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Stuck in a revolving door : secularism, assimilation and democratic pluralism

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6

The Politics of *Laïcité* Today

Au demeurant, ce n'est pas la jeune fille qui est exclue, mais le voile (Pena-Ruiz 2003: 112) [Moreover, it is not the girl who is excluded, but the scarf (my translation)].¹

In this chapter, I first examine some passages from the 'Stasi Report' (2003) that imparted to the French government the crucial recommendation to issue a law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious signs in public schools. The report provides a lengthy analysis of the actuality of *laïcité* by a commission composed of prominent French philosophers, jurists, sociologists, historians and pedagogues, led by the Christian-democratic politician Bernard Stasi.² The final recommendation to the government forms only a small part of this document, which has redefined *laïcité* in several regards.

Secondly, in light of my reading of this report, I will also explore some motives in the recent French debates about secularism and religion in the 'age of identities', by analysing passages in the work of Gilles Kepel, Alain Touraine and Marcel Gauchet. Thirdly, I provide a comment on the recent work of Olivier Roy, the French sociologist of religion who recently provided severe criticism of the use of the frame of *laïcité* to deal with the return of 'the

¹ Henri Pena-Ruiz was a member of the Stasi committee.

² Stasi committee members to be quoted are Jean Baubérot, Gilles Kepel, Alain Touraine and Henri Pena-Ruiz. Only Baubérot voted against the law.

religious', and of Islam in particular, in the public sphere. By analysing Roy's understanding of the relation between culture and religion in a globalised Islam, I demonstrate that the pattern of *laïcité* returns in Roy's own analysis and that we require a deeper critique, one that addresses the modernist heritage in our thinking about secularisation. I argue that in order to develop an alternative frame we need, first, to pay systematic attention to the distribution of power and to minority-majority relations and, second, to critically rethink the relation between religion and culture in the *sociological* concept of secularisation that underlies the *political-philosophical* concept of *laïcité*.

6.1 Le rapport sans médiation: reading the Stasi report

The Stasi report contains a redefinition of *laïcité*. It was commissioned in July 2003 by the President of the Republic in the midst of ongoing conflicts about girls who came to school wearing headscarves.³ These conflicts provided the major motive for the report, but other struggles accompanying those about the headscarves were at least as important. Mentioned in the report are, among others, refusals by Muslim women to be treated by male doctors, refusals by Muslim pupils to participate in physical education, refusals to acknowledge the authority of female teachers by Muslim pupils or their parents, refusals by Muslim pupils to attend classes on the holocaust, the general rise of anti-Semitism, the increase of group-thinking at schools in general, and the pressures brought to bear on mainly young people, girls in particular, to define themselves as members of a 'different' community.⁴

The Stasi committee seeks to answer these challenges by rethinking the compatibility of *laïcité* and pluralism, as well as its limits. The explicit aim of the committee's redefinition of *laïcité* is that it should provide a common ground on which to live in diversity, not a denunciation of diversity itself in the name of a Jacobinic heritage. When superficially read, the Stasi report is one of the most pluralist documents ever produced in French official circles. With regard to education, for example, the committee proposes several pluralist changes. It

³ In particular, a lot of media attention was devoted in the early summer of 2003 to the case of two daughters of an atheist Jewish father in Aubervilliers, Paris, who had presented themselves at school with scarves, had refused to take them off and were sent home from school. The father, a lawyer with the anti-discrimination organisation MRAP, did not like the decision of the girls but he still defended their right to wear the scarf.

⁴ Although the Stasi Report does not mention 11 September 2001, a fear of terror and the generally acknowledged possibility that, with its large Muslim population, France, too, could once more fall victim to a terrorist assault (after members of the Algerian GIA exploded three metro bombs in Paris in 1995, causing eight deaths and two hundred injuries), probably also inspired the French government to rethink the merits of *laïcité*.

states that more attention should be paid to immigrants' histories, to colonial history in particular, and to 'the religious fact'.⁵ The committee explicitly distances itself from *laïcité de combat* [combatant laïcism] (Stasi 2003: 2.3). Quite symbolically, the concluding words of the report are '(...) le pluralisme, la diversité' [pluralism, diversity] (2003: Conclusion). These two concepts occur throughout the report.

However, there is a sign of a quite extensive memory gap in the Stasi committee's understanding of the complexities of secularism. Although the committee distances itself from the old *laïcité de combat*, it sees no problem in recycling old Republican *lieux communs*. It revives the 'melting pot' as a viable metaphor for society, arguing that '(...) la force de notre identité culturelle peut renforcer le creuset de l'intégration' ['(...) the force of our cultural identity can reinforce the *melting pot* of integration'] (Stasi 2003: 35). Without mentioning assimilation explicitly, the committee refers to it implicitly, now associating it with 'integration'.

Furthermore, the committee proposes that contemporary Islam and other religions with juridical and public aspects should take *Franco-Judaism* as a model:

L'histoire rappelle l'effort demandé dans le passé aux cultes pour s'adapter au cadre laïque. (...) la loi religieuse juive a fait l'objet de diverses adaptations à partir du Concordat pour accommoder ses préceptes religieux à la loi civile (...); ce «franco-judaïsme» a permis de concilier morale juive et loi civile (Stasi 2003: 16).

[History reminds us of the effort required in the past from religions to adapt themselves to the secular frame (...) from the time of the Concordat, Jewish religious law has been the object of various adaptations designed to

⁵ As Benbassa (2003), Balibar (2004), Roy (2005), Bowen (2005) and others have suggested, proposals like these are pluralist, but they also stand in a tradition of the '*gestion*' of religion by the state through its nationalisation. For example, the committee proposes founding a national university for Islamic studies, and one of its particularly interesting proposals is to change the official teaching of ELCO (Enseignement des langues et cultures d'origine) into the teaching of 'langues vivantes' [living languages]. The teaching of official Arabic, organised by Koranic schools with often foreign teachers, would be replaced by courses in the maternal languages of the immigrants: for example, Berber and Kurdish. Some have suggested that this also serves the purpose of 're-ethnicising' a globalising Islam (Roy 2005). The committee also proposes a genuinely multicultural measure with regard to holidays: it wants to recognise Yom Kippur and Aid-al-Kebir, the most important Jewish and Islamic feasts, as French holidays. However, this proposal was not only multicultural but also quite Republican: these days would be feasts in France in general. This proved too idealistic: the proposal was the first to be rejected in the political arena, officially for practical reasons (there was no money for it).

accommodate its religious precepts to the civil law (...); this 'franco-judaism' has allowed a reconciliation between Jewish morals and civil law.]

In chapters three, four and five, I have addressed the ambivalences accompanying 'Franco-Judaism' in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France. I will not restate the major findings here again, but I hope to have demonstrated sufficiently that these ambivalences should have brought the committee to take a more distant stance towards precisely this history (see chapters three, four, five and also Birnbaum 1998; Benbassa 2003).

