

" All of a sudden,
I felt a curtain come down in
front of me "

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FIELD RESEARCH

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Introduction

Racism, discrimination and above all Islamophobia is a scourge in our society which has been on the increase in recent years in France, particularly because of prejudice, rumours and also following the terrorist attacks which have affected our country.

Within the framework of the TIP project (Theater Tools for Islamophobia Prevention) and in order to feed our research, we have carried out testimonies from people who are victims of Islamophobia, prejudice or who are affected, in spite of themselves, by this phenomenon.

We also carried out focus groups on the theme of Islamophobia in order to analyse and understand the phenomenon as well as possible and to identify prevention tools to fight against Islamophobia.

This qualitative study is based on testimonies of people who want to change the image of Islam but also and above all to change mentalities.

Some of them spoke of a drop in the ocean of a stone in the edifice: the way they look at the project is sometimes different but all of them had a positive outlook. The people interviewed, in the groups or in the individual testimonies were all unanimous: they were delighted and felt relieved because, for once, they were given the floor. For these people, it is important to give their opinion, they too are actors in society and in a way, nobody will speak this time in their place.

In this period and in spite of France's heavy current affairs, we realise that the meetings we've had help to create links, they help to understand and to understand each other.

Many of them have put a hope in the TIP project, that of seeing the challenge of the 21st century come true: living together.

REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN FRANCE

- THE SOCIAL CLIMATE

Following the various interviews and focus groups, we can see that the Muslim population, most of whom arrived in the middle of the 20th century, did not have any major concerns about integration in France at that time. Many people came to France to find a job and found it quite easily. Foreign labour was welcome. However, it was more complicated for women, as they stayed at home, they had no social ties with the French population and the language barrier was a real obstacle for them. The language forced them to stay and mix mainly with Muslims. This fact is probably at the origin of the "ghettoisation". The Muslim population has therefore naturally regrouped in certain neighbourhoods or cities. This allowed them to meet each other, exchange experiences and help each other. In the end, some of them were not able to mix with French society. So adapting to society was not easy, even if they managed to find their place.

Some people even said that Muslims were better integrated during this period than they are today.

There was and still is a barrier at the administrative level, some people were illiterate and bureaucracy was a problem for them.

According to the population interviewed, there are no problems in the neighbourhoods, nor in the neighbourhoods. Sometimes, depending on where people live, they are subject to certain looks, but no serious conflicts were mentioned. Cohabitation with the French neighbourhood seems to go well, there seems to be respect between people of other religious denominations or of different nationalities. They also recognise how lucky they are to live in a fairly rural area, in small towns or in quiet neighbourhoods, they know what other Muslims can experience in the metropolises.

The majority of Muslims have kept some of their religious customs and habits: going to prayer halls, wearing traditional clothing

such as the veil, beard for men, consumption of halal meat, religious festivals: Ramadan and Eid for example.

- PERCEPTION OF ISLAM BY MUSLIMS

Despite this, it is also noticeable in the discourse of the interviewees that Muslims admit that most of them do not know or know little about their religion. They acknowledge that it is difficult for the French population to understand Muslims among the different types of Muslims that exist. "There is, at the beginning, a problem between us" admits Mohamed, 26 years old.

They know the main lines and traditions but they don't know Islam as they sometimes claim it. Some of them also interpret it the way they want. Some practitioners do not have access to explanations about the religion they practice. Many practise it in the way their parents taught them. As a result, there is a gap in religious belief. So it is up to the people to seek information through writings, there is a mix between culture and religion. The image of Islam is sometimes distorted by ignorance of religion.

It is sometimes complicated for Muslims to have a good knowledge of Islam, which is also, consequently, complicated for the French population:

For example, Aïcha, 22 years old, explains "I am named after the wife of the prophet, I come from a Muslim family and I know nothing about the Muslim religion, I don't pray, I don't fast but my parents practice". Aïcha would like to know Islam, pray and find her own faith. "I looked for information on the internet to start praying but I don't understand anything at all. I don't know where to look for people who could help me and teach me Islam. There should be a general Imam just as there is a Pope to explain religion and express certain things. She feels ashamed, she knows nothing about the Muslim religion. She has not had any religious education and does not feel in adequacy with her religion and yet she would like to practise it.

Indeed, faith is sought after and one cannot adhere to a religion only by heredity and also claim it without really knowing it.

Above all, in order to know Islam well, Muslims must learn Arabic. They can only have access to a translation of Islam which is not necessarily well translated. Some even go through associations to learn Arabic.

Other interviewees explained a generational issue. There is a need to differentiate between generations in the practice of Islam. The first generations are well placed to talk about it, they have a lot of knowledge about religion but the new generations do not know as much. The transmission of religious knowledge may not have been sufficiently deepened over the years. Some young people consult sites on the internet to enrich their knowledge but are they still reliable and appropriate. Is it also this quest for knowledge that indirectly leads some to extreme enlistment?

