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“The Socio-political Context of Islamophobic Prejudices”

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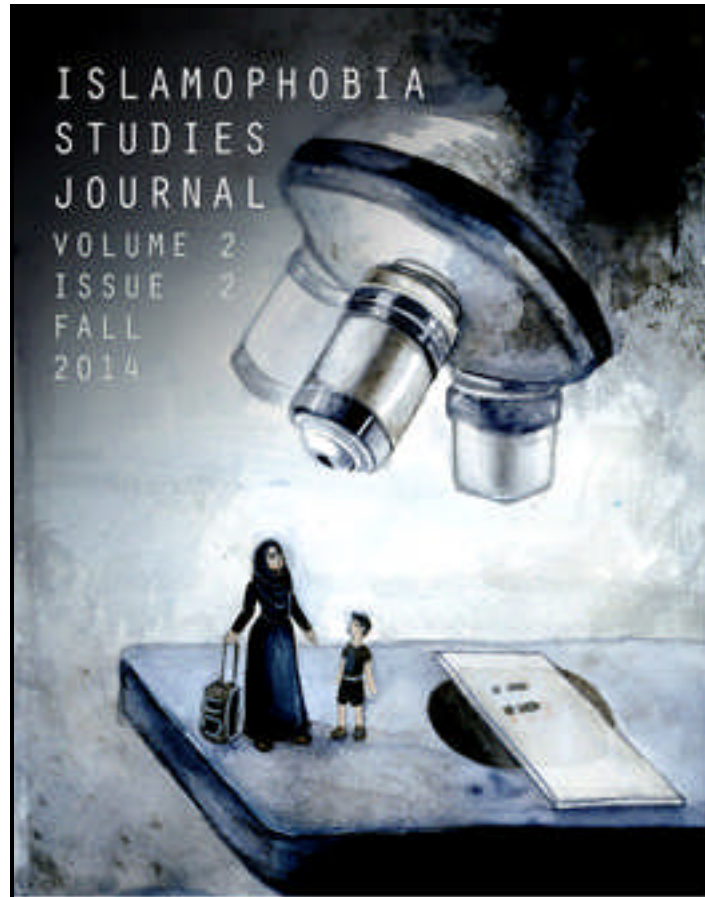
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INTRODUCTION

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When discussing minorities in the social sciences, we want to signify that a given population lacks decisive influence on the power structures in place — whether political (parliamentary majority, repressive forces), symbolic (medias), or economic (capital, jobs reserved to the native-born) — that they lack the influence required to end the ostracism of which they are the victim. The term 'minority' in sociology has no demographic meaning, i.e., of not being numerous in a society. The white minority in South Africa illustrates this point. Although small in number, it possessed between 1948 and 1994 the political, economic and symbolic powers.

In the past decade, some mentalities in Western societies have represented Muslims as populations whose behavior and customs are abnormal, deplorable, archaic, irrational, and even vicious. The representations of entire populations as cultural "aberrations" that develop bizarre, immoral, archaic, barbaric lifestyles, is common in modern Western history. Discourses on the superiority of the White civilization over other civilizations — of Anglo-Saxon over Southern European cultures, or again, of the national culture of the native-born, the so-called "old-stock" (as in the French expression "Québécois de

souche") over the cultures of immigrants — have had deadly repercussions on countless Native Americans and Africans, many thousands of Chinese and Indians, and more recently, during the Second World War, on millions of Jews and thousands of Gypsies and homosexuals. Such racist ideologies have remained powerful and unchecked up until the 20th century, given the near-impossibility for its victims ¹ to organize collectively and to contest the ostracism or overt repression which they endured, and given the absence of public debates on these matters. Besides, the notion of "public opinion" is recent in history, and appears with the diffusion of written media in the 19th century. The rare defenders of minorities at that time were English abolitionists who mobilized both in the name of human equality and of the protestant ideology of Christian charity. They were also the defenders of national minorities in Central Europe in the name of democracy and cultural specificity.