In my view, in proposing the prohibition of 'conspicuous religious signs', the committee not only creates an exception to its multicultural attitude, but also reveals how deeply problematic ethno-religious pluralism remains in French society, at least among republican intellectuals. The committee explains its decision as follows. It does not oppose pluralism, but it does resist a *communautarisme* intent on drawing legal or political boundaries between ethnic or religious groups within France, as well as the practicing of a 'prosélytisme agressif' [aggressive proselytism] (Stasi 2003: 1.2.3). Today, therefore, in addition to indicating the neutrality of the state and the separation between church and state, *laïcité* also implies 'la défense de la liberté de conscience individuelle contre tout prosélytisme' ['the defense of individual freedom of conscience against all proselytism'] (1.2.2). Here, rather than a bipolar relation between state and individual, a triangular relation between individual, community and state is at stake. We are dealing not only with the protection of the freedom of individual consciousness from intrusion by the state, but at the same time with the protection of the freedom of conscience—by the state—from a 'devoir d'appartenance' ['duty to belong'] (4.1.2.2). This duty to belong is imposed upon individuals by those communities that want to keep their members from merging into the melting pot of general individual citizenship. Headscarves have become the symbol of this struggle.

The result of the duty to belong is that Muslim girls living in the (ghettoised) *banlieues*, where *communautarisme* is strongest, are under severe pressure to wear the headscarf. The committee reports that it has been particularly sensitive to the 'cri de détresse' ['cry of distress'] of girls forced to wear headscarves, of which the many teachers interviewed by the committee contended that they formed the 'silent majority' (4.2.2.1). If these girls do not wear the scarf, they pay the price of being harassed, socially excluded, even sexually assaulted, and of being considered *putes*, *infidèles* or *impudiques*. Some girls had to be interviewed behind closed doors because it would have been dangerous for

them to speak of their experiences in public.⁶ The most acute formulation of this concern is a phrase from the Stasi report which states that the headscarf now provides these girls, paradoxically, with the very protection that the Republic should provide (3.3.2.1.).

This new constellation of the relation between individual, state and community, has convinced some of those known as 'new secularists', who for years opposed the *laïcité de combat* and promoted a moderate multiculturalism, to endorse the new law on *laïcité*, including the prohibition of the scarf in public schools. To the surprise of many, for example, Alain Touraine, who had always opposed the prohibition of the scarf and who had defended interpretations of it as a *bricolage* of the new from the old, came out in support of the new law. In an explanation of his change of mind, he said that *he* had not changed but that France had, and that, to his great dismay, it had become a *communautarian* country. Whereas at first the scarves could be interpreted as symbols of hybridity and cultural negotiation, as signs of an integration that preserved the agency of the migrants themselves, now Touraine concluded that the girls and organisations defending the scarf were proposing, in the same bargain, an undesirable *communautarisme* (Touraine 2003).⁷

About problems and their appropriate solutions: secularism or democracy?

A few questions should be answered here about diagnosis and treatment. If we are particularly concerned with violence perpetrated against women, or at least with the strong communitarian pressures put on them in the name of specific religious claims and communities, should our answer take the form of a general prohibition of 'conspicuous' religious signs at schools? Why not concentrate on providing Muslim women with as many possibilities for participation in the

⁶ One of the signatories of the petition against the headscarf organised by the fashion magazine *Elle* (and published in *Le Monde* on 9 December 2003) was Samira Bellil, who, in *L'enfer des tournantes*, wrote a moving account of her escape from a ghetto where women, particularly those dressed in a western style and non-veiled, were assaulted on a daily basis ('*Elle s'engage: Notre appel à Monsieur Jacques Chirac, Président de la République*').

⁷ According to this reasoning, the scarf has become the sign of a segregationist *communautarisme* or of political Islam, which are frequently used as synonyms. The scarf is no longer seen as an aspect of a possibly private Islamic belief, and interpretations less dependent on the public-private divide are not taken into account. The Stasi Committee's interpretation of the scarf did not emerge overnight. In 1989, just after the first headscarf affair, the *Conseil d'Etat* ruled that the proselytising attitudes accompanying the wearing of the scarf were prohibited, but that, in principle, the scarf was no more than a private expression of religious belief. Therefore, it had to be tolerated in schools. At the time, only certain neo-republicans perceived the scarf as a threat, while others defended it as a symbol of a modernising Islam.

larger society as possible, instead of putting this participation at risk when they wear a headscarf?⁸ Why not concentrate on issues of ghettoisation, economic exclusion, and the inability of the educational system to deliver inclusion for everyone? What if the scarf's *political* aspects could be interpreted, at least partly, as quite legitimate symbols of the right of groups to publicly contest the State?

Does a scarf mean the same in Iran as in France? Since when have we been so certain that the scarf's standard religious meaning as a sign of women's modesty—which is not that sympathetic to feminist thought—is *the* meaning of the scarf in general? Aren't there mixed motives for acting in complex cultural situations that invest the scarf, like all other objects in human interaction, with a polysemy that cannot be denied by 'official' religious interpretations? By recognising the orthodox religious interpretation of the scarf as its 'official state meaning', the Stasi committee, in my view, has only added to its politicisation and to rigidifying its meaning—and I very much doubt that this enhances the freedom of the girls in question.⁹ In sum, why is the idea of a religion that transgresses the boundaries of what is considered 'public', or, more generally, the idea of *communautarisme* itself, perceived as so problematic that even its harmless symbols, like scarves, kippahs, or 'large crosses', have to be prohibited at schools?¹⁰

⁸ Just as a brief indication of other possibilities: Theorising about participation, we could, for example, elaborate on a combination of 'real exit options' and 'parity of participation'. Bader (2005) explores the conditions of 'real exit options' for dealing with questions regarding minorities within minorities, and I return to this in my conclusion. Fraser (2001; 2003) introduces the normative frame of 'parity of participation'. This requires that members from different groups can all function as full partners in social interaction; there needs to be 'status equality' (2001: 24). The most important point for us here is that taking parity of participation as a frame for dealing with questions around cultural diversity implies that we do not have to evaluate cultural practices substantially, in terms of 'recognising' identities, but can still evaluate them with regard to the question of whether and in which ways they promote the equal participation of all, also within minorities.

⁹ In line with Nicolas Sarkozy's question to the Al-Azhar University about the religious duty to wear a scarf, to which the university replied that it was *not* an absolute duty (this, unsurprisingly, did not convince many wearers of headscarves). For a witty commentary on Sarkozy's move, see Benbassa (2003; I discussed her position in chapter three).

¹⁰ A more perverse proposal is to prohibit only the headscarves and not other 'conspicuous' religious signs. This solution has been suggested by some right-wing Dutch and German politicians, who want to accept crosses and kippahs as religious signs, while rejecting the headscarf as a sign of violent political religion and the submission of women. This proposal does not address the real underlying problems any more than the French law does. The advantage of dealing with the specific problem of radical Islam is outweighed by the fact that this would be a plainly discriminatory measure against a large group of citizens, which would become generally and systematically associated with terror, radicalism, and women's oppression.

Here I think we have to refer back to the modernist heritage in *laïcité*, which not only tends to problematise a 'duty to belong', but all kinds of belonging to ethno-religious or diasporic 'communities' other than the nation-state. Such attachments are perceived as competing with citizenship and therefore as problematic, as traditionalist, and as something that should be overcome. When it squarely returns to a concern with the appearance of religion in public places, the committee sometimes simply forgets that its primary concern was with the *devoir d'appartenance* of the oppressed girls. This is apparent, for example, when the report states that the difficulty with the legal translation of the principle of *laïcité* is the tension between its 'deux pôles nullement incompatibles mais potentiellement contradictoires' [two poles that are not incompatible but potentially contradictory] of religious freedom and the neutrality of the secular state (Stasi 2003: 2.2.3). The committee's slippage into the old problematic might explain why, when the *problem* concerns girls being forced to wear the signs of belonging to a community, the *solution* is thought to lie in the prohibition of headscarves in schools.