Not to mention the fact that Islam changes with time and generations. "As with Christianity, the one embodied by the church 500 years ago is not the same as today. We want to reduce Islam to an archaic religion or community and it's a shame," explains Mohamed.

"So there is Islam and the different interpretations of Islam. Everyone has their own interpretation. Just as Islam from the Koran is not the same as the Islam seen by extremists. Why make all Muslims around the world bear the brunt of appalling acts. It is unfair especially to legislate to exclude" he explains.

As Ali explains, although he considers himself to be from a generation that knows Islam very well, he too has at times changed his interpretation of the religion during his lifetime: "I threw a doll that my daughter received as a gift when she was a child into the garbage because I believed that in Islam it was forbidden. Many years later, when my daughter was 30 years old, I bought her a doll, because in time I understood that in Islam what is forbidden is not the doll but what you do with the doll."

The perception of Islam changes over time and generations. Like any religion, it adapts and applies itself according to our daily life and the society in which we live.

- SOCIETY'S PERCEPTION OF ISLAM

France is the country of cultural and cultural diversity but we feel that there are brakes. It is a country full of contradictions that advocates freedom, equality and fraternity but in reality it is often the opposite.

There are several types of Muslims for whom the French population makes no difference: there is the Muslim, who is a delinquent and non-practising, and the Muslim, who is honest, who pays his taxes, well in every respect and who will, in spite of himself, be pigeonholed. There are unjust associations that are made in people's minds.

"A minority stands out and the French population, in general, doesn't see it very well and doesn't accept what they see, and that's quite normal," says Abdès.

For most of them, and given the reality, they can understand the increase in Islamophobia but they are only indirect victims. Terrorist attacks have changed the image of Islam and Muslims who are themselves against the attacks suffer as much as the rest of the French population, except that they will also suffer the repercussions because of the stigmatisation that is unbeknownst to them.

The Muslims interviewed all agreed on one point: the French population does not know the Muslim religion or the culture of the Muslim people, even though it is very enriching. This is by no means a reproach but a simple observation. The people we met are precisely willing to explain their religion. The French population is afraid of what they do not know and the Muslim religion is part of it and "it is quite normal" they think.

Good information on Islam would not be enough to change society's vision of Islam. "It is also important that all people who claim to be Muslims behave well," said Mohamed, 26. It is a questioning of On their part, they also feel that some are redoubling their efforts but that in the end there is still a bad image of Islam that is conveyed, that is entrenched. In fact, "Many Muslims try to integrate but find themselves facing a mature person and as a result, there is a phenomenon of withdrawal and communitarianism that automatically follows," he adds.

This non-knowledge of religion added to the bad image accentuated by the media, it is indeed



normal that the French population is afraid of Islam. "We only show the bad sides of some people by stressing that they are Muslims. There are good and bad sides everywhere, whether they are Muslims, Catholics, French, Arabs. It is above all a question of people and not of religion or nationality," explains Ali.

The Muslims who have spoken out wish to make the French population aware of the values of Islam: peace, tolerance, fraternity, sharing, mutual aid, respect, benevolence and love.

In the end, all they want is to live in peace and to be able to exercise their religion in France in a territory where, what is more, they were born there. It is very complicated for a good part of the Muslim population because, in addition to this problem, there is a real identity crisis. Some people were born in France, are of foreign origin, practising for some of them another language and a religion at home that is not recognised on their territory. Most of the interviewees feel foreign in every respect in the country in which they were born and in a society that is their own and for which they feel no different.

"The values of the Republic are the same values as Islam: equality, fraternity and freedom are the values of Islam. Most Muslims respect other religions and secularism. People need to know this" explains Mohamed. "We only take images and stick preconceptions on them. The visual reinforces the negative aspect of Islam. Is this a way of really interpreting religion?" he adds.

Today's society has a bad image of Islam, we always hear about terrorism, about what is negative and never about values: Terrorism and their crimes do not correspond to the image and values of Islam. People simply have to differentiate between someone good and someone bad, regardless of nationality, religion or dress. Some acts should not be relayed to religion because it creates amalgams.

In order to live together, we have to get to know each other. "I don't feel French, they talk to us about integration but they don't integrate us. They take us for foreigners even though we were born here, we've been living here for two generations and we return to Algeria once every five years... To be considered French, I have to give up everything that makes me who I



am, my name, my religion, my food..." explains Souria. She also explains that most Muslims blend in with the masses and do not claim to be Muslim, whether at work or in other structures, they adapt to French society. They are adapting to French society. They represent, according to her, a community that does not move. They fade away because they do not want to be judged even more. "We even manage to understand the hatred that some people may have, but we don't justify it.

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DOES RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REALLY EXIST?

While adapting to French society, the bad image of Islam has a great influence on the daily life of Muslims and affects their religious freedom.

