

# PART I

## **THE INCUBATION PERIOD: FROM CLICHY TO SARKOZY**

Between 2005 and 2012, a great change took place in French Islam. Only seven years separated the riots from the massacre perpetrated by Merah, but this very dangerous period was a time of missed opportunities. Paradoxically, the spectacular return of jihadi terrorism to France in March 2012 coincided with the beginning of a campaign that led to the election of François Hollande as president of the Republic. Hollande owed his victory in part to the fact that Muslims voted for him in large numbers. It was followed by National Assembly elections that included, for the first time, more than four hundred candidates from Muslim immigrant families. By seeking election, they declared themselves full-fledged members of the nation.

But alongside this ostensible political integration of a group previously excluded from most social institutions, an underground movement appeared. The third generation of French Islam emerged in 2004–2005, between the Stasi Commission<sup>1</sup> and the riots. This generation sought to free itself from the state supervision promulgated by former Interior minister Pierre Joxe's Council for Reflection on French Islam (Corif) and its successor, Nicolas Sarkozy's French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM); it claimed full citizenship, with the same rights enjoyed by Christians and Jews.

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<sup>1</sup>A French commission headed by Bernard Stasi that was created in 2003 to reflect on the application of the principle of secularism in France. (Not to be confused with the former East German secret police, also known as the *Stasi*.)

The decoupling of this new political citizenship from its fragile social bases, added to a fractured Islamic religious field in France, created favorable conditions for the development of what its advocates call “total” Islam. The latter offers an imaginary alternative solution to the deadlocks in society that is all the more attractive because it manages to absorb, in part, the pre-existing radical utopian ideals of both the left and the right wings. It can also serve as a substitute for them, as is shown by the unprecedented increase in conversions to Islam.

This movement has been accelerated by the changes international jihadism has undergone. In January 2005, the Syrian-Spaniard Mustafa Setmariam Nasar, alias Abu Musab al-Suri, published online *The Global Islamic Resistance Call (Da'wat al-muqawamah al-islamiyyah al-'alamiyyah)*. This 1,600-page manifesto conceived terrorism in Europe as the main vector of the battle against the West and identified the “poorly integrated” younger generation of Muslims as its preferred instrument. This text breaks with al-Qaeda’s previous strategy, in which the leaders assigned agents from the Middle East to carry out attacks on the United States; instead, it gives priority to offensives in European countries, with the intention of fomenting civil wars in order to make them implode.

These ideas slowly matured as young jihadis left Europe to be trained on battlefields in Iraq and then Afghanistan, producing the milieu from which Mohamed Merah emerged. Conversely, the political integration of young French people from Muslim immigrant families was demonstrated by their willingness to vote and run for office in March 2012, at the very time when Merah committed the massacres in Montauban and Toulouse in the name of jihad—and as an enemy of society.

It is this political integration, the key to building a pluralist French society based upon shared values, that is deeply threatened by the emergence of jihadism at its very heart.



## **2005, THE PIVOTAL YEAR**

The terrible riots that shook France in autumn 2005 and that forced the government to proclaim a state of emergency—the first since the end of the Algerian War and to be seconded as of the January 2015 jihadi attacks (still implemented until the summer of 2017)—took place in the context of deep national and international upheavals.

These riots occurred at a watershed moment when a new generation of young Muslims burst onto the scene, seizing control of the streets for three weeks in the areas where they resided. During the following decade, this irruption would take the form of both participation in elections and the assertion of Islamic identity. Many banlieues voters would register to elect thousands of officials in municipal, general, and regional councils. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, some 400 candidates out of 6,000 would be descendants of postcolonial immigrants; they were seeking, for the first time in history, to embody national sovereignty. Half a dozen of them would be elected members of Parliament, while the same number would become senators.

The riots were a rite of passage corresponding to the transition to a new age of French Islam, in which a generation born and brought up on French territory came to the foreground and shook up the Islamic institutions that had been controlled by earlier generations whose members had migrated to France from the southern or eastern Mediterranean shores and West Africa. This phenomenon occurred at the very time when the international radical Islamic movement began its own mutation. Whereas al-Qaeda had had a pyramidal structure with Osama bin Laden at the top and the United States as a target, as was shown on 9/11, the new approach was structured on a bottom-up,

network-based model. It took Europe as its primary target and sought to recruit its “soldiers” among young Muslim Europeans.

During this period, bloody attacks committed in neighboring countries, such as in the United Kingdom in 2005 and when the caricatures of the Prophet were published in a Danish newspaper, had repercussions throughout the world. These events foreshadowed what would happen ten years later on a still greater scale, first in Paris and then in Copenhagen, while ISIS was expanding in Syria and in Iraq and when thousands of young Europeans had already joined the jihad.

The complex connection between the demographic and cultural changes in Europe and the transformations of jihadism are crucial for understanding what happened during the pivotal decade extending from the riots of 2005 to the attacks carried out in 2015 by ISIS.

### **THE DOUBLE TRIGGER FOR THE RIOTS**

The most consequential outcome of the 2005 riots was that the children of postcolonial immigrants emerged as political actors. These young people took control of the streets in the banlieues to which they felt relegated. The three-week spectacle of vandalism, looting, burning of cars, and harassing of police officers sent an existential message to the rest of French society that left deep scars. However, the staging and the location of violence were carefully limited. The participants themselves restricted the violence to a register that was chiefly symbolic: between October 27 and November 18, only four deaths were associated with the events, including those of two teenagers electrocuted when taking refuge in an electrical transformer in Clichy-sous-Bois—the initial catalyst for the revolt. The riots’ consequences were mainly self-destructive and included the burning of the public infrastructure—the housing projects, schools, gymnasiums, post offices, and means of public transportation—of which the rioters were, like other inhabitants of the banlieues, the main users. The incidents spread like wildfire all over France, creating a staggering mass effect for which the media provided both a vector and an echo chamber.