MINORITIES' RIGHTS AFTER 1945

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The status of non-right of cultural minorities changed at the end of the Second World War as a result of two events :

The reaffirmation of the liberal ideology after 1945. The legal protection of cultural, ethnic or national minorities had been a subject of international negotiations between the years 1918 and 1922, following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and of Austria-Hungary, two empires that contained numerous ostracised minorities. The question was settled through treaties — ordering, for instance, the displacement of populations to ensure their protection. Such was the case with the displacement of more than two hundred thousand Pontic Greeks (North of Turkey) to Greece. But the abuses of the Nazi regime and of Italian, Spanish, French and other instances of fascism have been genu-

¹ There is a debate on the definition of the Haitian Revolution as the first contestation of European supremacy, given the demands of equal rights regardless of race which have been put forward, along with the prise of power by non-whites.

inely traumatic for the ideologues of political liberalism : how could a liberal democracy founded on the equality of individual rights, the respect of fundamental liberties, and the belief in the progress of humanity bring about such authoritarian (fascism) and deadly (holocaust and assassination of minorities by the Nazi regime ²) phenomena ? What is more, the Cold War, i.e. the ideological and geo-political conflict that began in the 1950s between the two Post-War powers, demanded a reaffirmation of the basic principles of political liberalism.

The supporters of political liberalism established the rights of national, ethnic and racial minorities, just as they established the rights of political exiles by means of the Geneva Convention in 1951. International dispositions that oppose discrimination against minorities were adopted : the Charter of the United Nations of 1945 (art. 1 and 55) ; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (art. 2) ; the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 2) ; ³ the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Often, these documents, along with others, also created cultural rights for the members of minorities.

Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ⁴ concluded in 1966 but approved by the UN in 1991, is con-

² Victims of genocide by the Nazis : 6 million Jews, 200,000 or more Gypsies, thousands of political opponents and homosexuals.

³ Non-discriminatory clauses are also presented in other documents : the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention of the ILO, No. III (art. 1, 1958) ; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (art. 1, 1965) ; the UNESCO Convention (art. 1, against discrimination in teaching, 1960) ; the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (art. 1, 2, 3, 1978) ; the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (art. 2, 1981) ; the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the American Convention on Human Rights (Organisation of American States) ; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Organisation of African Unity).

⁴ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN, 1966, art. 13) ; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966/1991, art. 27) ; Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UN, Dec. 18, 1992) ; Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, European Charter for Re-

sidered the most effective. It grants the right both to preserve one's cultural life and to use one's language : "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language." This article [146] applies even if the State has not officially recognized the presence of such minorities on its territory. As for the States that have ratified the Covenant, they may introduce specific measures to end the inequalities of which minorities are the victim.

The resistance of minorities. The second evolution which changed the status of cultural minorities after 1945 is the rise in the demands of minorities that refused to be dominated on the basis of a so-called cultural difference. From the 1950s and 1960s, these demands are forcefully affirmed in North America, and from the 1980s in Europe (March of the Beurs, ⁵ 1983).

By the end of the 1950s, Black Americans, bolstered by their participation in the war, organized and took up the demands for equal civil and economic rights that had been initiated with regard to their access to lodging in the 1940s. The struggle was violent, notably in the Southern States, and the governments of Kennedy and Johnson had resort to the army to ensure the respect of the Black's civil and voting rights. In addition, they introduce legislations which would change their condition : desegregation of schools, obligation for a State to inform federal instances of any modification of an electoral county's territory, and social mobility through programs of affirmative action (positive discrimination). The same struggles spread to Canada during the 1960s with Native American, Quebecer and Ukrainian contestations. These struggles, as the public interventions that dealt with

gional or Minority Languages (Council of Europe), Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe).

- ⁵ Set in motion in part by the Socialist Party for its own interests, not supported by the Communist Party -that great defender of universalism in the abstract — this mobilization of immigrants and of their descendants, largely of Maghreb origin, had little impact and future. It was comprised of a militant current which demanded the simple social recognition of immigrants, and others which were more radical in their demand for equality.

them, have rendered impossible the negative use of terms such as 'race' and 'ethnicity' in North American State politics.

