action** (street protests), **humour and story-telling techniques in campaigning** and **indirect action** (for instance, by increasing the visibility of Muslims in the public space). Humour and irony, used for instance in the public awareness raising campaigns of the civil society organisations such as the CCIF[27] and *Les Indivisibles*[28], ridicule prejudice and narratives stigmatising Muslims to minimise their effect. Thomas Deltombe (2017) voiced similar thoughts as to the effectiveness of public action (petitions, public protests and forums) to combat anti-Muslim narratives. He also suggested that public actors involved in the production of

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[25] The "Christian roots of France" and "Europe's Judeo-Christian heritage", implying a rejection of immigration and Islam, are frequently evoked by politicians and used as a vehicle to reach the traditional right and far right voters. See Rivera (2010).

[26] Derived from the concept of "moral panics" (Cohen 1972), this phenomenon refers to biased negative reporting that promotes the idea that French culture is threatened by other cultures (Roma, Islam, multiculturalism, etc.) that came to invade France. It appears in the context of distrust in political elites and democratic structures and involves excessive coverage of rumors and anecdotes by the media and politicians, before fading overnight. Recent examples of identity panics include false smears and fake scandals such as burkini-clad women arousing fights in a Corsican village, cafés occupied by Muslims and forbidden to women, organised mass rapes carried out by Muslim individuals in Frankfurt, sexual harassment and bullying of women in the Paris neighborhood La Chapelle-Pajol.

[27] In 2012 CCIF distributed chocolate buns to passersby as a gesture of friendship and sympathy as a part of its communication campaign "A chocolate bun for everyone" launched to expose negative stereotyping of Muslims as a vote-catching strategy. It's 2016 campaign "I support the CCIF" using stereotypical statements about Muslims relies on irony and satire to frame their rights in a more emotional and human context.

[28] The satirical ceremony *Y'a Bon Awards* created in 2009 by *Les Indivisibles* has been rewarding public personalities who made declarations deemed racist each year.

counter-narratives should **hold the media that spread anti-Muslim narratives accountable by using techniques of resistance** such as boycott, to make their opposition more visible.

Othering and stigmatisation

Findings confirm that Muslims face high level of discrimination because of their ethnic or immigrant background and religion (FRA 2017) and their visibility seems to play an important role in their exposure to discrimination (Simon, Safi 2013). Discriminatory behaviour, negative stereotypes and prejudice result from stigmatisation.[29] Persons seen as belonging to the discredited categories on the basis of indications (e.g. name, physical appearance, skin colour) are devalued and ostracised. As a result, Muslims' experience of discrimination and harassment affects their social inclusion, trust in the country's legal system and police as well as their attachment to their country of residence (FRA 2017). There is evidence provided by social psychology studies of the negative effects of ostracism and exclusion on self-esteem of stigmatised groups (Williams, Shore, & Grahe 1998).

Several interviewees observed that the way they were negatively perceived by others affected their own self-perception. Nadia Henni-Moulaï (2017) observes that the lowered self-confidence combined with the lack of positive role models influences the career choices of minorities, including her own: "It must be understood that in France, when you come from a minority background, you live in an environment where the self-doubt is permanent. […] It's systemic, when you come from minorities you often ask yourself 'am I able to do it or not'?" Negative perceptions further affected women wearing headscarf: "I refrain from applying for certain job offers because I know that my veil could be a problem, and I want to keep it at work" (Myriam 2017).

In order to **promote the representation of people from diverse backgrounds in the media,** Henni-Moulaï founded an online platform *MeltingBook*. Its diversity-centred content compensates for the lack of interest of mainstream media in minorities and gives voice to groups the latter usually overlook. Henni-Moulaï (Ibid.) explains that one means of countering Islamophobia is "to **embody the counter-speech through personal journeys and career paths**". To achieve this, the website identifies and promotes experts from ethnically and socially diverse backgrounds. Henni-Moulaï hopes that public attention generated by the positive coverage can help reduce stigma and stereotypes: "My goal is to reach people who deny the existence of Islamophobia. Showing things differently will more likely affect them. Giving a voice to Muslim experts is a way of producing a counter-narrative" (Ibid.). Highlighting successful professionals from marginalised groups can also be a source of empowerment: "It is necessary to build a counter-narrative through story-telling. We need to **rewrite the media narrative about minorities** and **let the latter reclaim their media narrative and their image**. It is far more efficient to make a portrait of a lawyer who happens to be veiled, for example, than to present her as a veiled woman who succeeded despite her veil" (Henni-Moulaï 2017). Jehan Lazrak-Toub (2017), the co-founder of *W(e) Talk* which provides a platform to inspiring women role models to empower others, agrees: "The issue of visibility is very important. I am an entrepreneur and it is as an entrepreneur that I want to be perceived. I do not want to be perceived as a Muslim entrepreneur."