The sensationalist leitmotif *Paris is burning*, frequently repeated in American newspaper headlines, was false: Paris did not burn. Not only did the police take care to keep the riots outside the capital’s beltway, but the rioters themselves proved incapable of leaving their own neighborhoods, to which the burning was limited. Contrary to what some people claimed, there was no national organization or coordination. This reactive and spontaneous movement was indefatigably fed solely

by the vagaries of its own media and television image, its passionate upsurge giving way to an equally rapid subsidence. As was explained by young people from Clichy-Montfermeil, who had been directly involved in the riots or who had witnessed them, the riots were essentially limited to a few hours after dusk. The skirmishes occurred until their instigators got tired and went to bed in the same housing projects where the fighting had taken place—sometimes right below their own windows.

Continuous reporting in the media made it seem that the action was incessant and omnipresent when in fact it was spasmodic and circumscribed. The reality of the riots was largely dissociated from the way it was presented, but the scope of the phenomenon and its excesses led to an emotional interpretation that tended to exacerbate it.

The riots had two triggers. Noting this duality allows us to gauge the gap between the reality of the events and their representation. The first trigger was the death of two teenagers, one of Malian origin and the other Tunisian, who were electrocuted on October 27 when they tried to avoid arrest by hiding in a transformer. But this tragedy led to only a momentary reaction limited to the Clichy-Montfermeil area. The second trigger occurred at nightfall three days later, when stones were thrown at the police and the latter responded with a tear gas grenade that landed at the entrance of a crowded mosque. The sight of the worshipers choking and panicking gave new impetus to a weakening movement and extended it, over the course of a few days, to the majority of the housing projects in banlieues throughout France.

However, the account of the riots produced for general public consumption included only the dramatic episode of the electrocution, whereas it was the gassing of the Bilal mosque that provided the springboard for the events and caused their stupefying spread throughout the country. The tragic deaths of the two teenagers, Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, who had not committed the burglary of which they were suspected, supplied the occasion for an emotional response that is easy to understand and identify with and that gave the revolt a moral justification. This justification proved all the more necessary when the damage reached an unprecedented level, with more than nine thousand cars burned in the course of three weeks and tens of millions of dollars in damages incurred—and the majority of the population overcome by fear and indignation.

Less than two years later, in June 2007, the trauma would win the presidency for Nicolas Sarkozy, the hardline minister of the interior

during the riots. And yet, as is shown by interviews with participants and witnesses in Clichy-Montfermeil that were published in *Banlieue de la République* (Gallimard, 2012), it was the “gassing of the mosque”—a normative Grand Narrative of the event that deprived it of its accidental character and turned it into a deliberate offensive launched by the police against Muslim worshipers—that remained the principal vector of the uprising.

In 2005, Islam was becoming an irrepressible marker of identity in the banlieues. The incident at the mosque dramatized the stakes involved at the very time when the younger generation, born in France, was competing with older generations, born and brought up in the Maghreb or the Levant, for the right to speak on behalf of Muslims. By revolting, they positioned themselves as the true defenders of the honor of their families—whose dignity, they claimed, had been deeply wounded by the profanation of their place of worship during their time of collective prayer.

As was explained by Hassan (a community activist who became a local elected official), after the spontaneous riots by the adolescent peers of Bouna and Zyed on Thursday, October 27, 2005, the situation could have been quickly calmed down by the intervention of the “elder brothers,” who organized a silent march on the following Saturday. But then came Sunday, October 30:

Things were turbulent near the Bilal mosque. Tear gas bombs were landing inside the mosque’s enclosure, and there, in fact, it wasn’t only the fifteen- to eighteen-year-olds, but all those who were peaceful! When you see your mother come out of the mosque and collapse, or your grandmother, because it was Ramadan, the sacred month, right in the middle of prayers. In these neighborhoods, the young people feel abandoned, completely neglected. It was that, not the death of Zyed and Bouna, that snowballed all over France!

Nasser, another community activist whom the media asked to speak for the young people in Clichy, and who was later a candidate in the parliamentary elections, described the tempo of the violence:

It was Ramadan, so the young people were eating, I remember, at 6:30 p.m., and then they went to where the action was, for a short time, three or four hours. Then they went home. These young people have other things to do!

Ramadan thus supplied the temporal framework for the two events that triggered the uprising: Bouna and Zyed were hurrying back to their families' apartments so as to be on time for the breaking of the fast when they were forced to take refuge in the transformer, and the worshipers had assembled in large numbers in the mosque after the *ftour* (the meal eaten at sundown during Ramadan) in order to perform the sacred month's extra prayers. But although Ramadan ended on November 2, the riots continued for another two weeks. Thus the social and collective dimensions of the event went beyond the religious context. Nonetheless, the feeling that a sacrilege had been committed by the police not only served as an initial catalyst but also provided, according to Hassan, the rational justification for the violence:

What set everything off was the attack on the mosque. What happened was not right, and what happened afterward still less: there were no apologies, nothing. People said to themselves that in France, a Muslim is worthless these days. A Muslim matters only during elections. Had it been a Jew or a synagogue, the reaction would not have been the same.

Bilal, a pious thirty-year-old computer engineer who was praying in the mosque when the tear gas bomb landed outside, constructed a vivid personal account of the event whose apologetic character seeks to rationalize the revolt's violence by putting the blame on the police:

The women who were upstairs [in the mosque, in the area reserved for women] were poisoned by the grenades that were thrown outside. I was crying. People said: it's war. The guns they used to shoot their tear gas bombs looked like military rifles. It was scary to be facing them.

For Hamza, a Turk and an Islamic activist who was also present at the mosque and who stated that he "had tried hard to calm the young people who were throwing rocks," the atmosphere of war made his mediation impossible. He even situated the confrontations in the context of the conflict between Palestinian Muslims and Israel as it was seen on television:

Bringing in helicopters over the housing blocks automatically made people think of Palestine. That was what one heard most often: "Look, this must be what our Palestinian brothers have to endure!"

## FROM PROFANATION TO BLASPHEMY

The rationalization of the revolt as a reaction to the deliberate profanation of an Islamic place of worship by the state and its police force was facilitated by the international political context in which it occurred. However, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not the only international conflict that added fuel to the fire. In Denmark, on September 30, 2005, one month before the events in Clichy-Montfermeil, the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a series of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in reaction to what its editors saw as a trend toward self-censorship within the media on issues related to Islam.