Hajar, 44 years old, who has been wearing the hijab by choice and conviction since 2004 "at the beginning yes, it was remarks, looks that were sometimes insulting, people thought I had become radicalised... now I have taken a step back and I feel that I no longer have to justify my dress code. I am free. I don't judge others and nobody should judge me. Underneath my clothes, there is a human being above all that must be respected" and would like to make it clear: "There is no such thing as tolerance, you have to fit into a mould. Any form of dress is open to debate in France. We talk a lot about tolerance and acceptance of others but when you look closely, Muslims are obliged to assimilate themselves to others in order to be accepted and integrated".

Dress has a negative effect on people's minds. Some practising parents even end up advising their daughters not to wear the veil in France to protect them (work and people's eyes). Hajar's husband even advised her to avoid wearing the hijab to preserve her.

Problem of access to employment, to education, refusal in restaurants, in discotheques... hatred comes very quickly. We are not free, we wonder if we should say we are Muslim, if we should wear the veil, that's not freedom...

These kinds of things also have an impact on their daily lives, although obviously these are things that Muslims cannot prove but which they strongly feel are discriminatory.

For Rafael, a Frenchman who converted to Islam, it is an advantage for him, he does not suffer



too much from the persistent gaze of society because nobody knows and above all does not see that he is Muslim. On the other hand, if he had talked about his conversion or if he had grown a beard, some people would have looked at him differently. People don't even get attached to the person they know.

Everyday life is even sometimes complicated and unfair: In the canteen, there is no halal meat or substitute meals. Souria expresses her incomprehension: "There is no substitute meal, we make do with it, we don't say anything and we pay. Afterwards, they come to ask us to integrate... and they talk to us about tolerance! How do you want people to feel like others and integrated? she asks. "The children in the canteen feel excluded. Children grow up with bad images. Why wouldn't the French state make an effort? »

Children are differentiated already at an early age, some feel excluded and may develop hatred because they feel different from others in their own country. It is important to avoid raising children to be different or to make them feel no different.

There should be mutual respect which sometimes involves small things, small gestures. This would instil values, difference, tolerance, culture. There is talk of social mixing and integration but Muslims do not feel represented.

Opinions on the subject of religious practice are, however, divided: Religious practice in another country would change little for many of them. In spite of this, some of them are considering moving to another country to better live their daily life and their religion.

Hajar explains that practising the Muslim religion for women is easier, they can pray at home. For the man, he is normally obliged to pray at the mosque. When you are in the workplace and in a non-Muslim country, it is almost impossible to fulfil this obligation. "To bring up your children in the Muslim religion, France is not adapted but we adapt, we find solutions" she thinks.

Many people have raised the problem of not being able to wear a religious sign or risk being rejected by society. "So we can't be 100% free. Sometimes we even hide to pray," says Mustapha.



Hajar pointed out something interesting to us: it is also very complicated to find a person to perform the burial ceremony according to the Muslim ritual or to have the financial means to repatriate Muslims for funerals abroad.

We also noticed a difficulty that was felt and recurrent in the testimonies: always having to explain and having to justify fasting. Fiona, 27 years old, Muslim and of mixed race, even prefers to call herself a vegetarian rather than being forced to explain fasting or the fact that she doesn't eat meat. Conversely, for some, it is precisely the opportunity to talk about and make their religion known to others and to pass on information.

Mohamed, 26 years old, on the contrary, thinks that in France, he manages to exercise his religion without too much difficulty by mentioning that in Algeria, there are not as many people as that in the mosques, as there are in the churches in France. According to him, there is no link with the country in which one finds oneself "the practice of religion is personal and intimate, it can be done anywhere, certain conditions change but it is possible to exercise it.»

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ISLAM AND THE MEDIA: SOCIAL PROBLEMS BECOME RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS

Terrorism has greatly changed the image of Islam and it has been conveyed in a very negative way. Muslims interviewed on this subject are able to understand why society has a negative image of Islam. "Moreover, these terrorist acts give legitimacy to the speeches of racists or those who had doubts," explained 27-year-old Fiona.

It is important today to lift the veil on this reality, on this image of Islam that part of the French population feels only negatively and which, as a result, frightens them.

The media cultivate hatred and the clash of civilisations. "Some speeches should be banned in the public space. Society doesn't need that" expresses Ali and he explains: "This is the image that people have of it. The non-Muslim should be able to understand how Islam works. The human being is afraid of the unknown. But if you know the Muslim religion and how it was brought about, society is also able to understand it.

« Even our neighbours, friends, colleagues who know us hear negative things about Islam, but the truth is that "the real Muslim doesn't steal, doesn't attack, but the media will show the



guy in the neighbourhood and he will be representative of Islam in the eyes of the population," says Souria.

"We have to stop scaring people, we have to put Muslims on an equal footing and punish those who deserve to be punished" explains Mohamed.

First of all, we should be content to inform and not to influence. "If a crime has been committed, in the press, it will be reported by someone of a certain origin. The emphasis will be on the country of origin or the Muslim religion systematically", observes Latifa.

"Why do we stigmatise a population for every 15 idiots who have done something stupid? A Frenchman who kills someone is a psychiatric case, a Muslim or an Arab who kills someone will systematically be a fundamentalist. The press and the media have no limits in their descriptions, extrapolates Souria.