The opposition to an unspecified *communautarisme* that lurks behind the prohibition of religious insignia makes concessions to religious and cultural expressions with extensions into the public realm difficult. To my mind, this results from a generalised fear that violence hides behind all public religious claims. However, the reasons for the actual violence probably should be localised much more specifically in a heritage of merging religious claims with anti-colonial ones in the period of decolonisation, as well as in the incapacity to find strategies for pacification in that ongoing postcolonial context, which has become even more complex because of its merging with processes of social-economic exclusion. This thesis has been put forward by, among others, Olivier Roy (2002).

The heritage of old *laïcité's* problematically abstract distinction between freedom and belonging becomes more apparent when we analyse in detail the Stasi committee's general normative standpoint on the desirable relation between *laïcité* and *communautarisme*. We have already noted that the committee distances itself from the classical Republican political philosophical tradition, which defended the unity of the *corps politique* [political body] and perceived difference as 'threatening'. This does not mean, however, that pluralism and diversity are advocated. The report is reluctant to actively endorse diversity. It deploys passive constructions or indefinite pronouns like 'certains' [some people]:

Aujourd'hui la diversité est parfois présentée sous un jour positif; le respect des droits culturels est revendiqué par certains qui les considèrent comme un aspect essentiel de leur identité. Conserver culture, croyance, mémoire—

réelle ou imaginée—apparaît comme une forme de protection tout en participant à un monde mouvant d'échanges (Stasi 2003: 1.2.4.).

[Today, diversity is sometimes presented in a positive vein; respect for cultural rights is claimed by some who consider them an essential aspect of their identity. To preserve culture, belief, and memory—real or imaginary—appears as a form of protection while participating in a changing, moving world.]

With this explanation, which actively endorses neither cultural rights nor the conservation of culture, memory, or belief, the committee makes clear how reluctant it is to accept diversity, but also how conservatively it interprets the possible claims of culture. By not distinguishing in this crucial phrase between claims for cultural rights and those for the 'conservation of culture, belief, memory', it also makes clear that little distinction is being made between the various possible multicultural claims. Talking about 'conservation' does not take the relational aspects of these claims into account. The way, for example, they may be part of a negotiational process designed to increase minority power positions. Nor does the committee consider the transformative aspects of these claims, which may aim not at conservation but at transformation undertaken at a non-assimilationist pace.¹¹

What is also missing from the committee's analysis, and what is perhaps more crucial here, is a reflection on the possibility that conservative claims may be developed when an assimilationist dynamics encourages a 'reactive culturalism' on the part of orthodox groups. I have addressed this suggestion in chapter two, when discussing Ayelet Shachar's view of the relational origins of multicultural claims. Instead, in the analysis of the Stasi committee, we encounter a strong, nearly immediate link between 'communitarian sentiment' and identity political rigidities:

Nier la force du sentiment communautaire serait vain. Mais l'exacerbation de l'identité culturelle [ne saurait] s'ériger en fanatisme de la différence, porteuse d'oppression et d'exclusion (Stasi 2003: 1.2.4.).

[To deny the force of communitarian sentiment would be in vain. But the exacerbation of cultural identity [should not] establish itself into a fanaticism of difference, bearer of oppression and exclusion.]

¹¹ This last aspect has been addressed by Bauboeck (2001a) in a reflection on multiculturalism as an answer to the lives of 'minorities in transition'.

Diversity is only accepted *à reculons*, because it is inevitable. It is perceived as something to be tolerated, but the perceived danger is immediately noted: the 'exacerbation' of cultural identity should not turn into fanaticism. Again, diversity is seen to turn into violence almost immediately, through the assertion that it should not lead to 'fanaticism, oppression and exclusion', as if this were to be expected. The next sentence of the report, quoted below, is designed to specify what underlies the tendency of diversity towards fanaticism: it states that 'chacun doit pouvoir, dans une société laïque, prendre distance par rapport à la tradition' ['in a secular society, everyone should be able to distance him- or herself from his or her tradition']. This does not at all imply a

reniement de soi, mais un mouvement individuel de liberté permettant de se définir par rapport à ses références culturelles ou spirituelles sans y être assujetti (Stasi 2003: 1.2.4).

[denial of self, but an individual movement of freedom, permitting the individual to define him- or herself with regard to his or her cultural or spiritual references without being subjected to them.]

This phrase recalls the modernist dichotomous distinction between, on the one hand, tradition and belonging, connoted here by *assujettissement*, and, on the other, individual freedom. It does so not because of the interpretation of freedom it proposes, but because of what it suggests the 'others' think, do and want.

As a specification of what is necessary to avoid fanaticism, such a generalised norm as to how the individual should relate him- or herself to cultural or religious 'references' should be rejected; it simplifies matters of belief, since it is questionable whether there is an either/or relation between distancing oneself from one's 'references' and being, in a certain sense, also subjected by them.¹² Both for religious and non-religious individuals, elements of autonomy and heteronomy, of being defined by (a fragmented but partially transcendent) cultural background and by oneself, are always entangled and interdependent. The ideological turn of the debate lies in the way we conceive of 'modern' French people as being able to distance themselves from their cultural backgrounds 'rationally', while their 'others' are perceived, to a certain extent,

¹² The phrase repeats the freedom of conscience, but this time as an assignment by the state! Perhaps it spills over into a thick concept of 'liberal' individual autonomy that is incompatible with recent moderate liberal views of the 'reasonable pluralism of the good life'. In his late work, Rawls (1999) rejected the universalisability of the concept of autonomy as self-reflection, calling it a form of (western, liberal) parochialism. In any case, fanaticism is not intrinsically linked to profound religious beliefs.

as unable to reflect on their spiritual references. Normative views of society should concentrate on the social and political conditions of freedom rather than on indicating how individuals should organise their own 'individual movements of freedom'.

It may not be superfluous here to bring to mind the critiques that have been made of the liberal concept of 'autonomy' in the tradition of British multiculturalism. I would like to take as a brief example Bhiku Parekh's analysis of the work of John Stewart Mill, one of the great liberal theorists of the nineteenth century, who was also involved in the administration of India. According to Parekh, the core of Mill's philosophical theory was formed by the idea that man had been made to develop autonomously, on the grounds of individual choice. Only a self-determining person having 'character' or 'individuality' could improve her- or himself and develop a 'striving and go-ahead character' (Mill 1912 [1855]: 125, quoted in Parekh 1994: 86). This kind of individuality would help to create a progressive society because it made persons creative, critical and active.

Mill projected these personal qualities on peoples: he thought that only European societies had been improved by 'free and equal discussion'. He observed that 'the whole East', indeed, the 'greater part of the world', had 'properly speaking, no history because the despotism of custom is complete' (Mill 1912: 128, quoted in Parekh 1994: 88). Thus, liberalism began to define Europe in contrast to colonial societies, unifying itself into 'the other of its other'. It forgot about Europe's internal plurality and became 'obsessively anti-traditional, anti-custom, anti-conformity, anti-community' (Parekh 1994: 93). The presupposed lack of shared values by liberal and non-liberal peoples also implied that cross-cultural dialogue would not be enough to bring about change. Mill saw no objection to rigorous policies of assimilation, which were explained and justified by means of educational metaphors. Precisely this, Parekh remarks, made it difficult for liberals to acknowledge and regulate the use of force.