This initiative sought to respond to the trauma arising from the assassination of the film director Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam a year earlier. He had made a short film entitled *Submission*, echoing the meaning of the Arabic term *islam*. (French novelist Michel Houellebecq would give the same title to his famed novel published on January 7, 2015, the day of the massacre at *Charlie Hebdo*.) In the film, Quranic verses are projected onto a nude female body—verses that Van Gogh and his scriptwriter, Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somalia-born atheist and erstwhile Muslim, considered hostile to the cause of women. Van Gogh was attacked and his throat cut on the street by a twenty-seven-year-old Netherlander of Moroccan ancestry. This event deeply upset the Netherlands, which had up to that point advocated unlimited multiculturalism. Moreover, French Jacobinism had been scorned there, especially after the Stasi Commission<sup>1</sup> recommended that conspicuous religious signs be prohibited in the schools, a recommendation that was made law on March 15, 2004.

The outraged reaction to the blasphemy against the Prophet's person in the *Jyllands-Posten*, publicized in the Muslim world by Danish Islamists, won the support of certain governments in the Middle East. The latter did not share the Islamists' ideology but nonetheless feared being accused of not having defended Islam with sufficient vigor. This kind of worldwide campaign, heightened by the media in the region,

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<sup>1</sup>Named after Bernard Stasi, its president, this commission of "wise people" had been convened by president Jacques Chirac in 2003 to debate the threats against laïcité (secularism) that were posed mainly by Salafist attempts at making Islamic mores norms that would tamper French law. It recommended the banning of "ostentatious religious garments" in schools funded by taxpayers, in line with the French constitution's wall of separation between church and state. A law to that effect was passed in March 2014.

carried the concept of “Islamophobia” far beyond the Salafists’ and the Muslim Brotherhood’s usual networks. Let us note that it was the latter that publicized the term *Islamophobia* in the 1990s in an attempt to criminalize any criticism of the religious dogma they championed while at the same time constructing a specious symmetry with anti-Semitism so as to benefit from the moral dividends of victimization and turn them against Israel and Zionism.

The polemic surrounding the offense against Muhammad in contemporary Europe was not new. The 2006 campaign was in many respects a reprise of the one dramatized by Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini’s fatwa condemning Salman Rushdie to death, issued on February 14, 1989, for what the Ayatollah considered an insult to the Prophet in the British writer’s novel *The Satanic Verses*. At the time, Khomeini was trying to make himself the champion of universal Islam, although he exercised authority over only the Shiite minority to which he belonged, which still amounts to only about 15 percent of the world’s Muslim population. Since a fatwa’s death sentence is applicable only in the “land of Islam” (*Dar al-Islam*), this call for murder symbolically extended that realm to include Europe. This fatwa was followed by many others, issued and sometimes executed by Sunni jihadis, as was tragically demonstrated by the slaughter at *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7, 2015.

Fifteen years after Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa on Valentine’s Day 1989, the Danish affair in 2005–2006, which also focused on the issue of blasphemy, rapidly became the subject of intra-Islamic competition. Initiated by Sunni Islamists, it was immediately picked up by that group’s major media figures, notably Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Egyptian who was a naturalized Qatari as well as the principal preacher on the Al-Jazeera television channel. He did all he could to make a worldwide cause of the caricatures that had appeared in *Jyllands-Posten*—a cause of which he proclaimed himself the knight in shining armor. Tehran went him one better by electing as president the radical Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who used provocation of the West as a mode of government and who made himself famous by proposing to wipe Israel off the map.

Cutting the ground out from under his Sunni rivals just as Ruhollah Khomeini had, Mahmud Ahmadinejad announced that Iran would organize an international contest for the best caricatures of the Holocaust as a response to the Danish drawings. By so doing, he intended to deride the Holocaust in the same way the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons had mocked the Prophet. Though the Holocaust is sacrosanct in the West, public opinion and media in the Muslim world—including some

young Muslims in the West—see it as the foundational Zionist myth, which allowed the creation of the hated state of Israel. By means of this symmetrical outrage, the Iranian leader was seeking to regain ideological control over the Ummah, the international Islamic community, whose spiritual borders he extended from the Persian Gulf to Clichy-Montfermeil and Denmark. He found a henchman in Europe who echoed his sarcastic way of expressing hatred for Zionism in the person of the French humorist Dieudonné, who was to have a bright future that would involve the weaving of an improbable alliance between some of Islam's radical tendencies and extreme right-wing politics.

### THE EPOCHAL CHANGE OF FRENCH ISLAM

The magnitude of the international Islamic campaign against Denmark led some European periodicals to reprint, out of solidarity and in order to defend freedom of expression, the cartoons that had appeared in *Jyllands-Posten*. Among these reprints was the February 8, 2006, issue of *Charlie Hebdo*, a weekly whose editorial team was to pay the price in blood nine years later, on January 7, 2015, during the massacre perpetrated at its offices by the Kouachi brothers, who cried “Allahu akbar!” and “The Prophet is avenged!” *Charlie Hebdo*, a satirical paper whose dated sense of humor and commercial model were losing it readership, nonetheless sold half a million copies of this special issue in 2006. (The circulation of the issue that followed the attacks in 2015 exceeded seven million.) After it republished the Muhammad cartoons, the periodical was immediately taken to court by the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), whose complaint was ultimately dismissed in the name of freedom of expression and because the secular republic did not recognize a juridical concept of blasphemy.

Similarly, the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF), which had issued a fatwa urging young Muslims to cease engaging in violence during the riots, had little effect. Although it denounced “an irresponsible act against the mosque of Clichy-sous-Bois at a time of prayer,” it cited the Quran as authority for its fatwa: “Allah does not like those who sow disorder.” The organization stated:

It is strictly forbidden for any Muslim seeking divine satisfaction and glory to participate in any action that blindly attacks private or public goods or that might endanger others' lives. Contributing to these actions is an illicit act [*haram*].