She went even further, saying: "In a programme, we will never interview Muslims, people who are articulate or who know Islam. The media always interview 18 year olds from the suburbs who do not even know their own religion. The image that this young person is going to give is not that of the reality of Muslims".

However, a fair representation of the Muslim population would help to change the image of Islam in society.

The focus group organised only with Muslim women emphasised this point: They do not participate in certain organised events because they have no reason to defend themselves on something they do not approve of and which is far from their life and reality: "We have done nothing wrong" expressed Latifa.

The march against Islamophobia organised in November 2019 has not received enough media coverage according to them, "it could be interesting to have a march against Islamophobia but only if the media covered as much, or even more, than these kids who are doing stupid things...! she explains.



They are blasé when their religion is attacked or sullied by the news, but with hindsight, they don't pay attention to it anymore, and they realise that they are playing into the same game of the media, they are going in their own direction. This negativity is now part of their daily life.

"Arabs and Muslims are too stigmatised", they said. "Today, a man who will raise his hand on his wife, nobody will hardly interfere, but a Mohamed who will force his wife to wear the veil, everyone will interfere" explains Souria. She adds, about the media: "We don't condone, we want to incriminate terrorists. It's 20 year old kids who commit terrorist acts and we justify it by Islam. We are affected in the same way as the "French", it doesn't reflect our personality or our religion. These terrorist acts reflect negatively on us, we have a double punishment. »

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PREJUDICE, DISCRIMINATION AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Islamophobia exists because one does not understand the other and because the unknown is frightening. There are different contexts mentioned by the interviewees where Islamophobic incidents were felt:

Institutional context :

In schools, for example, some spoke of injustices or suspicions against them. Some found, for example, that teachers are harsher with Muslim pupils than others.

"At school, some Muslim students were suspected that their homework had been done by others. If the results were good, there was an assumption that it was not the Muslim who had done the work," Hallouma said. She adds, again in the school context: 'In the canteen, a catering officer at the college made a shocking remark to a Muslim student because she was not eating meat served in the canteen. He told her: "We will lift her skirt to check that she is Muslim". The comments were shocking and harsh. The Senior Education Adviser mentioned the possible misinterpretation of the words in order to calm tensions," she recalls.

This injustice is also felt during police checks, even though Abdès, 37, is keen to point out that "there, too, you shouldn't make generalities... despite the reality and certain situations I have experienced, on the contrary, the police were sometimes lenient towards me". He deserved

a trial following a police check on his vehicle, but he was evicted out of sympathy, good faith and to avoid Abdès perhaps feeling targeted again.

Fiona, for her part, objectively noticed that police checks were, despite everything, often directed even though she, personally, was not the victim of any injustice in this area.

Djillali, 57 years old, had a car lent to him by his garage after an accident he had had. He was stopped by the police with the loaned vehicle for a check-up. The check was carried out and got 4 tickets with this car which was not his. He made an appointment with the commissioner and the case was hushed up.

Other interviewees felt the same about these situations even though many of them no longer pay attention to them, it is their daily life and they accept it.

Abdelmalik, 73 years old, a Frenchman converted to Islam, said "during a medical appointment, I discussed my health and so many things openly with the doctor. As soon as I told him my religion, I felt like a curtain coming down in front of me"... "

Insult and "diverted humour".

Other characteristics evoked by the interviewees were insults and the very particular humour they are subjected to:

They often hear remarks such as "Arab gang" or "Go back to your city! or go back to your country...".

The son of Abdès, a child under 10 years old, was called "couscous" at school by his classmates. The child, like his parents, took this nickname as a joke given the social context in which it was used, the age of the individuals and the friendly nature of the child's classmates. However, it is noticeable that images are formed very early on and categories of people are quickly targeted even unintentionally.

This same father, of Moroccan origin, was once treated as a "sub-race", which hurt him enormously, but he took it upon himself.

"One of my neighbours, from the balcony, called me a monkey and told me to go back to your country... I smiled and showed him my identity card and I said, I'm sorry, I was born here!"
"Leïla argued. She also adds a most unpleasant and shocking situation: "With a colleague, she was talking and her colleague said: ah! I wouldn't want my gynaecologist to be a man. Another colleague behind her retorted: but you're not going to speak Arabic to us ! »

Djillali, 57 years old, says that since he started wearing a beard, some people around him no longer say hello to him. Some colleagues tease him about his beard but he doesn't take it badly, it's humour.

Sometimes, it's very special jokes that are transcribed in a professional context, between colleagues, such as "Where do you find the most Arab blood? ... on my windscreen", for example.

Traditions and religiosity :

What stands out a lot in the testimonies is that traditional dress changes the look of the people around them and for some, it dissuades them from wearing certain religious clothes. Clothes or physical appearance too often trigger strong hostility.

Veiled people are often the subject of sustained remarks and glances in public places. The victims of these remarks are simply people who live peacefully, who walk around, do their shopping and who no longer even react to this kind of behaviour which is part of their daily lives.