In the reasoning of the Stasi committee, we encounter the heritage of the binaries analysed by Parekh. Not directly, but 'asymptotically': not as explicit norms or judgements, but as a conceptual heritage that is insufficiently reflected and that perpetuates modernist dichotomies (whether in a 'secularist' or a 'liberal' guise) in trying to find answers to today's problems surrounding the place of Islam in society and politics. Even if we would recognise a certain one-sidedness in the way in which Parekh presents Mill's work, it may help us to understand how a debate on individual autonomy and collectivity may have culminated in such binary oppositions as 'these are our values and these are yours', 'we are the secularists and you are the *communautaristes*', or, vice versa, 'we are the *communautaristes* and you are the secularists'. In particular, it may

make us sensible to the need for cross-cultural dialogue rather than a use of force that also includes the introduction of specific laws.

I think we should try to definitively overcome this secularist, modernist element in liberalism. A crucial turn for thinking away from it has been developed by Bader, who argues for the 'priority of democracy' over secularism (1999; 2006b). Criticising secularism has to lead neither to generalised interpretations of reason as 'violence', as has happened in the tradition of Critical Theory, nor to a romanticisation of communitarian religion. Rather, we should change our perspective by changing the *norms* for what we consider valid and just arguments and behaviours. Instead of sticking to a secularism that is crucially intent upon drawing lines of validity around the question of whether arguments and behaviours are either 'religious' and 'affective' or 'rational' and 'autonomous', we should rid ourselves of this focus.

If we turn away from privileging arguments based on the claims of a 'neutral, rational' truth related to secular reason, we might come to see that a (minimal) liberal norm of freedom of conscience for all, and a (minimal) democratic norm of voice for all, bear within themselves enough 'universality' to be able to do without the layer of secularism. 'Voice' in particular is crucial here: democracy implies that all should have an equal voice, not only those who (appear to) 'know' the (scientific) truth and who have learnt to argue their points rationally, but perhaps even more those whose voices we tend not to hear because they have little access to the resources of knowledge and to the media.¹³ Or, to put it concisely, 'not only popes and ayatollahs have to learn that they cannot be king and that, if there is to be a sovereign at all, it has to be the *vox populi*' (Bader 2006b: 90); also Western secular elites should learn that 'error has the same rights as truth' (90). Here, the question becomes whether the liberal and democratic moments in the modern state can do without the secular layer. Here I agree with Bader, who argues that the contemporary liberal-democratic state, with its institutional provisions against theocracy and against the presupposed risk of a 'tribalisation' of society, does not need the secular layer that was crucial in early modernity for Hobbes, Spinoza, and Acosta.¹⁴ At least, we do not have to stress it. In today's European societies, it would be better to focus on the question of whether arguments and behaviours violate liberal and democratic norms, and to declare it irrelevant whether these

¹³ For a meticulous study and critique of the temptation of 'sophocracy' in the history of philosophy from Plato via Kant to Habermas, see Swierstra (1998).

¹⁴ A brief list of the terms French intellectuals have invented to discuss the threats posed by *communautarisme*: 'libanisation', 'tribalisation', 'cantonisation', 'ottomanisation'. The Stasi committee refers to the presupposed 'tribalisation' of the Netherlands, as noticed by the 'chercheur' [researcher] Herman Philipse (Stasi 2003: 2.3). For a lucid and sober comparison of the debates on the headscarves in the Netherlands and in France, see Verhaar 2004.

arguments and behaviours have religious or non-religious sources. I return to this proposal in my conclusion.

6.2 Postmodern identity politics

There is one more element in the reasoning of the committee that needs to be discussed here. It concerns the precise idea of what comprises a 'political religion': is it distinguished from 'public religion' or from a religion that encompasses cultural practices visible in the public realm? I will relate my questions here to some fragments from the French debates on secularism.

The Stasi committee does not explain what exactly it means that the scarf is considered to be a 'conspicuous religious sign' and not just a 'normal' religious sign, however visible or invisible it may be. It does suggest that the reason for this is that the scarf is not seen as an element of an ethno-religious heritage passed on between the generations, but rather as an 'anti-modern' construction. This interpretation emerges, for example, in the committee's claim that the scarf was affirmed in the Muslim world as a new tradition in the 1970s with the emergence of radical political-religious movements, and that the scarf appeared in French schools only from the end of the 1980s onwards.¹⁵ While the committee on the one hand professes the need for individuals to distance themselves from tradition, on the other hand it does not interpret the headscarf as the product of traditional religion, but rather of postmodern identity politics. With Islamism, we are not talking about the *capacity* to distance oneself from one's tradition, but about the *will* to do so. In the next part of this chapter, I try to put my finger on how French sociological and politico-philosophical discourse intellectually 'surrounds' this interpretation of the scarf, by discussing a few propositions that are in my eyes significant for this discourse.

¹⁵ The Stasi committee forgets to mention that secularist and repressive centralist regimes in the Islamic world, such as, for example, in Turkey, Tunisia and Iran, prohibited the scarf (in public places or even generally) before the rise of Islamism. Under communism in the Islamic world, the state's patronising attitude towards dress sometimes became ridiculous: in Afghanistan, at the beginning of the 1980s children were not only prohibited from wearing scarves, but were also forced to wear red trousers when going to school! Orhan Pamuk's novel *Suut* gives a marvellous insight into the vicissitudes of the scarf in contemporary Turkey.

Gilles Kepel

Kepel, one of the members of the Stasi committee and a specialist in 'urban Islam', has made observations about the constructedness of contemporary 'communitarian' Islam several times. Already in 1993, talking about Islamism in the French *banlieues*, he stated:

Ce sont des tribus qui établissent leurs frontières communautaires autour de projets et non pas autour de ce à quoi on assimile d'ordinaire la tribu, c'est-à-dire l'appartenance commune héritée, qu'elle soit ethnique, raciale ou autre (Kepel 1993: 78, quoted from Raullet 1999: 100).

[They are tribes that establish their communitarian borders around projects and not around what we usually consider to be tribal, namely inherited collective belonging, whether this be ethnic, racial or other (my translation).]¹⁶

By calling them 'tribes', Kepel interprets the 'communitarian claims' vindicated by Islamists as those of the most 'premodern', immediate kind of cultural group we, modern sociologists, have been able to 'document'. Yet Kepel shifts the direction of the 'tribe' on the axis of time. His tribe is not related to the past *at all*, but to the future. Hence, communitarian claims are not interpreted as following from the wish to preserve or reaffirm certain habits and practices that immigrants may remember. Their claims are only 'projects' directed towards the future. From within such an interpretative framework, the wish to wear a headscarf indeed has to be seen not as a symbol of premodernity, but rather as a reflexive, 'conspicuous' and demonstrative sign of distinction, perhaps even of anti-western and (hyper-)modern identity politics.¹⁷ Thus, prohibiting the headscarf in public places does not imply a denial of the principle of freedom of religion, for the wish to wear one does not follow from a belief 'preceding' the entry of the individual into the new polity. Instead, it is a symbol of the *kind* of participation the new citizen chooses: she (or the 'he' behind her) positions

¹⁶ Raullet (1999) concludes from Kepel's analysis that what is proposed by the Islamists is the 'spectre d'une collection de collectivités qui, sous le prétexte de faire reconnaître leurs différences, ne militent finalement que pour leur ghettoïisation' ['the spectre of a collection of collectivities which, under the pretext of making their differences known, finally do not campaign for anything but their ghettoïisation' (my translation)] (1999: 101). This kind of jumping to conclusions leads republican argumentation astray, even in Raullet, who is such a good critic of Republican philosophical history. What if some Islamists had long since gotten used to thinking of themselves in similar terms?