Not only did the fatwa have no impact, but rather, on the following day, November 7, the number of vehicles burned (1,408), persons arrested (395), and policemen wounded (35) reached record highs for a single day. What's more, the riots continued for another dozen days. November 7 marked the definitive end to the preponderant influence the UOIF had gained since the first "veil affair" in a middle school in Creil, in autumn 1989, in which it had played an incendiary role. The baton was passed to young people born in France—the children of the immigrant workers, or *darons*, who had been the first Islamic generation in France.

During the difficult period before 1989, this first generation focused its activity on building mosques. The vast majority of Muslim immigrants then were neither French citizens nor voters and had no influence on the granting of construction permits by municipal authorities. After 1989, they were marginalized by the Brothers and the *blédards* who constituted the second generation, most of whom did not have French citizenship either. This second generation targeted very young people born and educated in France, seeking to inculcate in them rigorous Islamic principles and thereby counter the effects of the public school system's assimilationist education. The main theme of this shift in values was the demand that girls be allowed to wear the hijab in class. This was a recurrent irritant from 1989 on, and in the absence of legislation addressing the issue, multiple complaints brought before administrative tribunals and the Council of State complicated life in the schools.

The law of March 15, 2004, enacted as a follow-up to the Stasi Commission, put an end to the dispute and to Islamists' legal challenges. By depriving the UOIF of its main legal and political leverage, this effectively destroyed its ascendancy. Up to that point, the organization had maintained a sense of agitation and victimhood from which it benefited by presenting itself, in the eyes of its flock, as the advocate of its threatened Islamic identity and, in the eyes of the government, as the manager of a community defined within the nation by its particular religious values. This abrupt loss of influence occurred at the very time when a demographic and social mutation was taking place: the coming of age of the third generation, whose members, the descendants of postcolonial immigrants, had been born soon after the March of the Beurs in 1983.

The law prohibiting the wearing of the hijab at school preceded the riots of 2005 by only one year. This law also marked the shift of

the center of gravity of French Islam from the UOIF to the banlieues and from the *blédards* to the “youth,” as the discourse of the media described it from the outside. A number of these young people liked to use terms from *verlan* (a type of French slang that involves inverting the syllables of words) when they self-identified, calling themselves *rebeus* (Arabs), *renois* (noirs), or even *keblas* (blacks) and *keturs* (Turks), and thereby bringing the native language of the suburban projects into the public sphere, reversing its stigma. An increasing number of young *céfrans* (white French people) who had converted to Islam were involved in this development. Compared with their Muslim counterparts, who had been influenced by a conspicuous and strongly proselytizing re-Islamization movement, spearheaded by the Salafists, the *céfrans* were a minority in the housing projects. As we shall see, they would find it difficult to resist this socioreligious pressure.

But the young people who were front and center on the Muslim scene starting in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century were not limited to this neglected group. Elites emerged by pursuing educational paths that were far superior to those of their parents’ generation and that led to high school and college degrees. Some members of these elites chose to become public servants, and some were initially associated with left-wing parties favoring a model of social redistribution that was part of the working-class tradition. However, the new development that put its stamp on the first decade of the twenty-first century was the arrival of a class of young entrepreneurs who had emerged from immigrant backgrounds and who were more open to the market and to right-wing values.

Of course, among them we find individuals who wanted to pursue careers that followed the conventional path of the republican meritocracy through which the preceding generations of immigrants had passed. In the course of this social ascension, these children of southern and eastern Europe had diluted their inherited identity, merging with the broader French identity and contributing to it. But what has been unprecedented has been the emergence of a new type of entrepreneur seeking to emphasize the identity of Islamic community with a view to gaining control over supposedly captive market shares. These businessmen, who can be figuratively described as “halal entrepreneurs,” have played a major political role since 2005.

The great shift in French Islam in 2004–2005, during the period separating the law prohibiting the conspicuous display of religious symbols in the schools from the riots, had a series of notable consequences. In place of the institutions set up by the state since 1989 to

provide for representation, which had failed to influence the young, a profusion of grassroots initiatives arose—some from associations, some from well-known individuals, some from mosques, and others from various interest groups. For the first time in the short history of Islam of France, the great majority of the social actors were French citizens who had been brought up, if not born, in France and whose native language was French. It was on the basis of their citizenship—whose ethical value and duties some contested even as they claimed the rights it conferred—that a series of demands were beginning to be formulated in the public sphere.

These demands range from strict respect for halal, whether in the domain of food or the choice of marriage partners, to the opening of private Muslim schools in which wearing the hijab is permitted and in which the teaching of “gender theory” is prohibited. These demands are pursued by lobbies that negotiate with candidates in elections, offering their support in exchange for a commitment to defend various Islamic causes. Whatever their specific orientation, most of these initiatives involve consumer pressure groups focusing on issues ranging from ritually slaughtered meat to education and voting. In this sense, the young citizens who participate in these groups are now taking a symbolic revenge, in the area of halal consumption in its broader meaning, for the situation in which France put many of their parents, who were excluded from the labor market after the crisis of the 1970s and who experienced widespread and extended unemployment.

This new generation, which consists of French citizens brought up in the world of the banlieues’ housing projects, has found in the Internet a privileged way of expressing and propagating its values. These values combine the search for an all-encompassing conception of Islam inspired by the Salafism of the Arabian Peninsula and a fervent consultation of a digital “Islamosphere” full of norms and injunctions breaking with the “infidel” model of the West. This digital tool and the connections outside France to which it gives instantaneous access lead to the drawing of an increasingly sharp borderline between the spheres of the halal (licit, authorized) and the haram (illicit, forbidden). It favors the ambitions of associative or entrepreneurial networks, active in society as well as in cyberspace, that aspire to exercise religious, cultural, and political hegemony over young people.

The extension of these networks has been further increased by lightning-fast developments in the digital world. The Web 2.0 revolution, which occurred between 2005 and 2015, facilitated the construction of virtual communities through YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

It was by this means that the third generation of Islam of France—which became active, as we have seen, after the riots of 2005—came into direct contact with the third wave of jihadism. This jihad movement began to take form in the same year, after the online publication of the founding work of its main ideologue, Abu Musab al-Suri, entitled *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*.