A young Muslim woman prefers to call herself a vegetarian rather than always having to explain why she does not eat meat in the canteen or at a business meal.

Origins and prejudices :

Some Muslims, who have had difficulties in finding a job, assume that it is because of their origin; even if this is difficult to prove, even if it remains at the stage of supposition, many people suspect it.



Prejudice is sometimes felt indirectly even if it is expressed in a sympathetic way: "you are different from others..... you are different when you are alone or in a group ... you are integrated compared to them ... this is the first time I get along with an Arab. »

Fatia, who works in a school, says that a mother told her "You, I like you, but not the others, you're not the same" " why? I'm not the same, because I have jeans" she replied.

Islamophobia, hate crime?

It is considered by everyone as a hate crime. It's "attacking a person based on their religion" explains Rafael.

The interviewees noted that lately Islamophobes are often young people in their 20s and 30s, perhaps because they can be more easily influenced by the internet.

They think that islamophobic acts have to be denounced, but sometimes there are Islamophobic people in the police. Hajar is reported to use an association, not the police. She believes she would not be heard; she does not trust the police. She is certain that they will not do anything and that they will not be taken seriously. One time she went to the police to file a complaint and the officer told her "you should dress differently these days..." she left and went to an association.

Police officers are supposed to be prepared to take this kind of statement, but this is not always the case. They also agree that it should not be generalised either and that their working conditions should be taken into account. They also recognise a lack of manpower within the police.

Some people understand victims who do not file a complaint because they are afraid of not being understood or heard, but they think it is important to denounce it, on the one hand, to realise the importance of the scourge of Islamophobia, but also because it is important to continue to hope that the aggressors will eventually be punished. It is impossible to act if the facts are not known or denounced.

The police or the gendarmerie must have the capacity to understand the victim, they must be trained to deal with this problem.

If Islamophobic acts are not recorded, it means that there will be more and more of them and that they will indirectly be allowed, Islamophobic acts will become existing but almost invisible.

IDEAS FOR PREVENTING ISLAMOPHOBIA: DECONSTRUCTING CLICHÉS

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Different ideas emerged during the interviews and focus group discussions. Here is a short list of the recommendations that were collected:

- Dialogue initiative: disseminate as much as possible the comic book "Bdouin" which explains the Muslim religion to children in a rather simple way and also explains the good through various cases of daily life.
- Organise a human library: each book is a story, each cover and each summary leads to a meeting with the "author" who orally explains his journey and can easily explain his life choices, his religion and possibly his convictions.

The idea is to be able to get to know the other person easily and simply through curiosity.

- Developing a link between communes and foreign populations
- Organisation of neighbourhood meals based on culture with the sole aim of getting to know each other better in a friendly atmosphere.
- To find solutions to avoid amalgamation and to avoid that only negative things come out and to make sure that no generalities are made.
- Introduce civic and religious courses in schools on a more recurrent basis. The idea, other than to improve everyone's knowledge and open-mindedness, is to put all people on an equal footing regardless of their chosen religion.
- Make the image of Islam positive, so that it can reflect reality and realise that it is not the one conveyed by the media. A better image of Muslims should be given and not just the negative image that is only of a minority of Muslims.

- Organise speaking times to explain the Muslim religion: Islam frightens people without even knowing the religion itself and the many values it represents that characterizes it.
- More developed religion courses in the classroom would bring more tolerance and openness in the long run.
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- A more in-depth course on religion could change the impact on Islamophobia. Some people use Islam without even knowing it.
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FOCUS ON THE NEWS

The French news has been put to the test during this month of October 2020 and encourages us to question ourselves about the future and the consequences of the decisions taken.

Speech on separatism by the President of the French Republic :

October 02nd : The President of the French Republic Emmanuel MACRON, made a speech referring to the draft law on Islamic separatism that will be presented on 09/12/2020 to the Council of Ministers. Here is a summary of what was presented:

- Ensure a republican presence at the bottom of each building (police officers, gendarmes) and local services (magistrates, clerks, judges...)
- Teaching more Arabic at school or in an extra-curricular centre to avoid possible manipulation.
- To support, to the tune of 10 million euros, the initiatives to be taken by the Foundation for Islam in France in the fields of culture, history and science. The creation of a scientific institute of islamology is envisaged.
- Organisation of consular Islam: the government plans to train the Imams of France.

- Building an Islam in France that would be the Islam of the Enlightenment
- The school must inculcate the values of the republic, not those of religion.
- Associations suspected of Islamic entry may be dissolved.
- The obligation of neutrality will be applicable to public officials and employees of the delegated companies.
- Avoid hatred against the Republic on the part of people who might use the discourse of colonisation for negative purposes.
- Separatism has already been built by society with ghettoisation. Populations were concentrated according to their origins and social backgrounds.
- Islam is going through a deep crisis
- The challenge: to fight against the deviation of some in the name of religion by avoiding amalgamation.
- France must tackle radical separatism. Radical Islamism has a claimed will to oppose the laws of the Republic. According to Macron, the goal is to take complete control of society and to reject freedom of speech and freedom of conscience.
- The Head of State specifies that secularism is to believe or not to believe, it is the neutrality of the State and in no way the erasing of religions.