¹⁷ For a deeply critical reflection on this essential turn in the interpretation of the scarf, see Asad (2004).

herself as a negative, separatist citizen who deliberately appeals to (religious) immediacy only because this *works* in Western societies.

Kepele's interpretation is an example of the projection of old Revolutionary dichotomies between past and future, absolute rule and freedom, onto Muslim claims. It 'others' them out of a more modest modernity by simultaneously ascribing to them the wish to establish tribal ties (the most immediate ones in terms of belonging) *and* the wish to fully break with the past (the most immediate in terms of a revolutionary new start). Even if these claims were all structured in this way, we might still ask if they were inherited from modernist secularism's dichotomies and the ways these dichotomies were spread across the Muslim world.¹⁸

Alain Touraine

Alain Touraine also served on the Stasi committee. We have already mentioned that he was among the proponents of a new, moderate *laïcité* compatible with moderate, liberal multiculturalism, but that he endorsed the law banning religious signs because France had become, in his view, 'a communitarian country', a state of affairs he blamed on the radically segregationist claims of

¹⁸ Arguably, for example, Sayyid Qutb's work shows the traces of the modernist dichotomies we are discussing here (Leezenberg 2003). But most Muslim claims, even fundamentalist ones, are more complex than Kepele suggests. The following quote is from a speech by Amar Lasfar, the then rector of the Lille mosque, which is connected with the *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (UOIF). The UOIF gained in popularity over the course of the headscarf affairs. In 1997, Lasfar was part of the advising committee to Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the minister of Interior Affairs: 'La loi française ne reconnaît pas la communauté, seulement la citoyenneté. Dans l'islam, la notion de citoyenneté n'existe pas, mais la notion de communauté est très importante car reconnaître une communauté c'est reconnaître les lois qui la régissent. Nous travaillons à ce que la notion de communauté soit reconnue par la République. Alors nous pourrions constituer une communauté islamique appuyée sur les lois que nous avons en commun avec la République, et ensuite appliquer nos propres lois à notre communauté. Il y a les lois que nous avons en commun et celles qui nous différencient' ['French law does not recognise the notion of community, but only the notion of citizenship. In Islam, citizenship does not exist, while community is very important because recognising a community means recognising its laws. We are trying to have the notion of community recognised by the Republic. Then we will be able to constitute an Islamic community that is based on the laws we have in common with the Republic and to subsequently apply our own laws to our community. There are laws that we have in common and laws that make us different from each other'] (Lasfar gave this speech at the Alliance régionale du Nord, Amiens, 9 October 1997; quoted from Kaltenbach and Tribalat 2002: 245, my translation). Even if Lasfar makes a very strong – and, let this be clear, in my view unhappy – claim that essentialises both citizenship and Islam, it still has an eye for overlaps and seems to stem from a deeply conservative interpretation of Islam rather than from a wish to construct a new, 'purely religious' and deculturalised Islam from scratch.

Islamist groups. Let us now consider a brief comment he made in 1990 on the emergence of *communautarisme*.¹⁹ In his analysis of riots in Vaulx-en-Velin, a suburb of Lyon, which had been described as the '*intifada* of the *cités*' by French media, he wrote that 'national societies are becoming dislocated' by an

Étonnant mouvement de démodernisation. Nous avons appris à définir les êtres humains par ce qu'ils faisaient et non plus par ce qu'ils étaient ; nous suivons aujourd'hui un chemin inverse et de tous côtés se forment des acteurs définis par ce qu'ils sont. Le champs social et politique se décompose et il ne reste plus, face à face, que l'économie internationalisée et des communautés définies par leur être particulier, à la fois par leurs traditions propres et par l'acceptation ou le rejet don't elles sont l'objet (Touraine 1990: 8).

[astounding movement of demodernisation: we had learnt to define human beings by what they did, instead of what they were; nowadays we follow the reverse route and on all sides agents are being formed defined by what they are. The social and political sphere is breaking up and the individual is faced with the internationalised economy and communities defined by their specific nature, both by their own traditions and by their acceptance or rejection by others (Touraine 1990, quoted from Kepel 1996 [1994]: 207-08).]

Touraine also argues that the great challenge for society would be to defy this dislocation, where the central conflict is not between 'exploiters' and 'exploited' anymore, but between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (208). About this quote, I merely wish to note that Touraine's argument is based on the fundamental modernist oppositions associated with the concept of modernity. He suggests that modernity meant that we defined humans by what they do and *not* by what they are. He makes a strong distinction between determining who people are based on their 'being', based on the ways in which their lives are determined by their particular histories, and the modern way of defining who people are on the basis of their deeds, their actions, and the products of their agency.²⁰

¹⁹ Touraine in *Libération*, 15 October 1990.

²⁰ Touraine's use of the concept of demodernisation has an even stronger moral implication because he quotes the (famous) way in which Vladimir Jankélévitch understood anti-Semitism. Touraine, however, turns it around. In 1942, Jankélévitch had written that fascist anti-Semitism meant that: 'pour la première fois peut-être des hommes sont traqués officiellement non pas pour ce qu'ils font, mais pour ce qu'ils sont; ils expient leur 'être' et non leur 'avoir' (...). Ceci donne tout son sens au mythe immémorial du peuple maudit (...). [perhaps for the first time people are being officially persecuted not for what they do, but for what they are; they atone for their 'being' and not their 'doing' (...)] This gives full meaning to the immemorial myth of the

Touraine's analysis once again constitutes a manifestation of an imaginary dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy. Autonomy is reserved for some levels of human organisation, such as the individual and the state, while heteronomy seems inextricably linked to other levels, such as the global and the ethnic. Mediations between these levels and possibilities for distinguishing more of them are hardly taken into account. Modernity is associated with the existence of a social and political sphere within the nation-state that enables people to freely decide on their own laws. This brings Touraine to suggest that political self-determination will be lost through the combined movements of globalisation and communalisation. Both lead to 'demodernisation', and modernity will be replaced by a determination by the 'other'. Thus, globalisation and communitarianisation imply a challenge to political self-determination through a potential transfer of power to the laws of a non-democratically organised world economy and to the laws—or even the (constructed) customs and moralities—of communities. There seems to be no possibility, in this view, of politicising precisely those levels that are ethnicised in the standard modernist view, and to particularise those levels that are considered ideally political, democratic, or 'de-ethnicised', to return to Joppke and Morawska's favourite phrase (see chapter two).