This coincidence of social change in the banlieues' housing projects, the shift of generation in the leaders of French Islam, and the transformations of international jihadism's ideology looks like a perfect storm. Nonetheless, it was this coincidence that, through the social networks that were then emerging, produced the hybridization from which would emerge, ten years later, the cohorts of French jihadis enraptured by the battlefields in Syria and Iraq. By autumn 2015, more than a hundred and fifty of them had already died there, not counting those who followed the examples of Mohamed Merah, Chérif and Saïd Kouachi, Amedy Coulibaly, and Abdelhamid Abaaoud, perpetrating attacks on French territory or assassinations inspired by that ideology.

This latter phenomenon is obviously extremely limited in comparison with the number of people involved in the riots of 2005. Moreover, it represents only an extremist by-product of this third generation of Islam of France that has established itself in the meantime and that has taken various other forms of expression, as we shall see. But its spectacular character, its violence, and the forms of cultural hegemony that it has constructed in certain strata of the population, not to mention the perverse globalization that it illustrates, all give it an emblematic quality.

This requires us to identify precisely the context in which this phenomenon emerged, and neither to exaggerate nor to belittle its true significance. The paradoxical connection between these two spheres—the Islam of France in the banlieues on one side of the Mediterranean, and North Africa and the Middle East caught up in chaos on the other side—has produced the new dialectic of jihadism.

## THE DIALECTIC OF JIHADISM

In January 2005, the 1,600 pages of *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* were made available online. This mixture of activists' encyclopedia and instruction manual for third-generation jihad was written by al-Suri, a naturalized Spanish engineer then in his forties, and it would put its stamp on the decade that followed.

Drawing up a balance sheet of international jihad successes and failures over the past quarter of a century, the text elaborates a dialectic of the movement that sounds almost Hegelian. According to al-Suri, everything begins with the “moment of affirmation” corresponding to the victorious Afghan jihad of the 1980s and then to its fruitless sequels in Algeria, Egypt, and Bosnia in the 1990s. It was followed by a second phase—that of al-Qaeda, symbolized by September 11, 2001.

This latter is the “moment of negation.” Osama bin Laden and his organization turned away from armed jihad against the nearby enemy (*al ‘adu al qarib*), which had led to the sterile guerrilla wars that had concluded the first phase. For it they substituted spectacular actions against the faraway American enemy (*al ‘adu al baid*), which were intended to weaken it and expose it, in the eyes of the Muslim masses, as a colossus whose feet were of clay. But according to al-Suri, this second phase also led to a failure, because al-Qaeda’s business model (based on terrorism alone, with satellite television, especially Al-Jazeera, as its vector) had no concrete expression among Muslim populations. The attacks that followed September 11, until the bombings in London of July 2005, merely exhausted its substance without triggering a popular mobilization.

*The Global Islamic Resistance Call* was situated at this historical juncture. It theorized a third wave to come, which in its quasi-Hegelian dialectic would correspond to the “negation of the negation”—that is, to its “transcendence” (*Aufhebung*). For al-Qaeda’s pyramidal organization, which was not integrated into society, Al-Suri substituted a jihadism of proximity, based on a network-based system penetrating the enemy societies to be overthrown from the bottom up rather than from the top down. The spectacular attack on America was dismissed as the hubris of an Osama bin Laden intoxicated by his own image in the media. According to al-Suri, September 11 merely succeeded in giving George W. Bush an opportunity to destroy al-Qaeda’s infrastructure.

Instead, the Syrian ideologue advocated civil war in Europe, drawing on poorly integrated, rebellious young Muslims of immigrant descent after they had been suitably indoctrinated and trained militarily on a nearby battlefield. This was supposed to be how the final dislocation of the West would begin, paving the way for the worldwide triumph of Islamism. Such a “rhizomatic” jihadism, which passes below the enemy’s radar and turns its own adopted or natural children against it, is constructed in opposition to the centralized, almost Leninist model implemented by Bin Laden. Al-Suri summed up his program

in a formula that flourished in the jihadosphere: *Nizam, la tanzim* (“a system, not an organization”).

Having been posted on the Internet in January 2005, when al-Suri, hidden in Baluchistan, the vast tribal region on the western borders of Pakistan was fleeing the American army’s offensive against al-Qaeda before his eventual capture. A decade later, in 2015, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* appeared to be a visionary text. Even before it served as a literal instruction manual for terrorist activities, from Mohamed Merah to Abdelhamid Abaaoud, it was available, in PDF form and in both Arabic and English, on the Facebook pages of French, European, and Arab jihadis who had gone to Syria. Its importance was shown in 2008 by the Norwegian orientalist Brynjar Lia in a monograph entitled *Architect of Global Jihad*, as well as by my own book, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom*. These works received little attention; the *Call*, which is long and difficult to read as a whole, was thought to be merely a jumble of wild theoretical imaginings whose reticular strategy would have no foreseeable practical effect.

However, it must be admitted that the “phase of transcendence” prophesied by al-Suri corresponds exactly to what gradually transpired during the decade following the publication of the *Call*. Two phenomena proved crucial to its realization. First was the concomitant appearance of social networking sites. (For example, the YouTube domain name was registered on February 14, 2005, a month after the *Call* was posted online.) These sites quickly became the vector par excellence for third-generation jihadi indoctrination, just as satellite television stations like Al-Jazeera had been for the second generation and faxes had been for the first generation. However, Western intelligence services failed to recognize in time this mode of radicalization, which relied on the sharing of images and other digital content in a virtual universe, and instead remained focused on the surveillance within mosques of activists linked to al-Qaeda.

In France in particular, this surveillance was successful—up to a point. It made possible the neutralization of the Franco-Algerian Khaled Kelkal and the terrorist network responsible for the Islamist attacks carried out in 1995—and then the preventive arrest of his compatriot Djamel Beghal in 2001, before he could blow up the U.S. embassy in Paris. And it was also this surveillance that led in 2005 to the dismantling of the “Buttes-Chaumont jihadi network,” which was sending young Parisian recruits to al-Qaeda in U.S.-invaded Iraq. Thus the country remained under tight security until March 2012, when those who had considered al-Suri’s *Call* to be of negligible importance

were caught off guard by the carnage perpetrated by another Franco-Algerian, this time equipped with a GoPro camera: Mohamed Merah.