Separatism is going to fight against radical Islam and political Islam: the objective of the State is to bring the Republic back everywhere on the territory to integrate everyone.

Demonstrations in Saint Stephen against the President's speech on separatism

On Friday 16/10/20, a few days after the speech of the President of the Republic, Emmanuel MACRON, about sixty people marched calmly in Saint Etienne against Islamophobia and in reaction to this presidential speech which dealt with separatism. According to the demonstrators, the government encourages Islamophobia and even participates in it.

They gathered following the call of the CCIF stéphanois (Committee Against Islamophobia in France).

For some of them, "the President's speech revived Islamophobia by proposing specific laws aimed at Muslims. This Islamophobia has existed for a long time and is fuelled by the government. »

In a newspaper article reporting on the event, several demonstrators said that they had been insulted or had seen people insulted because of their religion. They feel stigmatised again after this speech in a complicated social and health context.



For some, "it is the government that separates the French, instead of appeasing society as a president should do. Secularism is used as a detestation".

The demonstrators took the opportunity to proclaim their belonging to France. "They also took the opportunity to specify that "we can be

French and Muslim, just as we can be French and Jewish, Catholic or Buddhist.... »

Threat of certain dissolutions of associations by the government, including the CCIF.

Within the framework of Emmanuel Macron's speech on separatism, he envisages the dissolution of certain associations in order to fight against radical Islamism, and all the more so after the attack that took place on October 16th, 2020. The CCIF is apparently threatened by this dissolution. The CCIF is an association that participates in the defence and promotion of liberties. Its action is essentially centred around the fight against racism suffered on a daily basis by the Muslim population. CCIF's action deals with the subject of Islamophobia and discrimination suffered by Muslims on our territory. For the time being, the CCIF has asked the government to renounce its dissolution in order to respect the freedom of association and freedom of expression, enshrined in the Constitution of the French Republic.



Other associations such as BARAKACITY have been dissolved.

Terrorist attacks in October

2 terrorist attacks hit France in October 2020, bringing back painful memories, reopening wounds that have not yet healed and rekindling a climate of terror on French territory.

- On October 16th, 2020 : Samuel PATY, a teacher, was beheaded by an 18-year-old for showing his pupils caricatures of Mohammed as part of a course on freedom of expression.
- October 29, 2020: 3 worshippers were murdered with knives by a 21 year old terrorist in the Notre Dame Basilica in Nice.

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CONCLUSION

"Let's focus on what we are like, not about what separates us".

The minute these lines are written, a climate of tension, sadness and incomprehension reigns in France.

A terrorist attack took place on 16 October 2020 in Conflans-Saint-Honorine, where a teacher was savagely beheaded by an 18-year-old Chechen terrorist for having shown cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in certain classes where he was explaining freedom of expression.

This terrible incident unfortunately sums up much of this report. One event was enough to explain the French situation, its problems and its consequences:

- The too important impact of the Internet in the transmission of information and in radicalisation
- The easy targets of radicalisation: young people
- A course on freedom of expression that was misinterpreted and misexplained to parents of students
- Muslims who have perhaps too often been misunderstood and insulted and who have led some to fundamentalism or to extreme and serious behaviour.
- Freedom in general, and freedom of expression that opposes and will always oppose religion and will always be interpreted as disrespectful.

In recent days, we read in the French press that demonstrations in Israel and Gaza have taken place calling for boycotts of French products following the cartoons that were made of Mohammed and the fact that Emmanuel MACRON decided not to ban the cartoons... and another attack took place in a church in Nice where 3 worshippers were murdered by a 21 year old terrorist for the same reasons.

Almost all the Muslims interviewed in this survey explained that an in-depth course on religions would be a good solution to change the image of Islam and above all to better know and respect each other.

How can it still be imagined today? under what circumstances? on what themes? if a teacher is no longer able to teach a theme as he or she sees fit, and while respecting the values of the Republic, on pain of being beheaded.

How can a course on religion be set up under these conditions?

Should they be prepared by people from the religious body so that there is no possible offence?



Should freedom of expression be limited or should we be more open-minded?

Wars of religion have existed since the dawn of time, they are wars that divide people because we do not have the same beliefs and they are the most powerful wars because they evoke our faith and can therefore hurt us deep inside.

In these times, it is more necessary than ever to value religions in order to restore a balance.

There is no miracle solution to ensure that we all live in peace and therefore with respect for each other: but we could leave religions untouched and start to value them all, or as Léa, 6 years old, used to say, "if we don't like a drawing, we don't kill someone, we make a prettier one" and I would even add we can tear it up, we can also not look at it, explain why we don't like it so that the next one will be much prettier or that we refrain from making another one.

The truth sometimes comes out of the mouths of children...