Fatima Khemilat (2017) asserts the importance of positive communication and shifting the focus from denunciation of anti-Muslim discrimination to building stronger connections between communities: "More than a counter-narrative, we would need **an alternative narrative based on a positive element rather than on antagonism or hatred**. We need narratives that denounce anti-Muslim discrimination because the force of racism is such that it must be done, but it is not enough. Muslims must be

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[29] According to Goffman (1963: 3), stigma is an attribute that discredits and reduces an individual "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one." Crocker et al. (1998: 505) define stigma as the possession of or belief that a person possesses "some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context."

mobilised in other areas to build a more positive image and normalise the Muslim presence in all spheres of public life."

The student organisation *Etudiants musulmans de France* (EMF) inspired by Muslim ethics and values has taken a similar approach. Its active members strive to **normalise and demystify the Muslim presence in France** through sport, cultural, union, social and humanitarian activities. The organisation counts on **positive actions to break down stereotypes and bring about change**. Its former president Anas Saghrouni explains: "If a person in difficulty has benefited from the food bank of the EMF – available to all, not only to Muslims – tomorrow he or she will remember 'yes, they helped me.' These things stay with you forever. They can change attitudes" (Saghrouni 2017).

Thomas Deltombe (2017) notes that those who frame Islam as positive often ignore how the racist and anti-Muslim narratives work: "People who base their discourse on positive aspects of Islam do not realise that they promote the same essentialism as the one that is at the root of racism." He warns about the risk of deploying narratives that conceptualise Muslims as a single group, as they may be counterproductive: "We should beware of trying to develop a feeling of Islamophilia by insisting that 'Muslims are nice' because it applies the same logic as saying 'Muslims are not nice.' Muslim identity is a social construct. If we essentialise Muslims by using positive or negative narratives, in both cases we participate in Islamophobia" (Ibid.).

Arts and creative expression are also used as a means of changing the narrative about Muslims. The collective *Um'Artist* addresses racism and Islamophobia by providing a platform to Muslim artists. Its founder Hawa N'Dongo (2017) explains the collective attempts to give a different image of Muslims in order to encourage mutual understanding and dialogue. Another member of the collective Ibrahim Bechrouri (2017) adds: "Every oppressed group sees art as a form of liberation. We, nevertheless, have no desire to show that one can be a Muslim and an artist at the same time, for us it is normal." The objective behind the events organised by the collective is also to promote arts within the Muslim community and **empower Muslims by enhancing the talent of Muslim artists**: "We realized a lot of Muslims had a problem with self-censorship. We wanted to allow them to have access to a 'safe space' to express themselves. […] By sharing our stories and talent with others, we reclaim our history and identity" (N'Dongo 2017). For the interfaith activist and columnist Samia Hathroubi (2017), writing has a similar purpose – it can help turn Muslims from objects to agents and let them shape their own story by deconstructing myths: "One of the things that led me to write my monthly columns was to be able to reclaim my identity. To say who I am, tell my story and let younger generations see it is possible to create an alternative narrative about who we are as Muslims, French citizens and Europeans."

Community withdrawal

Starting from the early 2000s there has been a visible fragmentation of the anti-racist organisational landscape. The objective of some organisations shifted from promoting all-encompassing approach to eradicate racism to defending specific group rights. The divisions within the anti-racist movement also gave rise to a multitude of grassroot structures and triggered a mobilisation against Islamophobia (Hajjat & Mohammed 2013). The flagship organisation in this area - the CCIF, derives its authority and legitimacy from its member base.[30] It was created "in response to an absence and a denial" and "to fill the void" in the traditional approaches to anti-racism which "did not recognize the reality and mechanisms of Islamophobia" (Recadrage 2016). The political context of open and public attacks on Islam and increased scrutiny of Muslims in the public, intellectual, media and political discourse

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[30] The CCIF's commitment in the defence of Muslim women during the 'burkini affair' in August 2016 attracted 6,900 new members and allowed the organisation to significantly enlarge its base of subscribers. In August 2017, the organisation had approximately 14,500 affiliates.

prompted its action: "The victims, first and foremost women of Muslim faith wearing headscarves, were not helped, and at the same time, Islamophobic statements became more and more accepted by the politicians and media of our country, without being contradicted" (Ibid.).