*The issues of minorities' struggles
and the State 's solutions*

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Of the three issues at stake, the most explicit is economic. It should be noted that the economic dynamics of the time are not unrelated to the recognition of the rights of minorities. The North-American continent is mutating industrially and expanding economically. It necessitates an expansion of the interior market and of labor force, both qualified and unqualified. Part of this new labor force will be national, while another part will have to come from the so-called Third World, given that by the 1960s Europe no longer constitutes a significant source of immigration. All quotas by race or region of the world will be eliminated from immigration policies in the United States in 1965, and in Canada in 1967.

In Europe, the dynamics are similar but different : Post-War reconstruction requires an abundant non-qualified labor force that will largely come from old colonies. The civil and social rights of immigrants will be recognized during the 1970s, but no European country will implement policies that fight discrimination and defend equal rights for cultural minorities as in the case of North America, given that their interior cultural minorities do not constitute an economic issue or asset, unlike the 'Black' feminine labor force in the United States, or again, the Franco-Canadian labor force in Canada.

The second issue is of a socio-political order. The contestations of minorities aim for the reduction, on the part of the State, of the power granted to the cultural majorities that oppress them. The struggle thus concerns access to the State and its intervention on their behalf.

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The term 'cultural majority' designates views — some would say values — which are shared by a sufficiently large proportion of indi-

viduals in a society ⁶ so that their behaviour can impact those who cultivate other values. Such views may be expressed through a passion for sports, such as football (soccer), modes of consumption, religious beliefs, and also through an aversion for certain peoples, accompanied by negative and discriminatory types of behaviour.

The modes by which the State intervenes to counter discrimination against cultural minorities have taken three forms since their invention during the 1970s. Canada remains the State which has developed, on this matter, the most advanced policy compared to the countries of Continental Europe. In 1971, Canada designed a Multiculturalism Program which was to become, in successive steps, a multiculturalist policy, i.e. a policy addressed to all Canadians, promoting the cultural plurality of the civil society and endeavouring to end all form of cultural discrimination (based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, physical appearance, sexual orientation). This policy has three principal finalities and modes of intervention :

- a. Education of the cultural majorities so as to reduce their non-reflexivity and their discrimination of cultural minorities. Here, the task of the State and its agencies is to delegitimize any current of opinion which would advance, for instance, that the political life, the redistribution of, and access to, employment in the public sector, social recognition, or modes of behavior in the civil society, must serve the values and interests of the 'nation's native-born' (as in the case of debates on Muslim attire, Christmas decorations, holidays, access to citizenship, unemployment indemnities, distinction between national cultural and particular religious heritage, etc.) This education takes the form of a discourse on the part of political authorities which promotes cultural plurality and of interventions and pressures on the medias, large businesses and artistic communities ; it also takes the form of training programs for employees in the public sector, and above all of those who are in contact with its clientele : teachers, medical personnel, judges, police officers.

⁶ 30% could be a sufficient proportion for impressing an orientation to ways of acting within a civil society. All depends on the political power and/or influence on the media of the concerned cultural majority.

- b. Anti-discriminatory and legal measures so as to punish the infringement of equal rights in access to lodging, employment, and education, as well as all racist, ethnicist, misogynistic, homophobic or heinous public discourse towards a member or members of cultural minorities.
- c. Measures aimed at opening channels of social mobility to members of minorities that are victim of discrimination (affirmative action/positive discrimination in favor of visible minorities, of women) and at facilitating cultural adaptation, access to the job market, to public programs (financial aid to the community sector), access to rights (legal education, particularly of women).