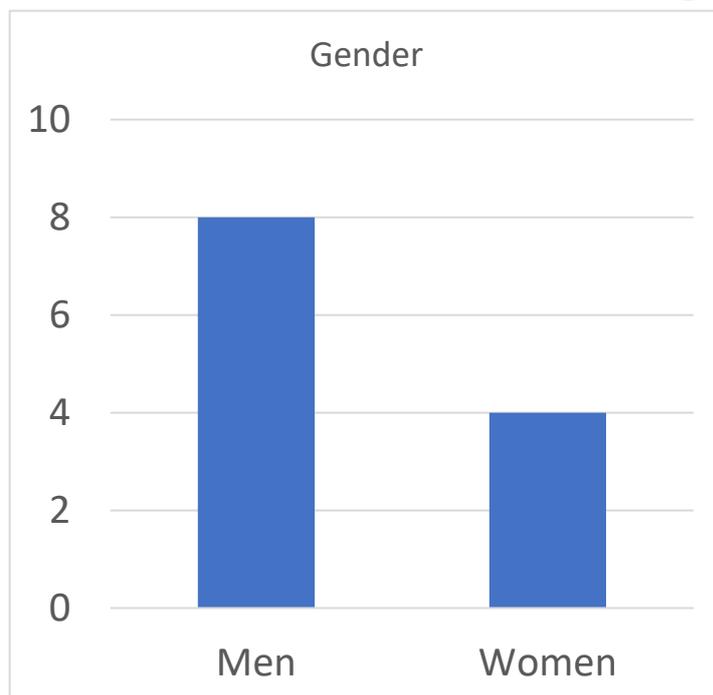
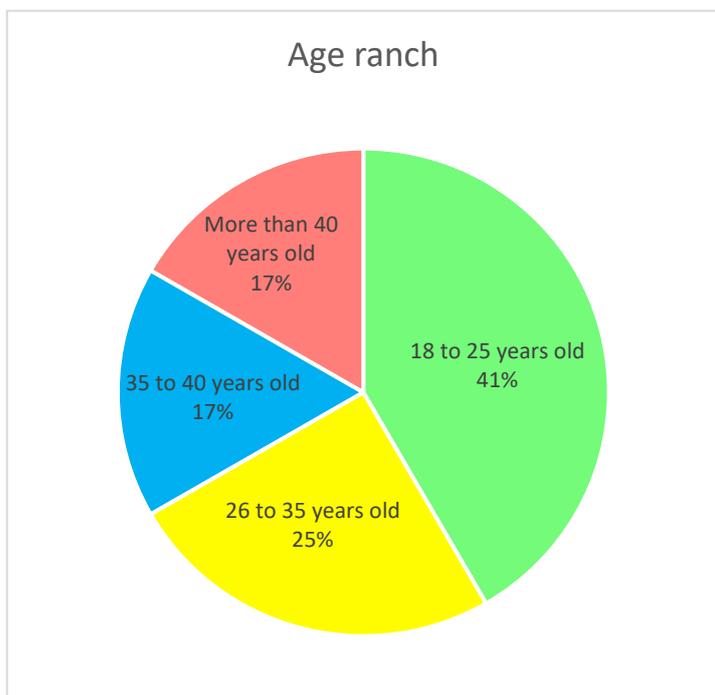
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ANNEX 1

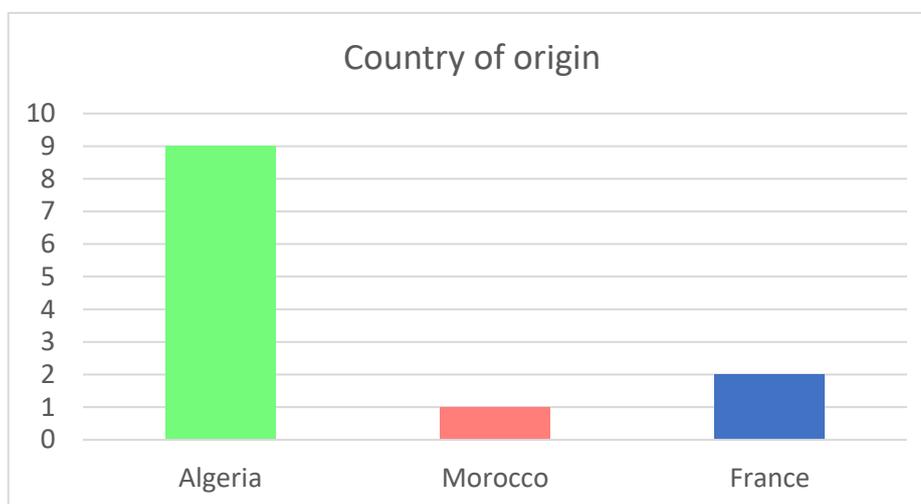
Here are the characteristics of the people who agreed to give their testimonies in this study. We tried to obtain testimonies from different people in order to obtain the most real vision possible of Islamophobia in France.