Fatima Khemilat (2017) notes that such fragmentation can be counterproductive as it may bring division and weakening of the civil society. She believes an approach that links the fight against Islamophobia with other legitimate struggles, especially the ones that have already proved their worth and are considered as normalised – such as feminism and anti-racism –, should be encouraged. She insists that **strategic ideological rapprochement** can cut the anti-Muslim narratives short: "It is very difficult to admit that you are an anti-feminist or a racist, it is easier to claim that you are Islamophobic" (Ibid.).

Alternative approaches involve **collaboration beyond common cultural and religious backgrounds.** Instead of federating around values of Islam and fight against Islamophobia, activists try to put the spotlight on dialogue and shared values: "There is only us, not them and us. To fight for the rights and freedoms of Muslims is to fight for the rights and freedoms of all people. If we restrict the rights of one group, we restrict everyone's rights. I do not want a specific legislation, I want the same laws to apply to everyone" (Khemilat 2017).

Madjid Messaoudene (2017), a member of the Saint-Denis city council responsible for equality and fight against discriminations, notes that everyone's individual rights and freedoms can be adversely affected. It is therefore necessary to **broaden participation in the fight against Islamophobia by building relationships with human rights advocates outside the usual sectors**: "The fight against Islamophobia goes beyond an appeal to the sole interests of Muslims. […] When a minority is attacked, other minorities must be able to respond. Today, though we have allies, the battle is waged on several fronts. We should bring together all efforts and avoid prioritising struggles."

It seems that insisting on the **universality of values and pursuit of common goals such as social justice, eradication of discrimination, violence against women and poverty can** help Muslim activists and civil society organisations to establish partnerships outside the Muslim community. Opponents perceive fighting against Islamophobia as promoting self-interest and accuse Muslims of community withdrawal and defending their turf (Chevrier 2017). One way to gain public support is to foster Muslims' citizen engagement and participation in activities that go beyond their immediate political interests and serve the interest of all French people: "For years, Muslims have been told to talk about Islam, extremism and related issues. We must not react – we must act differently. We must come out of our intellectual ghettos and talk about other subjects such as education, environmental protection, public health or green issues. After all, we are citizens like any others" (Myriam 2017).

It seems equally important to target people not yet convinced of the necessity to combat anti-Muslim hatred and gain their support. Several respondents observed that it was important to balance intra-community and inter-community alliances to achieve it. Attika Trabelsi (2017) of *Lallab* notes that to build an effective counter-narrative it was just as important to communicate their engagement to social justice and women's rights to the Muslim base as to the public. She considers that **inclusive public events and targeted communication strategy can generate awareness and commitment also among people not directly concerned by Islamophobia and build out-group alliances**: "It is not enough to empower Muslim women. We must allow people who do not know how to react to actually put themselves in our shoes to understand what we are experiencing. If they have solid arguments, they can be our potential allies." Their endorsement can be crucial in getting the message across: "When the narrative of the persons affected [by prejudice] is not legitimised, the ally reinforces their point" (Ibid.). *Lallab* relies on a variety of tools (social media, public events, advocacy and training, support groups, etc.) to leverage broad public support. The organisation's capacity to mobilise support, evidenced by the long list of public personalities speaking up against recurrent verbal attacks

targeting its leaders and accusations of Islamism (*Stop au cyberharcèlement islamophobe* 2017), confirms it gained legitimacy and credibility.

The CCIF occasionally partners with other anti-racist organisations[31] and its leaders seem to believe in the efficiency of a joint action: "A collective effort and solidarity is always stronger and will generate a more powerful effect. […] Eradication of Islamophobia or its massive reduction is possible only if all the forces combine" (Charef 2017).

Obono (2017) suggests that academic research produces "scientific and scholarly literature to establish the legitimacy of anti-racist counter-narratives", therefore researchers can be great allies in the fight against Islamophobia. Olivier Esteves (2017) notes the limited potential of the academic community to be a major ally since the narratives it produces do not reach the unconvinced: "Producing counter-narratives usually comes down to preaching to the choir." He believes it is up to the community activists to "consolidate their theoretical and conceptual arsenal" in order to produce audible counter-narratives. Similar concerns were voiced by Régis Meyran (2017) and Agnès De Féo (2017) who adds that academics experience difficulties in promoting alternative narratives: "Even though there's a will in the academic world to make these narratives heard, there are many roadblocks."