A third issue, which is intellectual and lesser known, is ideological. It has been central to the evolution of the social sciences and humanities over the past thirty years. During the 1980s and 1990s, demands for equality on the part of American Blacks and of North-American feminist movements have generated a large-scale debate in political philosophy on [148] the status of cultural difference in a modern democracy, and on the effectiveness of the formal right to equality. Radical critiques of the tenets of classical Anglo-Saxon liberalism⁷ have been formulated and have undermined the legitimacy of positions — such as the official French stance — which reject programs of affirmative action (positive discrimination) on the basis of race or ethnicity. However, if this academic debate seemed to have come to a close by the early 2000s, it has regained momentum with the rise of racist and xenophobic movements — such as the *Tea Party* in the United States, the Parti Québécois and its Charter of Quebec Values in Canada, as well as Extreme Right parties with growing influence all over Europe.

⁷ The terms *liberal* and *Liberalism* as employed here in no way refer to a theory of the minimal role of the State in the economic and social spheres, nor do they convey the notion of economic neo-liberalism. They are used in their theoretical and historical sense, which is in fact more Anglo-Saxon than Franco-French. Historically, this sense has existed in France, although the philosophy of Classical Liberalism has been almost entirely supplanted by the Republican doctrine (Jaurne, 1997) or transformed by it, so that it lost its original meaning.

Another aspect of this ideological issue is intellectual and concerns the history of ideas. The socio-cultural transformation which was induced by the protests of minorities has given rise to so-called Post-Colonial Studies which seek to reconstruct and understand the identities, mobilizations and itineraries of individuals and other dominated social categories, of subordinates (Gayatri C. Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Edward W. Said) who do not conform to the norm (most often white, Christian, masculine, heterosexual, with little mobility) of dominant cultural majorities.

THE REACTION OF THE MAJORITIES : RESISTANCES TO CULTURAL PLURALISM AND LOSS OF SOCIAL STATUS

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The demands of minorities challenge the benefits which certain social categories draw from discrimination. These are for instance employers who resort massively to the work force of minority groups (immigrants, Chicanos, Blacks with little qualifications). These are also salaried employees in sectors where jobs are highly-protected through unions and historically held by the nation-born (public sector, non-university teaching positions, the so-called 'regalian' professions in France : funeral parlors, tobacco shops, etc.). Moreover, State measures aimed at reducing discrimination, such as programs of *affirmative action*, generate socio-occupational mobility in educated segments of immigrant, racial, feminine minorities.

Just as important for the political struggle, the demands of minorities challenge, if not diminish, the political and symbolic rights/privileges of cultural 'majorities'. They jeopardize the collective identifications, modes of thinking and lifestyles of the cultural majorities against which they struggle. Blacks condemn racism (of the racist white majority), women struggle against the supremacy of men, both professionally and politically (misogynist majority), Native Americans against the dispossession through violence of their territory (so-called civilized majority versus so-called archaic cultures), Muslims against secularism and the depreciation of religion and belief in the

name of progress (atheist majority, which is yet to be demonstrated), homosexuals against sexual roles.

This socio-cultural change takes place just as the social categories which are most targeted by protesting minorities, i.e. the middle classes they seek to integrate and which are still predominantly white, undergo socio-economic and cultural devaluation that has been [149] accelerating since the 1980s.⁸ These middle classes are partly the victims of the effects of economic globalization, which erodes the rights and social statuses that had been established in the Welfare National States. They experience or apprehend the increased mobility of the work force, the derealization of productions, the change in the structure of occupations, a decline in social mobility for themselves and their descendants, a decrease in buying power, unemployment, and physical insecurity. The threat of loss, or loss of economic status, and of identity referents combine together for social categories that are not main actors of globalization and that often reproduce lifestyles and modes of thinking from the 1960s and 1970s.

On a social scale, the issue of minority struggles becomes an ideological and political struggle between the advocates and actors of cosmopolitanism and globalization, and the advocates and actors of the protection of borders and of the Nation and the post-war Welfare State.

Some authors also insist on linking the rise in xenophobia, religious intolerance and racism with the growing risks, perceived or experienced by individuals, as well as with the State's discourses on insecurity (urban criminality, terrorism) and threats (natural and technological disasters, epidemics) (Beck, 1999a,b ; 1992a,b). Such discourses would induce a culture of fear⁹ and establish a link between danger and externality, danger and difference, danger and otherness

⁸ To give a simple yet striking example of the rise in social inequalities, according to a report by Caritas from October 2013, 6% of the population of Spain lived on 307 Euros per month in 2012, which is twice as much as in 2008. The number of millionaires had increased by 12% in 2011. *The Guardian Weekly*, October 18th, p. 13. Wealth Gap in Spain is EU's Biggest.