Marcel Gauchet

Marcel Gauchet did not form part of the Stasi committee. In his *La Religion dans la démocratie: Parcours de la laïcité* [*Religion in Democracy*] (1998), he analyses the emergence of *communautarisme* in France. Regularly referring to the work of Charles Taylor and José Casanova on recognition and public religion, Gauchet is one of the French philosophers who is most reluctant to reject *communautarisme* in general. He also interprets public religion in a larger context than that of the presence of Islam in France, namely in the context of what he calls the 'age of identities'. Yet I trace a similarly problematic conceptualisation of contemporary religion going public in his work as in that of the Stasi Committee.

Gauchet interprets public religion in the context of what he calls 'the age of identities', the (postmodern) era in which beliefs have turned into identities. In this new age, according to Gauchet, the individual has started to live her beliefs both inwardly, as an experience, and outwardly, in how she places herself in

"cursed people"'] (quoted from Taguieff 1987: 25, my translation). Neither is overly critical about the modern, absolute distinction between being and doing, but the quote from Jankélévitch at least suggests that the strong distinction itself might also be a product of modernity.

the public sphere. Let us now look at the way in which Gauchet presents the historical development of modernity into the 'age of identities'.

According to Gauchet, the emergence of 'identity' transforms the related concepts of subjectivity and citizenship that had been dominant in western society from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. Being a 'self', according to Gauchet, no longer implies trying to become a moral 'subject' in the sense of someone who acts with a moral law in mind. In modernity, 'personal identity' meant becoming 'me' in the sense of transcending my own point of view in order to ascend to the one supposed to be valid from a universal point of view. However, these ideals of 'individuality, subjectivity, humanity' (Gauchet 1998: 123), inherited from the Enlightenment, have been surmounted in the age of identities. We can no longer become 'selves' by freeing ourselves from what determines us and by giving ourselves the law—by becoming autonomous—as in the Kantian understanding of Enlightenment. Instead, the new identities 'nous font basculer aux antipodes de cette identité-là' ['make us turn to the antipodes of that [old] identity' (my translation)] (123).

Still following Gauchet, there is a systematic shift away from universal citizenship. In order to be a citizen, we no longer have to break free from what determines us, from our 'natural', i.e. traditional, surroundings; instead, we bring what determines us into the arena of self-definition. What one belongs to and what one inherits, one's sexual orientation, being a woman, having Arab parents, is what one has to join together subjectively. We even make these determinations into the main elements of our self-definition. 'Le vrai moi est celui qui émerge de l'appropriation subjective de l'objectivité sociale' ['The real me is the one that emerges from the subjective appropriation of social objectivity' (124, my translation)].

In his analysis of the transformation of modernity into the age of identities, Gauchet suggests that citizenship at one time implied autonomously exercised subjectivity. This view is a clear example of Republican nostalgia, for such subjectivity never existed; indeed, the suggestion that it did or should has led to many illusions and played a role in producing the exaggerated imaginaries of 'difference' that we studied in Proust. Talking of 'basculement' [turning into, toppling over] suggests, moreover, that the transformation of modernity into the age of identities did not occur gradually but suddenly. The choice of this image is profoundly indebted to dialectical interpretations of Enlightenment in line with an understanding of the French Revolution as a radical break with the past. It is the result of the projection of a simplified Kantian scheme on a complicated history (see also chapters three and four).

Summarising, the interpretations of Kepel, Touraine and Gauchet have in common that they all seek to overcome the old orientalist stereotypes of the East, which associate Islam with premodern backwardness. Yet an equally over-

systematised figure of thought keeps returning as a pattern of interpretation: a conceptual framework that closely connects the relation between tradition, modernity and the 'age of identities', or between 'immediacy', 'subjectivity' and 'construction', with radical change, dialectical turning points and epochal breaks. In sum, with an imaginary inherited from modernist interpretations of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

Such frames make it possible to construct, essentialised and abstracted from each other, concepts such as tradition and modernity. Yet when we first separate past, present and future, or, analogously, tradition, modernity and the age of (constructed) identities, to then project these separated categories back onto people's attempts to find mediations between freedom and belonging, we are projecting simplified philosophical figures onto actual developments that are much more complex and entangled. Returning to these inherited frameworks cannot serve as a useful basis for normative views, subsumed under the heading of *laïcité*, about how we should live together in society.

The binary opposition of *laïcité* and *communautarisme* depends on the historically abstract representation of the relationships between tradition, modernity and postmodernity, or, in other terms, between *appartenance* [belonging], citizenship and identity politics. This representation to some extent seems to determine the perception of Islam in France. It is being reproduced on the side of both republicans and Islamist groups. While Republican France keeps returning, in tropes and concepts, as the representative of modernity, Islam is figured as an ingenious and potentially threatening mixture of premodernity and hyper- or postmodernity, as a combination of reified culturalism and globalised political religion.

This division, even when subtly argued, between a modern "us" and a non-modern "them"—or, vice versa, between an Islamic non-modern "us" and a "modern" them—encourages the polarisation between, on the one hand, the majority of the French, and, on the other, ethno-religious minorities, in particular Muslim ones but also others. For this reason, it is important to understand that *laïcité* is not, as its proponents suggest, merely the morally justified anti-discriminatory answer to the communitarian Islamist claims. Rather, it stands in a complicated causal relation to it. I will trace this relation further by studying the view of Olivier Roy. This will also allow me to return to the concepts of religion and culture that the debate started with.

6.3. Olivier Roy's *laïcité* and globalised Islam

In this final section, I present some notes on Olivier Roy's increasingly authoritative view of a globalising Islam, which he developed most recently in *Globalised Islam* (2004 [2002]) and *La laïcité face à l'islam* (2005). I argue that the dichotomous conception of belonging and freedom which I discerned in the discourse of *laïcité* also appears in Roy's sociological analysis of contemporary Islam, though he is as critical of the frame of *laïcité* as of multiculturalism.

According to Roy, both *laïcité* and multiculturalism assume the existence of Islamist 'communities' or contribute to their formation. He considers *laïcité* the ideology of a republic 'obsessed with the religious' and 'fascinated by the monarchy' (2005: 63). *Laïcité* frames the claims of an Islam that wishes to become visible in the public sphere in terms of a contest for political power, thus translating *social* religious identities into political ones. In doing so, *laïcité* enhances the formation of religious identities linked with political contestations, instead of facilitating their merging with more diverse identifications and practices. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, links Islam to migrants' cultures of origin and tends to grant power to conservative elites supposedly representing entire ethno-religious groups. For Roy, however, these elites at most represent the purely religious neo-communities of those who explicitly declare themselves their 'members'.

Underlying Roy's critique of contemporary normative philosophies of integration is a sociological analysis of contemporary Islam, particularly of the 'public' Islam that is challenging the diverse European secularisms. Roy argues that this public Islam is not a traditional Islam inherited from migrants' cultures of origin. Rather, it forms part of a wider '*retour du religieux*' [return of the religious] in a globalising world, also apparent in, for example, Christianity and Hinduism. In the case of Islam, the emergence of such a 'neo-fundamentalism' (*salafisme*) has become politicised because of the history of the Middle East, but this does not prevent Islam from taking part in a dynamics of globalisation and secularisation just like other religions. This is particularly the case in the West, where Islam has become a minoritarian religion and has thus been brought to recognise a secular realm 'outside' religion. Moreover, in the globalised neo-fundamentalist Islam, all ties to specific cultures (and states) are deliberately cut in the search for a 'pure', universal religious community, the *Ummah*.²¹ Second-

²¹ This is why Roy does not use the term 'political Islam' for 'Islamisme'. 'Political Islam' was introduced as a better name for the movement which is often called Islamic Fundamentalism, because the latter term is linked to Protestantism and to the reading of theological texts in purely theological and not political terms. According to some, fundamentalism is a frequently used misnomer suggesting the desire for a return to an authentic religion and neglecting the fact that Islamism and other current religiously inspired movements are modern and thus far

and third-generation migrants, in particular, may feel attracted to neo-Islam, because they can use it as an 'apology' for the 'deculturation' and 'uprootedness' that have resulted, for some, from migration (Roy 2005: 128).