Building alliances is not unanimously approved mobilisation strategy as some movements choose to root themselves in the community instead of reaching across community boundaries.[32] Omero Marongiu-Perria (2017) deplores the lack of coordination between Muslim activists and their low media profile: "There are Muslim actors who operate as intermediaries between the grassroots and the prefectures and local authorities and act as watchdogs for Islamophobia. These actors remain less known figures in the media landscape. Their interlinking would allow for the creation of a more efficient field network." He identifies a lack of willingness of national organisations to collaborate as the major cause of this deficiency: "If one organisation assumes the leadership role, it is not a problem. But no one builds bridges between organisations, no one sets up a network. I think this lack of efficiency is caused by a real lack of will. It is not due to a lack of resources, it is due to unwillingness to cooperate on the part of various actors."

One of the greatest challenges of coalitions is that they require not only strong connections and trust between members, but also balanced decision-making and centralised coordination, which does not combine well with the vertical type of leadership within autonomous organisations (Fox 2010). Organisations having achieved leadership position in their fields put up badly with the horizontal relationships and shared-power settings within coalitions. Moreover, organisations dealing with Islamophobia in France vary in size, organisational culture and ideology. While diversity may bring broad support, research has found that it may also reduce network's performance and bring disagreements – the more diverse the members, the more complex the network (Kadushin et al.

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[31] The CCIF and other anti-racist organisations joined the criminal proceedings against the French historian Georges Bensoussan, charged with inciting to racial hatred for having called Arabs innately anti-Semitic, as civil parties. The organisation shares platform with national anti-racist organisations and independent bodies (*Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, CNCDH, etc.) to denounce human rights abuses, signs petitions and regularly participates in national and international events on Islamophobia along other organisations.

[32] Several self-organised activist movements that strive to empower women and minorities have based their mobilisation model on the organisation of women-only and other "non-mixed" events to fight sexism and racial discrimination. Creating women-only spaces and events reserved for minorities is seen as a political statement. *Le Camp d'été décolonial* (Decolonial summer camp) reserved to "persons who personally suffer from State racism" in 2016 and events reserved to black women during the NYANSAPO festival organised by the black feminist collective Mwasi in 2017 caused a wave of criticism and public outrage for allegedly "wallowing ethnic separation." See AFP (2017).

2005). Eventually, the question that arises here is whether we define success "in terms of achieving an outcome or enrolling the greatest number of partners" (Ibid.).

Stereotype of the 'oppressed Muslim woman'

Mobilisation against the 2004 law banning headscarves from state schools fostered the creation of Muslim feminist organisations, at odds with the traditional feminist movements[33], which perceived religion as a barrier to empowerment (see Chapter 3 of this report). Feminist scholarship[34] analysed the discursive construction of Islamic headscarf as a coercive practice and provided a critique of the "Western" feminist discourse on Muslim women and their marginalisation in both mainstream political party and feminist movements. From this moment Muslim feminist groups grew stronger and multiplied initiatives to let Muslim women speak for themselves (Dot-Pouillard 2007).

The public discourse on Muslim women, nevertheless, seems to be dominated by the representations of the latter produced by external observers rather than by Muslim women themselves: "Today we keep talking about Muslim women rather than letting them speak for themselves. Media prefer giving the floor to the so-called experts – usually white men in their sixties – who speak for Muslim women and tell them how they should dress and live" (Zouak 2017). Appropriation of the 'Muslim women narrative' by their critics led to framing of the former as a homogenised group and participated in the construction of a hegemonic discourse pointing to their systematic oppression: "We confiscate the words of these women and believe they cannot make their own choices. If a woman converted to Islam, we believe she did so because of a man. **Muslim women are not a monolith**. The **reasons for wearing a headscarf are multiple** and different for each one of them. There is no global project of Islamisation, there are only individuals" (De Féo 2017).

The Muslim feminist initiative *Lallab* strives to **reverse the trend** by providing Muslim women with online and offline platforms that allow them to **develop a positive self-image** and become "active agents in their own lives" (Trabelsi 2017). Developing positive narratives about Muslim women has an **empowering** effect on the latter. The organisation also works towards **raising public awareness** on negative impact of prejudice and discrimination on Muslims women through public events and work with journalists.