⁹ Of which a new slogan describes the current facets in the United States : *God, Gays and Guns*.

(stranger, migrant, anyone different from oneself) (Perry & Poynting, 2006 ; Morgan & Poynting, 2012).

Starting in the 1980s, and more forcefully since the 2000s, social categories that consider themselves dispossessed due to the protests of minorities and the protection which the State grants them will resist and join anti-State, anti-elitist and xenophobic populist movements, in an attempt to bring about a shift in public policies towards what they regard as their own interests, ¹⁰ i.e., preserving their rights and identity.

¹⁰ The open discourse of the Republican Party since the 1970s has been to reduce the size of the State and of social entitlements. Two factors intervene. Its electoral base wants to maintain its economic and cultural status ; the financial sector estimates that the return on capital has decreased too much since the 1970s and that the cost of the State has become too high. This electoral base has demanded and obtained the opening of borders for the exportation of capital in countries where the salaries and production costs are lower, as well as the abolition of the separation between the investment activities and commerce of banks (Clinton, 1998). It has also created false financial products, encouraging poorer social categories to get into debt and creating bubbles and financial crises. Nonetheless, a new phenomenon in the past four to five years has been the harshness by which a fraction of the Republican Party, such as the Tea Party, has applied this program and reaffirmed its identity referents (family, Christianity, contempt for the poor, morality, exclusion of all lands of deviants including homosexuals). It is noteworthy that the more this current destroys the State, the more the pro-Democrat coalition of the poor, the middle-class struggling with backward social mobility, wealthy liberal elites, Blacks, Chicanos, immigrants, non-whites and cultural deviants, is reinforced. The history of the Parti Québécois' cultural shift is similar. From a defender of the interests of the middle class and of ascending francophone elites that muzzled the nativist, racist and xenophobic fringe of the party, it now has for its main base the voices of cultural Catholics alarmed by their loss of status and power in society.

OTHER TARGETS : WHY MUSLIMS ?

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Racism, white supremacy, homophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and the mistreatment of undocumented immigrants are various forms of this reaction. In Europe, illegal immigrants coming from the South border were the ones particularly discriminated against by xenophobic and racist movements during the 1990s. Currently, the Roms ¹¹ are targeted. In the United States, Blacks and Chicanos remain minorities which are discriminated against by middle classes and White elites that are forcefully opposed to two reforms of federal programs, the first of which is already accomplished, and the second, currently under debate.

Obamacare (Affordable Care Act) is a State program which obligates every resident to hold health insurance and subsidizes those persons who do not have the financial means to afford such insurance. It concerns approximately 45 million Americans, many of whom are disadvantaged Blacks and Chicanos, ¹² but also rural Whites and/or impoverished elderly people. The other case, under debate for the past ten years, is the Immigration Law reform and the regularization of nearly 12 million illegals, mainly Chicanos, who provide cheap labor. The two programs grant new rights to minorities : health protection and right of abode.

Another significant offensive is that of the Supreme Court against the rights of racial minorities, such as the possibility since 2012 —

¹¹ We should remember that 80% of Gypsies in Germany, or more than 200,000 persons, were exterminated in Nazi camps, and 100% of those established in Croatia. France detained Gypsies but did not hand them over to the Nazis. Germany refused to recognize the genocide of Gypsies until 1979 (Delpha, 2013, 11).