Global Islam is thus linked to the individualisation processes demanded from individuals living in the West in general. New global media such as the Internet fit this new, deterritorialised religion perfectly. Being a Muslim, like being a believer of other religions, has become a matter of choice, and those who choose to make it a crucial element of their identities should be considered *born again* Muslims rather than Muslims in any cultural (ethnic) sense.

Roy considers the results of both the frames of *laïcité* and multiculturalism disastrous. *Laïcité* squeezes this neo-religion into the old frame of a religion aspiring to state power, when the level of the state is precisely *not* relevant to this Islam. The emphasis on *laïcité* creates fears of an Islamic *communautarisme* in majorities—analogueous to those anxieties in the nineteenth century about the *classes dangereuses*—when, in actuality, these 'communities' hardly exist (Roy 2005: 146). Only very weak forms occur and these develop at the level of neighbourhoods or in even weaker, more imaginary forms at the global level. Not, however, at the level of the nation-state. Moreover, *laïcists* tend to create a divide between 'good' (liberal and secular) and 'bad' (fundamentalist) Muslims, thus excluding from dialogue those that should be included (and *gérés* [dealt with]).

Multiculturalism, on the other hand, addresses conservative elites as representatives of pre-defined ethno-religious groups. These elites can acquire political power over non-believers and over those who consider themselves secular Muslims by claiming the right to protect these ethno-religiously defined communities from assimilatory pressures. Policies based on a better understanding of neo-fundamentalist Islam would avoid creating or imagining more extensive communities than there actually are. They would exclude no religious groups from dialogue and would not interfere with other people's dogmas, while at the same time never considering the spokesmen of religious groups as the representatives of entire ethno-religious communities.²²

from retrograde or reactive. Roy, by contrast, distinguishes between political Islam, which was prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s and concentrated on the creation of an Islamic state, and what he calls 'neo-fundamentalism' or 'salafisme', which is not aimed at the state but at purifying Islam from all cultural or ethnic relations in order to internationalise and even globalise it.

²² Roy's criticism of the reified use of the concept of culture within multiculturalism is familiar from the debates within multiculturalist discourse itself. Constructivists have made their critique of the reified concept of culture into their program for multiculturalism's redefinition or even rejection (see for example Baumann 1996). Some critics have analysed the links between constructivist concepts of culture and a return to classic liberalism (see for example Asad 1993; Bader 2001; Modood 1998). These political theorists do not defend reified concepts of culture but maintain that cultures, like all other things in the world, transform, change, are performed,

Although Roy's criticism of the frames of *laïcité* and of a top-down conservative multiculturalism is welcome, I have some problems with his interrelated use of the concepts of *culture*, *multiculturalism* and *secularisation* in his understanding of globalised Islam, which he deems necessary in order to be able to present his critique. First of all, with regard to the concept of culture, talking of the 'deculturalisation' of second-generation immigrants and endorsing the theoretical possibility of a strict separation of religion from (ethnic) culture assumes an essentialist notion of culture that links it to an ethnic particularity and immediate belonging, which members of the second generation lose or can even actively reject. But what about the relation of neo-Islam to a more general concept of culture that encompasses practices, beliefs, ways of doing, seeing and thinking, as well as ways of negotiating with the members of majorities and the 'making' of culture in the process? I will return to this question after addressing my second, related concern. By not distancing himself clearly from the neo-fundamentalist concept of Islam's 'deculturalisation' into a pure religion, even deploying it in his own conceptual scheme, Roy assumes a problematic understanding of secularisation as well. He (and the neo-fundamentalists) seem to follow the modernist understanding of secularisation as the radical individualisation of religion, leading to religion's complete break with tradition and ethnic belonging. In short, with the strong opposition between (ethnic) culture and (individualised) religion, we seem to reencounter in Roy's *sociological* notion of secularisation the dichotomy between belonging and freedom that I criticised in the discourse of *laïcité*.

The suggestion that a 'deculturalisation' of religion is possible, is based on the 'strong theory of secularisation' inherited from modernist philosophy and Durkheimian sociology. Historically, as we have seen, this notion of secularisation is linked to the interpretation of Protestantism as an individualised 'religion of the heart' that severs itself from the *culte*, from tradition, and from institutions. We came across this notion of secularisation when discussing Durkheim's pedagogy, where he suggested the full autonomy of morality from the '*culte*' in Protestantism. Roy's endorsement of a similarly strong version of secularisation overlooks the many criticisms that have been made of the modernist concept of secularisation as privatisation and individualisation, even in the context of Protestantism. In chapter five, we have seen that Durkheim himself already voiced such a criticism.

In contemporary philosophies of religion critical of secularism, the *retour du religieux* not only designates a changed state of affairs in *society*, but in *theory* as

etc., but are nevertheless not entirely ephemeral, negative, or irrelevant to political discourse. In their view, cultures should be allowed, if people desire this, to have a critical potential and weight.

well. The *retour du religieux* in theory corrects earlier theories of secularisation, which Roy seems to endorse and which he projects onto contemporary neo-Islam. For example, a systematic critique of 'individualised', modern religion as separated from cultural practices, has been made via Wittgenstein's philosophy of meaning. Wittgenstein rejects the possibility of (Cartesian) subjectivities by refuting the possibility of a 'private language' and by arguing that meaning-making is an inevitably social, cultural practice, a matter of linguistic *Gepflogenheiten* [customs] (1984 [1952]: 344). This is also the case with religious meaning making.²³

Such a critique could lead to the view that all three versions of the modernist secularisation thesis should be deconstructed, whether they refer to the privatisation of religion, to its individualisation (the two are often conflated), or to the separation of religion from politics. In reply to the first interpretation, we may suggest that believers may recognise that their beliefs and practices are contingent and, in Roy's words, 'minoritarian', but this does not mean that they will (or have to) privatise their religion. Second, religion may individualise to a certain extent, but never to the point of becoming purely subjective or 'deculturalised'—this is my main point contra Roy. Third, organised religions may develop as public religions while at the same time being 'modern' in the sense of being open to democracy: it is a mistake to conflate public religion with religion's monopolistic political pretensions.²⁴

Roy's interpretation of neo-Islam is not only problematic theoretically, but also politically: it draws boundaries between an Islam inextricably linked to quite immovable 'cultures of origin' on the one hand, and a supposedly deculturalised, deterritorialised 'neo-Islam' as the '*Islam des jeunes*' on the other. Furthermore, it links images of a (dangerous) 'deculturalisation' and 'uprootedness' to young Muslims in an overly systematic way.²⁵ By

²³ Such a critique of modernity's conceptualisations of religion has been developed by Charles Taylor (1995; 2003). He deconstructs William James's subjectivist concept of religious experience. I am aware that my argument for the intrinsically practical, cultural sides of religion is insufficiently elaborated here. I will return to this in chapter seven on metaphor and memory in the *Recherche* and in my upcoming argument on the need to frame questions around ethno-religious diversity not only in relation to '*laïcité*' with its emphasis on religion, but also in relation to culture.