Louiza Bougherara (2017) strives to give a different image to Muslim women by **unlocking their potential for entrepreneurship** and thereby enhancing their self-fulfilment and self-esteem. She believes that "the more [Muslim women] are visible as professionals, the less people will focus on [their] headscarves." She created *Akhawate Business*[35] to empower Muslim women who are being stereotyped as tradition-bound, domestic and family-oriented: "It is a way of giving an alternative vision of a Muslim woman who is presented by the media and politicians as a prisoner of her family and religion, prevented from achieving self-actualisation. I go against the tide and show that they are

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[33] Expression "traditional feminist movements" refers to Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (1984) understanding of Western feminism as ideologically committed to an ethnocentric universalist approach which considers women as a coherent group regardless of their class, ethnic background, history and culture.

[34] See the works of Nacira Guénif-Souilamas and Christine Delphy. The 2006 edition of the journal *Nouvelles questions féministes* (Vol. 25 n.1 and n.3) was dedicated to the post-colonial approach to feminism and the disruption of feminist movements in France following the headscarf ban.

[35] Created in 2011, *Akhawate Business* federates Muslim women entrepreneurs and provides them with advice and support in the creation and development of their businesses. It participated in the emergence of a class of Muslim entrepreneurs. Initially focusing exclusively on Muslim entrepreneurs, the organisation opened its membership to women from minorities and poor neighbourhoods in 2016. See http://akhawatebusiness.com/

free: they manage and invest their money, form professional partnerships and manage suppliers" (Ibid.). Bougherara considers that changing the perspective and looking at Muslim women as business sector professionals can make a positive impact because these women are not judged by their appearance, but by their performance.

Narratives based on promotion and protection of women's rights have been widely deployed to justify Islamophobia. These narratives frame Muslim women as oppressed by the so-called Islamic traditions which deprive women of their basic rights, dictate their behaviour and the way they dress. Khemilat (2017) notes that contrary to these assertions, "**patriarchy is structural to our societies, it is not specific to Muslims.** We will not liberate women if we penalize them by voting laws that limit their access to labour market, to leisure facilities, housing, health care, etc." Madjid Messaouden (2017) uses his mandate "to give the floor to Muslim women who bear the brunt of Islamophobia." The city council works in close cooperation with the civil society, sets up working groups to tackle Islamophobia and included the need to combat religious discrimination into its report on equality between men and women: "We need to emphasize that women's rights apply to all women and also to those wearing the veil" (Ibid.). Iaad Ben Dhia (2017) of EMF observes the importance of **embedding the struggle against Islamophobia into the fight against sexism and discrimination against women** in order to break down negative stereotyping of Muslim women: "There are people who say that Islamophobia does not exist or is not a priority. There are also those who admit being Islamophobic. Discrimination against women is a more unifying cause than Islamophobia."

Attempts on secularism

Producing powerful and audible counter-narratives on Muslim women is particularly challenging because, as Houria Bouteldja (2017) remarks, **the pseudo-virtuous narratives that take up the defence of women's rights, republican values and *laïcité* are very hard to deconstruct**. Alain Gresh (2017) – the co-founder of the media website *Contre-attaque(s)* which raises awareness on Islamophobia – agrees that these core concepts are distorted in order to become a weapon against Muslims. The misinterpretations of the legal framework in which *laïcité* operates lead to unnecessary tensions and debates over the extent of application of the principle of religious neutrality, particularly in the school setting (see Bila 2017). **It is not the visible religious practices (headscarf, street prayers) or demands for religious accommodation (*halal* food in canteens, women-only hours in sports facilities) that violate this principle**, but rather "attitudes that construe *laïcité* as a key cultural characteristic of French society and use it as an instrument for segregation and exclusion" (Roman 2011).

Tara Dickman (2017), who has a rich experience as a trainer in inclusive management and laïcité for civil servants in local governments, agrees that the concept of secularism is poorly understood and often misconstrued because of an ideological battle over its interpretation. She identifies the cause as the feeling that one's identity and value system is being threatened by 'otherness': "The more we work with people on what motivates the rejection and devaluation of the Other, the more we are able to interpret it as a reflex that comes from ignorance, fear and self-centredness" (Dickman 2017). Grassroots initiatives as the Neighbours' day (Comptes rendus 2015) or open days in mosques (Marongiu-Perria 2017) have the potential to challenge them.