¹² In Texas, where the rejection of Obamacare is the strongest in the United States, 10% of Whites do not hold insurance, as opposed to 40% of Blacks and Chicanos. Corine Lesnes, 2013. "Texans à votre santé !" *Le Monde*, October 21st.

following the abolition of a right acquired during the 1960s — of modifying the borders of an electoral county in the Southern States without having to notify a court of justice. We are also waiting to see if the Supreme Court will accept to hear cases that challenge the law voted by Congress which defines marriage as a union between persons of different sexes (Defence of Marriage Act, 1996). Finally, two recent laws concerning the school curriculum illustrate in other ways the current form of rejection of minorities and foreigners. The first, voted in 2010 in Arizona, prohibits references to the history of ethnic minorities, and the second, voted in April 2012 in Texas, prohibits references to 'ethnic groups', race and gender.

It is in this historical context of attempts at containing the loss of rights by social categories declassified by economic globalization and cultural change that animosity towards Muslims surges. Islamophobia is only one of the modes of ethnocentrism in those social categories which, observing the decline of their influence, consider themselves the victims of undergoing changes, or of intellectual and political elites.

Muslims are one of their preferred targets for a number of reasons :

- a. Their demographic importance within European populations of foreign origin, where xenophobia is on the rise since the 1990s.
- b. Their low capacity for organization and community mobilization, given their recent installation in Western societies, the absence of centralized, hierarchical religious organization, the multiple ethnic, linguistic, religious, national and political rifts that divide them, just as they divide the Muslim world.

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- c. The fear of political Islamism, which becomes visible in the West with the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979.
- d. The end of the repressive control of internal tensions in regions and countries that depended on the URSS until its fall in 1989, very often Muslim countries (Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan) where Islamist contestation, whether terrorist or not, had been on the rise since the 1970.

- e. Finally, Western interest for the energy resources of the Middle East. This issue is evolving, given the United States' capacity for self-sufficiency expected for 2020, so that the Middle Eastern oil market is coveted only as a supply source of European and Asian economies, primarily China.

ISLAM AND THE QUESTIONING OF MODERN BELIEFS

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Evidence indicates that Islamophobia is fostered by a cultural change which is more fundamental than the struggle of minorities for their access to equal rights and the recognition of their difference. The significant presence, at least visible, of Islam on Western soil, and especially the demands of many of its adherents with regard to their freedom of religion, challenges Western secular paradigms. Islam is thus merely the symbolic vector of the questioning of the profound convictions of large segments of Western societies, whether Right Wing or Left Wing.

Beyond the right of (post-colonial) minorities, to demand the social recognition of their cultural specificity, the point of contention is the questioning of the status of religion and, through it, of rationality in contemporary societies. Strong currents of opinion have presumed that belief and religious practices no longer had any political or cultural impact in societies said to be modern, advanced and developed. Demands on the part of non-Christian (Sikh, Jewish, and especially Muslim) or Christian (Evangelical, fundamentalist Catholic) religious minorities for the respect of their values and practices openly question popular paradigms of the past two centuries.

1. The paradigm of rationality. The first paradigm is one that regards religion as an intellectual archaism that cannot subsist in a 'modern' society led by rationality and its most obvious manifestation ; namely, social, scientific and technological progress.

The notion that religiosity is an archaic cultural trait is perfectly embodied in some segments of Muslim populations which profess a fundamentalist — literal as they put it — interpretation of sacred texts, whether in terms of its modes of social sanctions (physical mutilation), its scrupulous forms of piety, the inferior status of women, as well as the refusal of scientific discoveries and of intercultural contacts.

Nevertheless, to assimilate such Muslim obscurantism to 'Islam' is itself another form of obscurantism, since it is a fact that the majority of Muslims are not fundamentalists, as numerous studies conducted by the PEW Centre in the Muslim world as in North America have shown. In Canada, it is the least pious immigrants, unlike Asian immigrants in the 1990s, who display the strongest affiliation and religious practice (Indians, Chinese, Koreans).¹³ Such Islamophobic obscurantism also ignores that it is no longer possible to [152] define modernity as a sure path to the emancipation and affirmation of rationality (Gray, 2012 ; Sen, 2003),¹⁴ The debate on the flaws of this thesis began at the end of the 19th century and was continued after the First World War, and then after the Holocaust. Let us also bear in mind the contradictions of modernity, which brought about Human Rights along with policies for indigenous peoples, the Democratic contract along with colonialism, of citizen and non-citizen (women, the colonized, the salaried poor).