The second phenomenon that facilitated al-Suri's schema was the occurrence of the Arab "Spring" and then, especially, its chaotic collapse from 2012–2013 on, particularly in Syria and Libya. These upheavals created an exceptional site for military training and propaganda only a few hours' flight from Europe, and at a very low cost. Young Europeans who came from postcolonial immigration backgrounds or who had recently been converted to radical Islam through social media networks could realize the fantasy of a "total Islam." Slaughtering "infidels" and other "apostates" in the same way that they killed player avatars on their PlayStations, confounding the virtual world with the real one in an Ummah without territorial borders, posting images online in order to terrorize the enemy and galvanize sympathizers, they connected the terrains of Middle Eastern jihad with the banlieues of Europe. And some of them returned to the Old Continent to continue their murderous mission there, thus giving concrete form to the vision formulated in the *Call* in January 2005.

Al-Suri wrote his text on the basis of lessons drawn from his experience during more than three decades of activism. This red-haired jihadi, born in 1958 to an old aristocratic family from Aleppo, learned his trade from the Muslim Brotherhood in his country and during the Afghan jihad of the 1980s. He knew Europe well, having lived there for several years; he began by studying to be an engineer in France and then became a naturalized Spanish citizen through marriage.

During the 1990s, al-Suri found refuge in the Islamist networks of London (nicknamed "Londonistan"), clustered particularly around the Finsbury Park mosque. At that time the United Kingdom was generously granting asylum to jihadis from the Arab world—who after the establishment of the Taliban regime in 1996 would return to Afghanistan to join forces with Osama bin Laden. Al-Suri won a flattering reputation by sending, from London, a magazine entitled *Al-Ansar* and by providing support to the Groupe islamique armé (GIA; known in English as the Armed Islamic Group) in Algeria. In the years before the use of e-mail became widespread, this statement was faxed to the main radical mosques throughout the world in order to spread the cause of jihad in Algeria and to situate it in tradition of the triumph of jihad in Afghanistan during the 1980s.

After his return to Kandahar around 1997, al-Suri served as a public relations officer for the head of al-Qaeda, for which he organized meetings with foreign journalists. Thus he was associated with the

leadership of the second wave of jihadism after having participated in various stages of the first wave, from Afghanistan to Londonistan. He experienced the excitement of the Afghan battle, which forced the Red Army to withdraw from Kabul in February 1989, and saw its victors persuade themselves that they had played a decisive role in the fall of the USSR, of which the destruction of the Berlin Wall a few months later remains the symbol.

In the Islamist worldview, the only history of humanity is that of the Revelation and its accomplishment. If the world is not yet entirely Muslim, that is the fault of tepid believers who turned away from doctrinal rectitude. As the Egyptian Sayyid Qotb (the Islamists' principal mentor, who was hanged by Nasser in 1966) explained, it is up to believers to constitute a "new Quranic generation." After centuries of decadence when Muslims were lukewarm in their political and religious zeal, the new generation must take up the cause where the contemporaries and successors of the Prophet (the *salafs*) left it.

For Bin Laden and his doctrinal brothers, the fall of the USSR was the modern analogue of the collapse of the Sassanid Empire (the last pre-Islamic Persian empire) in the first decades of Islam's existence. That having been accomplished, Bin Laden urged Muslims to destroy the other impious superpower, America, just as they had captured Byzantium by multiplying raids on Constantinople until it was finally seized in 1453. Although it took centuries for the Greek Empire to fall, the apocalyptic acceleration of time, he claimed, would bring about the destruction of its current equivalent much more quickly.

The "twofold blessed raid" of September 11 was situated in a similar cosmology. According to al-Suri and his comrades in combat, the jihadis embodied the "spirit of the time," the Hegelian *Zeitgeist*. They were convinced that their Afghan apotheosis could be easily duplicated on other battlefields: in Egypt, in Algeria, and also in Chechnya, areas from which several hundred members of these international brigades hailed. In Bosnia, they thought they could transform the civil war that followed the collapse of Yugoslavia into a jihad that would allow them to gain a foothold in Europe.

These dreams were not realized. In the euphoria of the victory in Kabul, the jihadis forgot that they owed their military superiority over the Red Army to Stinger surface-to-air missiles provided by the CIA and that the Islamic *casus belli* constituted by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was an idea more productive for recruiting militants than for overthrowing governments that had Islamic legitimacy, like those in Egypt and Algeria.

The Dayton Accords of December 1995 marked the end of the war in Bosnia, forcing the jihadis to leave. In autumn 1997, the Egyptian and Algerian jihads, which caused about ten thousand and a hundred thousand deaths, respectively, turned into massacres of civilians. The very populations that militants were trying to mobilize to bring down the “apostate” regimes in Cairo and Algiers turned against them. However, al-Suri initially made himself the publicist par excellence for the GIA, justifying the rectitude of its actions by reference to its goal even as the group’s image was being tarnished by suspicions that it had been infiltrated by the Algerian secret services—suspicions that led its members to tear each other to shreds and to massacre civilians. However, al-Suri himself finally became disillusioned with the group and left Londonistan for Kandahar. There, protected by the sympathetic Taliban regime, he worked alongside Osama bin Laden in the elaboration of the doctrine of the second wave, that of al-Qaeda, until he moved beyond it in his own writings of 2005.