Hate speech

French legislation offers anti-racist organisations the possibility to initiate a legal action against defamatory or insulting speech.[36] It is another way of giving visibility to anti-Muslim narratives and the civil society organisations tend to use these legal tools to bring charges against traditional and online media actors and public personalities considered as high-profile opinion-makers. The CCIF uses strategic litigation to **send a strong message to the perpetrators; it is also a source of reparation for victims and a means of gaining public acknowledgment of the wrongs committed**: "Judges formalise this 'you have crossed the red line' message, it is not just the CCIF that says that, it is also a judicial authority of our country that makes it clear. It adds weight to the argument, it reinforces its dissuasive effect" (Charef 2017). Despite the meaningful redress and support for the victims that judicial procedures may provide, activists remain sceptical about seeking justice through court action: "Women wearing headscarves are completely dehumanised, it is therefore very difficult to speak out and defend their rights. Even if we win this fight in court, it will not change fundamental attitudes. By winning a lawsuit, we reinforce the divide" (Myriam 2017).

Charef (Ibid.), on the contrary, believes that strong mediatisation of the court cases can make a significant impact on stakeholders and the larger public: "It is essential in terms of information, public awareness, deterrence and education. The multi-purpose message is addressed to multiple targets. That is why we think it is not so much about initiating procedures as about trying to assign a certain number of properties and virtues to these procedures. Sometimes it even allows us to create a coalition of organisations that do not necessarily agree on a number of issues." Yet, excessive media coverage does not always have the desired effect and can generate an opposite response: "The discrimination and injustice towards Muslims is real; so, in order to fight it you file a complaint and launch a media campaign. Even if your complaint is legitimate, the media over-react and it will lead to political manipulation" (Lazrak-Toub 2017).

Several respondents consider challenging Islamophobia through criminal law to be a short-term strategy lacking consistency. They warned that politicizing the debate about Islamophobia contributed to widening the gap between Muslims and the surrounding society and could affect the work of local Muslim grassroots organisations in a negative way. Development of an efficient, long-term strategy allowing actors on the ground with limited resources to plan for the medium and long term and form true and lasting partnerships, was cited as a necessary step.

Dickman (2017) believes civil society actors should take up the full challenge of the fight against anti-Muslim hatred and bring a new dimension to the judicial procedures: "Filing a complaint is essential because doing nothing can weaken future victims. […] Legal action may have an educational purpose if in parallel we develop trainings not only for victims, but also for perpetrators and human rights advocates. We can thereby recreate a dialogue and come out of this crisis on top."

Lack of political representation

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[36] Defined as incitement to hatred, discrimination and violence against a person or group of persons because of their origin, or their belonging or non-belonging to a particular ethnic group, nation, race or religion.

Muslims in France face objective barriers to participation in decision-making (Geisser, Soum 2008). At the local and community level all the way to the highest levels of government, they are often underrepresented in leadership positions, left without a voice in decision-making but wooed as an electorate by the candidates seeking re-election (Pingaud 2012).

Le Parti des Indigènes de la République (PIR)[37] provides a platform for the political organisation of the descendants of immigrants and minorities affected by discrimination and racism. These socially and politically marginalised populations were left behind by the left-wing political parties, which have for many years "supported the interests of proletarians and white middle class" (Bouteldja 2015). The PIR seeks to achieve equal involvement of the above-mentioned populations in the governance and its agenda takes up issues usually ignored by the political parties such as "political marginalisation, stigmatisation of our cultures and religions (especially in the media), police brutality and ethnic profiling, discrimination in employment, housing, education, repression of immigration and residents of neighbourhoods, etc." (Ibid.). Its spokesperson Houria Bouteldja explains that the PIR's **resistance to dominant cultural narratives translates into political action:** "We encourage the victims to get organised, we also try to convince a wider audience that if they do not fight against racism, the whole social body will be affected" (Bouteldja 2017). Political movement questions the current balance of power between the elites and the unrepresented groups by creating strategic alliances with certain left-wing parties and the political and trade union militants of the left and far left and their associates. **To challenge the hegemonic narrative framing Muslim populations as a problem,** the PIR looks at the same issue from a reverse perspective: "The State's analytical framework is based on the premise that there is a problem with Islam. We prefer to turn things around and base our analysis on the premise that there is a problem with the West. […] When we are told that Muslims engage in terrorist activities, we respond by saying that we must fight Islamophobia because terrorism feeds on Islamophobia" (Ibid).