Here are some of the characteristics:

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Country of origin of interviewees : (2 people are French and converted to Islam)





Places to live :

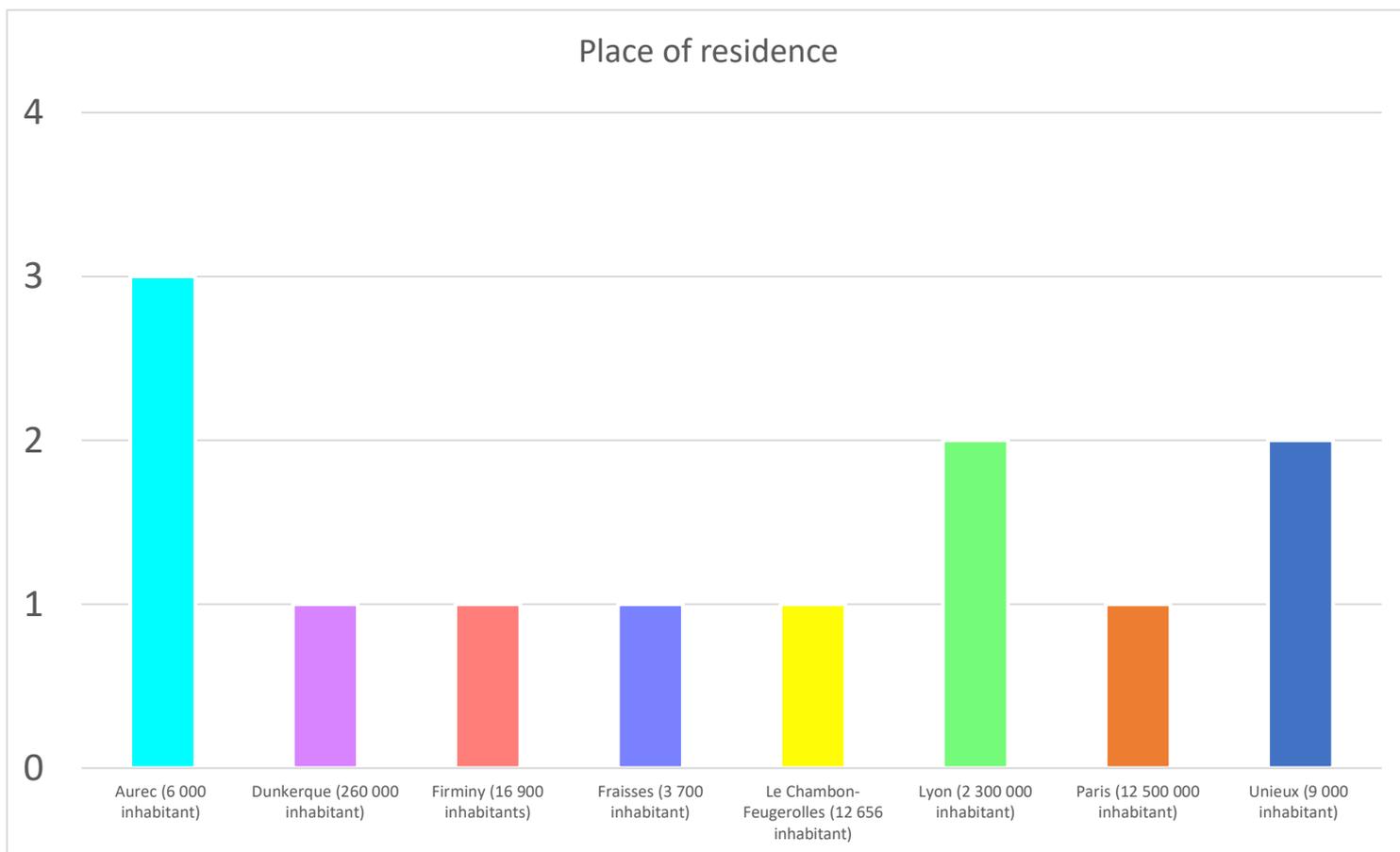
6 people from a town of less than 10,000 inhabitants,

2 people from a town of less than 20,000 inhabitants,

1 person in a city of less than 300,000 inhabitants,

1 person in a city with a population of less than 2,500,000 and

1 other in a city with a population of 12,500,000.



ANNEX 2



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During the focus groups, we asked which of the images presented below best described French society's vision of Islam. Their findings were as follows:

- The veiled woman
- The bearded man
- The swords

We also asked them to also choose 2 images that would qualify the image of Islam in their eyes :

- Almsgiving (the 2 hands)
- The prayer mat
- The Quran
- Attestation of Faith (finger raised)

ANNEX 3

Images of Islamophobia in the media :

People in the focus groups were, in a way, shocked by the headlines from well-known French newspapers (below), although very few people were really surprised by the headlines.

Many of the headlines came up when we had previously discussed the perception of Islam in society. The negative image is reflected in the headlines, and French society's view of Islam is consistent with what is said in the press. The headlines say a lot about the negativity of the Muslim religion in the media :

- Why Islam scares French people
- The West facing Islam
- Will Islamism win
- How do you make a terrorist
- The hunt for Christians
- Islam without embarrassment