Rationality is not the exercise of an intellectual logic which aims to define and affirm opinions, choices and interests. It is in no way the fundamental trait of the human psyche and of the social sphere and is

¹³ 50% of immigrants in the 1990s affirm that they regularly frequent a place of cult, compared to 20% of immigrants of European origin, 40% of Arab immigrants, regardless of the period of arrival, and 31% of native-born Canadian adults. Those of Middle Eastern and Western Asian origin, mostly Muslims, do not display a high degree of religiosity : 33% versus 65% for those of South Asian origin and 56% of South-Eastern origin (Clark & Schellenberg, 2006).

¹⁴ Gray critiques any notion of 'meliorism', i.e. the belief that the material and moral condition of humanity improves over time in an irregular yet inevitable manner. Sen is critical of the school of rational choice which reduces rationality to the realization of an immediate objective, without taking into account the beliefs, moral ends and convictions of individuals.

not always sufficient for conflict resolution among humans, nor to define a so-called common good. Rationality is the apprenticeship and exercise of detachment from such convictions and of doubt, which in turn leave room for both difference and disagreement.

2. *The paradigm of the secularisation.* This paradigm, which derives from the former, puts forward the necessity and ineluctability of the secularization of the civil society. It is an atheistic fundamentalism, founded on an evolutionist model of societies — the idea of a progressive and inevitable secularization of civil societies by means of human rationality, scientific progress and instruction. This scheme is directly put into question by the permanence of religious beliefs, and this challenge weakens the authority and legitimacy of intellectual elites, as well as of currents of opinion professing a scientist philosophy adverse to any position which is not established by controlled observation or by clear causality, thus condemning religious belief as nothing but refusal of science, intellectual alienation, social constraint and moral archaism.

3. *The paradigm of the necessary opposition between the State and religion.* According to this paradigm, religious thinking should be ignored, if not combated, by the modern State, given its so-called archaic nature. This position, which is professed by strong currents of opinion in the West, notably in historically Catholic societies, ignores the extremely diverse forms of the constitutional regimes that regulate the relations between the State and religion, in the West and elsewhere. The strict separation between Church and State, as in the case of France, is an uncommon form (United States, France, Mexico). The most widespread forms are : (a) the cooperation between the State and one or more religious institutions (Germany, Belgium, Netherlands) ; and (b) the granting of privileges, whether significant or limited, to one religion (Spain, Italy, Canada). The issue as regards these forms is then the extent of the public funding of religious instruction and of religious personnel.

4. *The paradigm of the threat on popular sovereignty by the judiciary* (since it protects cultural minorities). Religious minorities are protected by constitutional clauses applied by the judiciary. Some advance that such protection of cultural or religious minorities undermines popular sovereignty, i.e., to the supremacy of the people and of elected assemblies against [153] the judges. According to this anti-

democratic vision, elected national assemblies should possess the power to define the norms of social life. As we have seen above, this idea, present in European debates on the Muslim attire, has been curbed in the Post War era so as to prevent the ostracism of cultural minorities.

5. *The paradigm of the inherent oppression of women in Islam and in religions in general* (for instance, that women are barred from priesthood in Catholicism). In the case of Islam, the wearing of the veil is perceived as manifesting sexist domination and, if freely chosen, women's alienation due to archaic and pietistic customs. However, three points should be noted concerning this paradigm :

1. It ignores surveys conducted in Muslim countries which reveal a desire for democracy and the inclusion of women in the public spheres, with one notable difference : puritanism with respect to sexuality (Helly, 2010).
2. It conflates Islam and patriarchy, and omits the critiques of modernity on the part of Muslim feminists (Helly, 2010).
3. It ignores that in a democracy the State cannot prohibit a form of private behavior to an individual unless it infringes upon the rights, dignity and/or physical and psychological well-being of others. In a Post-War modern democracy, freedoms of opinion, conviction, cultural choice, can no longer be impeded or annulled in the name of the will and values of the cultural majorities. Democracy can only, by definition, be constituted of conflicts, compromises and constant negotiations, given the innumerable differences in worldviews, moral values, practices and modes of behavior and thought.