Civil society organisations committed to fight against Islamophobia also seek **active engagement in politics and public life in order to promote social and cultural change and shape the political discourse on Islamophobia**. *Coordination contre le Racisme et l'Islamophobie* (CRI), was founded in 2008. Besides providing legal support to the victims of Islamophobia, it organises public awareness activities (meetings, roundtables, protest rallies) in order to challenge Islamophobia "emanating from intellectuals and media and political personalities who influence the collective imagination" that "harms social cohesion and French democracy" (CRI 2015). Organising a dispassionate and balanced debate regarding tackling the diverse aspects of Islamophobia is not self-evident, as the cancellation of a symposium on Islamophobia, supposed to be held by the University of Lyon 2 in October 2017, demonstrates.[38] Abdelaziz Chaambi (2017) believes **political mobilisation is the most effective tool against Islamophobia and racism**: "Mobilising political forces can move things forward and get results

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[37] Created in 2010 on the ideological basis of the *Mouvement des Indigènes de la République* founded in January 2005, the party reclaimed the term 'indigène' to denounce the paternalism of the French State and colonial continuality of its attitude towards descendants of immigrants, reflected in their unequal treatment, discrimination and negative representation in the media and political discourses. The party posits that it is impossible to understand the situation of people of immigrant descent, without analysing it through the prism of colonisation and the situation of colonised populations.

[38] The event attempted to bring together stakeholders (*Observatoire de la laïcité*, the European Commission), researchers and civil society organisations to discuss inequalities and discriminations. Its participants were accused of Islamism, anti-republicanism and "*laïcophobia*" (or a phobia of *laïcité/*French secularism) by LICRA (International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism), radical secularists and the far-right. Abdelaziz Chaambi (2017), the president of CRI and one of the invited speakers, considers that preventing an event meant to encourage cross-sectional dialogue and stimulate critical thinking from taking place "has brought [France] to an advanced level of censorship."

faster. It is the best answer; we are therefore pushing people from CRI to commit themselves politically" (Chaambi 2017). Several members of CRI standing in legislative elections held in June 2017 were supported by the *Parti égalité justice* (Equality and Justice party, PEJ) having close ties to the Turkish ruling party AKP (Bonzon 2017). The party presented around 50 candidates and has taken up to the cause of combating Islamophobia (Ibid.). Jamilla Zennoune-Farah (2017), a member of CRI and a candidate of PEJ, **engaged in politics to increase the pressure on politicians who try to minimise the scope of Islamophobia**: "We are silenced in the public spaces, people are suffering, some of their fundamentals rights are sabotaged. We have to go on the offensive, we have to make noise."

5. Conclusion

Analysis of data collected through a range of sources allowed us to group the counter-narratives to Muslim hatred in clusters according to their discursive content. We distinguished nine major themes which were paired with their corresponding narrative of Muslim hatred (based on prejudice or negative stereotyping and resulting in negative attitudes and discrimination): association of Islam with terrorism (1,2,3), Muslims framed as a problem (4), cultural incompatibilities (5,6), othering (7), accusations of community withdrawal (8, 9), stereotype of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' (10,11), attempts on secularism (12), hate speech (13) and political exclusion (14).

The counter-narratives that dominate the media, political and civil society discourses are the following:

1. Muslims were affected by the terrorist attacks as much as the rest of the French people and they do not need to justify themselves. By expecting Muslims to apologise and denounce terrorism we reinforce the misguided association of Islam with terrorist ideology.
2. The counter-terrorism measures adopted by the government criminalise Muslims and thereby participate in the construction of a 'society of suspicion'.
3. The government's use of exceptional policing powers on the pretext of terrorism prevention contributed to erosion of civil liberties of all citizens.
4. Heavy handed policing of Muslim populations can play into the hands of those who peddle the victim agenda with the aim of driving Muslims further towards extremism and terrorism.
5. There is no contradiction in being French and Muslim. Muslims are citizens like any others.
6. Narratives of cultural incompatibility between Islam and the West are based on an essentialist conception of culture as static and immutable.
7. Promotion of Muslim professionals and experts as cultural brokers can help build bridges between communities and normalise the Muslim presence in France.
8. Muslim communalism is a myth. Muslims are diverse and plural, they do not form a homogeneous community.
9. Active citizen engagement and pursuit of shared objectives can help Muslims gain wider support in the fight against Islamophobia.
10. Patriarchy is not specific to Islam.
11. Muslim women are in control of their own lives. We should therefore stop speaking on their behalf and rather amplify their voices.
12. The notion of *laïcité*, which ensures the freedom of conscience and guarantees the free exercise of worship, is constantly 'hijacked' to exclude Muslims.
13. Legal action strengthens Muslim voices in the face of Islamophobia fed by political populism, hate speech and media hype.
14. Through active engagement and political action Muslims can collectively and effectively pressure the government to challenge Islamophobia.