### **JIHAD’S FIRST TERRAINS**

During the first phase of jihadism, young Frenchmen had already left for the battlefields; sometimes they had humanitarian intentions, but subsequently they got involved in armed Islamism. In Alsace and the Lyon region, the war in Afghanistan was a catalyst for the Islamization of people who had become disillusioned with the antiracist *beur* movement of the 1980s. The conflict was also a factor in the conversion of the first young *céfrans*. When these converts returned to Europe, they became the contingent of radicals within a community of converts that had up to that point been dominated by older Sufi intellectuals. The gang of Islamist hold-up men in Roubaix, whose hideout was stormed by the police on March 28, 1996, was partially composed of jihadis who had fought in Bosnia. The ringleaders, two converts from northern France—one of whom would be killed by the Belgian police—tried in vain to relight the flame of jihad in France itself after returning from Bosnia.

For its part, the jihad in Algeria awakened considerable sympathy among young French people whose families had emigrated from that country. Even before terrorist activity shifted to France proper, there was ample evidence of support for the movement in France. The various bulletins issued by the *Fraternité algérienne en France* (FAF, or Algerian Brotherhood in France), which were regularly banned by the ministry of the interior; the meetings expressing support for the

movement (notably, again, in Roubaix); and the collection of funds all testify to this sympathy. The hijacking of an Airbus plane flying from Paris to Algiers shortly before Christmas 1994, and then the attacks carried out in the following summer and autumn, which killed eight and wounded 175, are attributed by most observers to the GIA, led by Djamel Zitouni, alias Abu Abderahmane Amine. Its main operative on French soil was Khaled Kelkal, from Lyon, who was killed by the police on September 29, 1995.

Contrary to what was to be seen twenty years later, the cycle of violence in which Kelkal was the main figure—along with a small band of petty delinquents from the banlieues housing projects—found only scant support in groups descended from postcolonial Algerian immigration. The generation of the *darons* (fathers) still had a strong grip on the “Algerian colony in France,” as it has been called by its great sociologist, Abdelmalek Sayad. These immigrant workers, who labored mightily to build a future for their children, invested in real estate, and endured xenophobia and unemployment, could not accept seeing decades of hard work and saving destroyed by the acts of a few young fanatics.

For their part, the Muslim Brotherhood’s *blédards*, who dominated the Islamic institutions created by the state from 1989 on, did not approve of these terrorists, who threatened the Brotherhood’s control over these institutions. These terrorists showed that the communal hegemony of which UOIF boasted to successive governments remained deficient. Finally, specialized police forces recruited numerous Arab-speaking officers who had been trained by French universities and who were well acquainted with the Islamist movement’s networks, particularly through surveillance of radical preachers.

After the executions of Khaled Kelkal in the Lyon banlieues and, on March 29, 1996, of Christophe Caze from Roubaix, there were no more attacks connected with Islamist terrorism on French soil until those perpetrated by Mohamed Merah in March 2012. This sixteen-year period of domestic peace is rightly attributed to the reorganization of French intelligence services, but it was also the result of the supervision exercised by the generation of the *darons*.

For France, the second wave of the jihadi dialectic, that of al-Qaeda, was thus not directly manifested by violence within it. A few young French citizens of North African heritage were in fact arrested in Afghanistan or Pakistan after the Western offensive against the Taliban and al-Qaeda after September 11, 2001, and incarcerated at Guantánamo, but their influence remained limited, and their cause did not

mobilize much support. The attacks carried out in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005 had no equivalents in France.

### THE PRISON INCUBATOR

Al-Qaeda's only large-scale operation planned to be carried out on French soil in the wake of the second phase of jihadism came to light in 2001. The Franco-Algerian Djamel Beghal was intercepted as he was returning from the organization's Afghan camps to prepare an attack on the U.S. embassy. To realize his goal, he had to rely on a complex network, whose members were subsequently arrested in various European countries. These preventive arrests were made possible by surveillance techniques and by the lessons learned from the battle waged in France in the 1990s against the Algerian GIA, with which Djamel Beghal had been associated.

Djamel Beghal was incarcerated until 2009 and then put under house arrest in the Cantal region of France because he could not be expelled legally to Algeria; he was imprisoned once more in 2010 and remains so. Even though he was put out of circulation, he embodies the transition between the second and third phases of jihadism. A pure product of al-Qaeda—a rare case for a Frenchman—his planned action in Paris was conceived as a continuation of the September 11 attacks. It was in the Fleury-Mérogis prison that he met Chérif Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly, the future killers in the January 2015 attacks, who were being held there as well.

Chérif Kouachi was part of a network established in Paris's nineteenth arrondissement. Its goal was to send young, radicalized Salafists to the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda commanded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, which was fighting the coalition army led by the United States in Iraq. This network was dismantled by the police in January 2005, the same month that al-Suri's *Call* was posted online. It was nicknamed "the Buttes-Chaumont Islamist network" because apprentice jihadis jogged in the Buttes-Chaumont park in northern Paris to prepare themselves for future combat.

Their mentor, Farid Benyettou, was a Franco-Algerian preacher. Only twenty-four years old in 2005, he had been born in Paris on May 10, 1981, the day a Socialist president was elected. This improbable child of the "Mitterrand generation"<sup>2</sup> was also and especially a

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<sup>2</sup>The generation that was young during François Mitterrand's presidency (1980–1995).

spiritual son of the Algerian jihad. After losing his father at age sixteen, he was educated in this form of Islamism by his brother-in-law Youssef Zemmouri, a former activist in the Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat (GSPC; Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) who had taken refuge in France in 1997 after the Islamist massacres in Algeria that hastened its defeat.

Arrested and imprisoned in France for having fomented an attack during the World Cup soccer competition in 1998 (which was won by the French team led by Zinédine Zidane, who is also of Algerian descent), Zemmouri was expelled from the country in 2004 after he was released from prison. The GSPC, one of the products of the disintegration of Algerian jihad, was to give birth in 2007 to al-Qaida au Maghreb Islamique (Aqmi, or al-Qaeda in Islamic North Africa), the North African and Sahelian franchise of Bin Laden's organization, some of whose members later pledged allegiance to ISIS.