²⁴ See Bader (2006b).

²⁵ The concept of 'uprootedness' in particular is rooted in the right-wing tradition. We encountered it in chapter three when discussing Maurice Barrès's view of the Republic. We cannot just forget about this genealogy (see chapter three). Here, I would like to remind the reader of my interpretation of Bloch's situation at the threshold of Marcel's family. In my interpretation, a double bind came to light which entrapped him: in the family's moderately secularised Catholic world, he was perceived as '(a little bit too) ethnically Jewish' and '(a little bit too) modern and uprooted' at the same time. This was the result, specifically, of the fact that in its own judgment, Marcel's family oscillated between republican and ethno-religious

concentrating on Islam as neo-religion, Roy fails to address the difficult knots linking contemporary Islam with questions concerning ethnicity, poverty, and global politics, although he does mention these factors often, and recognises their importance. Understanding neo-Islam as a fully secularised, individualised religion presses it into a frame that is as old as the frame of *laïcité* so criticised by Roy. This frame, moreover, is based on the same modernist divides between belonging and freedom, autonomy and heteronomy, and private and public inherited from the nineteenth century.

Back to culture

Instead of assuming the 'deculturalisation' of religion in modernity, we should rethink the relation between religion and culture. I would like to suggest that a sophisticated notion of culture can play a mediating role, linking the emergence of globalised Islam to the particular cultures with which it interacts. I do not mean culture in the sense of a reified copy of the (past) culture of origins, but culture as a nodal point linking (in this case) religious experience and practice to memories, power positions and the experiences constructed by others in the present. To substantiate this, before returning to the headscarf issue, I would like to briefly discuss Bonnie Honig's definition of culture, as proposed in her reaction to Susan Okin's famous thesis that multiculturalism is bad for women:

'Culture' is a way of life, a rich and time-worn grammar of human activity, a set of diverse and often conflicting narratives whereby communal (mis)understandings, roles, and responsibilities are negotiated. As such, 'culture' is a living, breathing system for the distribution and enactment of agency, power, and privilege among its members and beyond. Rarely are those privileges distributed along a single axis of difference such that, for example, all men are more powerful than all women. Race, class, locality, lineage all accord measures of privilege or stigma to their bearers. However, even those who are least empowered in a certain setting have some measure of agency in that setting and their agency is bound up with (though not determined by) the cultures, institutions, and practices that gave rise to it (Honig 1999: 39).

concepts and experiences of belonging; believing in universal citizenship and the requirement to give up one's ethnic identifications on the one hand, while remaining firmly attached to habituality on the other. Thus, the 'stranger' is judged according to the letter of the concept of neutrality, while the family's own habitual practices remain unperceived.

This definition has the advantage that it is packed with contrasting elements. To my mind, it grasps what culture can mean once we put aside both its essentialist definition in terms of 'original belonging' and the anti-essentialist or constructivist attempt to empty out the concept of culture to the point of denying its relevance. Honig's definition grasps the complexity and pervasiveness of culture. It inextricably links belonging and freedom or, analogously, structure (system) and agency. What might have been added is a note on the relational, negotiational and ironic elements of culture as it is made by different individuals and groups occupying different power positions. Another amendment should address the way Honig's definition (implicitly) separates culture from practices, a separation that is an unnecessary legacy of secularism.²⁶ Culture thus defined *is* relevant to contemporary discussions about Islam in relation to secularism in at least two ways, to be discussed in what follows.

We need to conceive of a systematic link between Islam and culture if we wish to analyse the position of Muslims in France not only in terms of their self-definition but also taking into account the ways in which they are positioned and made into ethnic others by the members of the cultural majorities. There is a subtext of ethnic othering and xenophobia linked to Islam that is difficult to address if we stay within the discourses that focus exclusively on Islam as religion. Let us not forget that the first headscarf affairs coincided with Marianne wearing a *hijab* or *tchador* in political cartoons (Birnbaum 1998). Ethnic othering is not the exclusive domain of the Front National, but also penetrates the *laïcité* frame. Most strikingly, this was demonstrated by the fact that, the day before the Stasi Committee presented its report, *Le Monde* published a petition signed by many famous French feminists claiming to defend the rights of women:

Le voile Islamique nous renvoie toutes, musulmanes et non-musulmanes, à une discrimination envers la femme qui est intolérable. Toute complaisance à cet égard serait perçue *par chaque femme de ce pays* comme une atteinte personnelle à sa dignité et à sa liberté (Pétition Elle 2003; my italics).

²⁶ Emphasising the implicit practical and plural sides of both culture and religion (even if religion is to an extent considered explicitly 'secular' by believers themselves), does not imply a lack of insight into the performative, constructed aspects of culture and religion. I would resist the suggestion that considering religion as cultural practice will lead to a post-modern (or naïve) defence of orthodox religion or even of a constructed neo-orthodox religionism or traditionalism. These responses again depend on the modernist view of religion that separates religion not only from politics but from public appearance and ethnicity as well. (Here we find the analogy, in the debates around secularism, of the debate concerning the implications of constructivism for the concept of culture (see Bader 2001; Baumann 2001).

[The Islamic veil pushes all of us, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, towards an intolerable discrimination against women. All complacency in this regard will be perceived *by every woman of this country* as a personal attack on her dignity and freedom (my translation, my italics).]

We need to link Islam and culture (in the sense of ethnic culture but *not* in the sense of inherited ethnicity) theoretically so that we can analyse and criticise the mechanism of exclusion that betrays itself here: 'if you do not think like us, you do not belong to us'.

A notion of culture is also relevant for understanding the position of Islam in France in relation to intercultural memory, which is a memory that links religion to power positions. This is an evident and necessary step in the case of Islam in France, considering its (post-)colonial background. In the summer of 2003, I spent a long day in Paris with Samia Touati, a young Algerian woman studying in Paris who wears a headscarf. That afternoon, she served (just once) as a teacher of Arabic at a '*centre culturel*' in St. Denis—where she hospitably took me. In reply to my questions about her scarf, she at first stated that the scarf was something between her and God. Yet this was not the only motive she gave for wearing the scarf. Her second answer, that 'our mothers wore headscarves when they cleaned the houses of the French and it was never a problem', contains a postcolonial and class-based argument. For Samia, the headscarf only became a problem in the eyes of the French when Muslims started to be public 'citoyens'. Perhaps her argument evoked the fact that in Algeria, until 1947, Muslims were considered 'sujets' and could only become 'citoyens' after abandoning their religion, while Christians and Jews were automatically considered 'citoyens'.

Taking these shared memories—of a long period of shared experiences of exclusion—seriously does not imply the use of a reified concept of culture. A definition like Honig's will do. Such a concept of culture is more dynamic than Roy suggests; it can help us to embed cultural and religious claims in history and to connect them with agency without declaring them purely constructed or ideological in advance. It should even be considered crucial to a democratic concept of memory (Bauboeck 1998b). In the next chapter, I will return to Proust's *Recherche* and explore the ways in which it presents the complexities of collective aspects of memory in the context of modernity.