The counter-narratives took different forms according to the tactical aims they attempted to reach (build awareness, mobilise allies, obtain justice, achieve change, etc.). The narratives that emerged as having the biggest impact were those that fostered dialogue, appealed to emotions and humanised the abstract principle of equality. While the need for Muslims "to reclaim their voice" came up many times during the interviews, striking a right balance between targeting the Muslim communities (to empower them) and the general public (to gain support) seemed essential to achieve dissemination of a counter-narrative across different platforms and, by a multiplier effect, increase its impact. Most respondents also agreed that narratives needed to be accompanied by (positive) actions in order to reach wider audience.

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Bahloul, Kahina – co-founder of the initiative *Parle-moi de l'Islam* focusing on debunking myths about Islam.

Bechrouri, Ibrahim – researcher on surveillance and counter-terrorism, collaborator of the *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France* (CCIF).

Benbassa, Esther – French senator and historian specialised in Jewish history and the history of minorities (*École Pratique des Hautes Études*).

Ben Dhia, Iaad – president of *Etudiants musulmans de France* (EMF).

Bougherara, Louiza – founder of *Akhawate Business.*

Bouteldja, Houria – spokesperson of *Parti des Indigènes de la République* (PIR).

Chaambi, Abdelaziz – president of *Coordination contre le Racisme et l'Islamophobie* (CRI).

Charef, Lila – executive director of the *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France* (CCIF).

De Féo, Agnès – researcher and author of several documentaries on Islamic headscarf, full veil, radicalisation and jihadism.

Deltombe, Thomas – journalist and author of numerous publications on representations of Islam in the media.

Dickman, Tara – community organiser and trainer for civil servants on secularist values and inclusive management.

Esteves, Olivier – researcher (Lille III University) in history of immigration in 20th century Britain, author of the chapter on France in *2015 European Islamophobia Report* (SETA, 2016).

Gresh, Alain – journalist, editor of the journal *Orient XXI* and co-founder of the online magazine *Contre(s)-Attaques.*

Hathroubi, Samia – columnist, interfaith activist and European director of *Foundation for Ethnic Understanding*.

Henni-Moulaï, Nadia – journalist and founder of the online media *MeltingBook.*

Khemilat, Fatima – researcher on gender and religion (IEP Aix en Provence).

Lachelache, Nassim – deputy mayor of Fontenay-sous-Bois responsible for urban policy and the spokesperson of the collective *Stop le contrôle au faciès.*

Lazrak-Toub, Jehan – former journalist (*Saphirnews, Courrier de l'Atlas, Contre-attaque(s)*) and co-founder of *W(e) Talk* focusing on empowerment of women.

Liogier, Raphaël – sociologist and philosopher, author of numerous articles and books on religious and cultural identities.

Marongiu-Perria, Omero – sociologist specialising on French Islam, author of *En finir avec les idées fausses sur l'islam et les musulmans* (L'Atelier, 2017) deconstructing most frequent stereotypes concerning Muslims.

Messaoudene, Madjid – member of the Saint-Denis city council responsible for equality and fight against discriminations.

Meyran, Régis – anthropologist, researcher (Université de Nice – Sophia Antipolis) and author of numerous publications on national and cultural identity.

Myriam – women's rights activist.

N'Dongo, Hawa – women's rights activist, founder of *Um'Artist*, co-president of women's organisation *Lallab.*

Obono, Danièle – member of the French parliament (*La France insoumise).*

Saghrouni, Anas – former president of *Etudiants musulmans de France* (EMF).

Sari, Fouad – member of the Vigneux-sur-Seine city council.

Trabelsi, Attika – social entrepreneur, co-president of *Lallab.*

Zennoune-Farah, Jamilla – candidate of *Parti Egalité Justice* (PEJ), member of *Coordination contre le Racisme et l'Islamophobie* (CRI).

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