The sometimes violent reaffirmation of secular paradigms in the West and the disparagement and rejection of the rights of non-Christian minorities are based on the idea of a return of religion in the past twenty years. It is a misleading idea. Secularization is not declining in Western countries, and religious belief has not made thousands of new adepts (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). We are simply witnessing the constitution of new sects and of new syncretic religious currents,

as well as a transfer from secular adhesion to historical Christian churches to minority, charismatic, evangelical, Christian churches. In this sense, the change that has taken place since the 1980s is neither a return of religion nor a decline of secularization but the emergence of new forms of belief and religious groups. The mutation also marks a change in the coalition strategies of minority Protestant churches in the United States since the 1980s and in the adoption by the Papacy of new strategies of influence to sustain its conservative contestation of the political and cultural mutation of the 1960s and 1970s (change in morals and values).

The religious actors, notably institutional, American, European, Latin-American and African, have been very active in the past twenty years on the political stage ; they have participated in mainstream moral and political debates on euthanasia, homosexuality, cloning, abortion, American wars, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Darfur genocide, and adopted diverse positions, but which are founded on Christian morality.

This strategy can motivate a political a political effort on the part of liberal and militant agnostics, but could by no means justify absolutism or anticlerical fundamentalism, a return to intolerance and the annulment of the right to equality of non-Christian minorities. Nor could it legitimize the defense of the political supremacy of cultural majorities and the ostracism of religion.

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Although the social and legal status of non-Christian minorities has become one of the most visible subjects of confrontation in this three-way fight, the main issue lies elsewhere, and most often concerns the control of the State. In the United States the Christian Right is Islamophobic, and the NGO CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) publishes nearly every morning an intolerant or racist declaration by a member of the Christian Right. Its objectives are the rejection of the most disadvantaged groups (Blacks, Chicanos, rural Whites), the primacy of the Supreme Court on Congress and the challenge of the separation of Church and State, two pillars of the American political system and two basic convictions of Liberalism. In Quebec, a number of Catholics want to exclude non-Christian minorities in the name of their national cultural heritage ; they struggle against

both liberals and atheist fundamentalists, among which are many feminist groups, who want to exclude religion in the name of so-called Quebecer values. We are faced with profound rifts where three currents of opinion and interest, by no means cohesive, clash - liberals (believers or not), traditionalist Christians and fundamentalist atheists — and the point of contention is the current restructuring of the political personnel of Quebec and its economical repositioning in a Canada which is enriched by its own mining, oil and gas resources.

These struggles should not have for collateral damage the violation of the freedom of religion and the uncompromising condemnation of religion's influence on political life. Progressive and egalitarian stances have often been adopted by religious institutions, notably Protestant (recognition of homosexuality, defense and asylum of refugees, fight against inequalities). Religious belief is considered a conviction, an opinion, and as such must remain free of expression.

CONCLUSION

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Hostility towards religious institutions and against any public role of religion arises in segments of populations which are often privileged by the political and ideological powers in place and which constitute powerful pressure groups (teachers' and public sector employees' unions, partisans and intelligentsia, feminist groups). These pressure groups understand by the religious neutrality of the State the anti-religious stance of public institutions. They advocate radical anticlericalism, even State atheism, while other pressure groups advocate the supremacy of Christian religions and the strict observance of their moral, ethical and family precepts. Muslims have become the main target of the animosity of both groups, and this double animosity is stronger in historically Catholic societies or regions and where Catholicism has historically had a strong influence. In such places, most often, the superimposition of Church and State has been historically detrimental to the development of democracy and individual freedom, and has resulted in conflicts, sometimes violent, between partisans and adversaries of the Church, as well as between fundamentalist and progressive Catholics. There, liberal currents are historically less es-

established, while antireligious currents are powerful. Such is the case in France, Spain, Quebec, Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands.

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