Farid Benyettou recruited his followers by means of Salafist teachings he communicated to certain worshipers at the Adda'wa mosque in Paris, the best-attended in Europe at that time. Known as the "Stalingrad mosque," it was situated in a former textile depot near the Stalingrad metro station, but it was closed for renovation in 2006. Benyettou, who had a vast knowledge of Arab-Islamic culture, had great influence on young people who had only an elementary education. Making headlines, he led the street prayers that accompanied the demonstration of January 17, 2004, protesting the Stasi Commission's proposal to forbid the wearing of ostentatious religious symbols in public schools and in private schools under contract with the ministry of education. Organized by a nebulous "Muslim Party of France," the demonstration sought to radicalize the opposition to the "veil law" by going the UOIF one better.

The Buttes-Chaumont network was prosecuted in 2008 on the charge of being an "association of criminals associated with a terrorist undertaking." Benyettou was accused of having played a decisive role in the departure for Iraq of about a dozen young people, three of whom died there. The other important member of the network was Boubaker al-Hakim, alias Abu Mouqatel, who was in Iraq as early as 2003. From Damascus, where he was receiving Islamic training, he arranged for the entry of combatants into Iraq. Among them was his younger brother Redouane, alias Abu Abdallah, who died "as a martyr" in Fallujah during a suicide attack on the American army. Shortly before his death, Redouane made the following statement, dated March 18, 2003, to a French journalist he had met in Iraq:

I'm from the nineteenth arrondissement in Paris! We're going to kill everyone who wants to kill Islam! I tell all my friends from the nineteenth: come join the jihad, I'm here, it's me, Abu Abdallah, all my friends who are over there, come defend Islam! The Americans are all faggots and clowns, nothing at all. We know they're scared. They fight with their planes. They have to be told! Let them come at us on the ground, let them fight us, with guns. . . . If they come like that, in two hours we'll have destroyed them, all the Americans. I'm ready to fight in the front line, I'm even ready to blow myself up, strap on sticks of dynamite, and then [shouting] Boom! Boom! We'll kill all the Americans. [Chanting in a North African rhythm] We're the Mujahedeen! We want to die! We want to go to Paradise!

After being imprisoned in France from 2005 to 2011, Boubaker al-Hakim returned to Tunisia and then joined the international jihad, playing leading roles on both stages. In a video posted in December 2014, he took responsibility for the July 2013 assassination of Mohamed Brahmi, the secular Tunisian Member of Parliament from Sidi Bouzid, the cradle of Arab revolutions. In March 2015, in the eighth issue of ISIS's Anglophone online magazine *Dabiq*, he boasted that he had riddled Brahmi with bullets. He went on to outline his whole career, from his enrollment in the precursor of ISIS in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's movement, up to his imprisonment in France, and he gave his opinion about the present outlook for jihad in France.

In this article, one of the movement's most important activists explains with great clarity his journey, between 2005 and 2015, from Buttes-Chaumont to Iraq and Syria by way of Tunisia:

Prison was hard. We were humiliated by those infidels [*kuffar*], but at the same time it was a marvelous gateway for calling people to Allah and explaining His path to the young prisoners. Glory be to Allah! Today, I say to my Brothers in France: don't look for specific targets, kill anyone at all! All the infidels back there are targets. And I tell the *kuffar*, soon, Allah willing, you will see the flag of *La ilah illa Allah* ["There is no God but Allah," ISIS's banner] flying over the Élysée Palace. The Islamic State is now very close. Between us and you there's only the sea. And Allah willing, we will sell your women and your children in the markets of the Islamic State!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Boubaker al-Hakim was killed by an American drone on Islamic State territory in November 2016.

Chérif Kouachi, the future killer at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, was arrested by the French police in January 2005, as he was about to board a plane for Damascus with the intention of going to Iraq. At that point he was simply a potential soldier for this jihad. Farid Benyettou, in the numerous statements he made to the press in early 2015 to testify to his own repentance, did not conceal Chérif Kouachi's low intellectual level and his simplistic violence. During Kouachi's incarceration in Fleury-Mérogis, he met Djamel Beghal, who enjoyed the prestige of having passed through the camps in Afghanistan. It was this meeting that was to transform an apprentice jihadi seeking martyrdom in Iraq into the perpetrator of attacks in Paris ten years later, on January 7, 2015.

In addition, Amedy Coulibaly, who in 2005 was also imprisoned in Fleury-Mérogis for robberies in the southern banlieues of Paris, was also in contact with Djamel Beghal.

Although between 1996 and 2012 France enjoyed genuine security, from 2005 on, the Fleury-Mérogis detention center served as an incubator for a new kind of attack that was implemented starting in 2012. The prison put in contact individuals from different backgrounds, such as Djamel Beghal, with his aura of an international jihadi and his knowledge of al-Qaeda; Chérif Kouachi, an apprentice jihadi whose tendencies were strengthened by Beghal's example; and Amedy Coulibaly, a petty criminal who, like many others, discovered in prison a redemptive radical Islamism into which he threw himself headlong.

The ground was being prepared for the sowing of the ideas of Abu Musab al-Suri, which targeted vulnerable young European Muslims like Kouachi and Coulibaly. Benyettou, arrested in January 2005, at the same time that al-Suri posted his *Call* on the Internet, was the last of the flesh-and-blood preachers whom traditional surveillance by the secret services was capable of detecting. The following years were to be those of the cyber-jihad that took form on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

Just as the intelligence community missed the transformation of jihadism into its third generation after 2005, the French authorities failed to see what was going on behind bars—where the drifting away of the impoverished housing projects of the banlieues was being exacerbated and crystallized. In his *Islam in Prison*, published in 2015 after the Paris attacks, Mohamed Oueslati, a jurist and Muslim chaplain since 2001, notes that in French jails, “Islam has become the primary religion.” He estimates that Muslims constitute between half and two-thirds of the inmates, depending on the prison. According to him, they

have “the same characteristics as other prisoners: rather young, little educated, from poor, broken families.”

Oueslati rapidly identified the causes of religious radicalization in prisons, which is facilitated by lack of privacy and the prisoners’ psychological vulnerability. They often fall under the influence of “self-proclaimed imams” who preach “war and violence.” In addition, there is the reinterpretation of television news through the prism of their situation: “The West mistreats Muslim countries, seeks to annihilate them. Then they [the prisoners] perceive an echo of what they have experienced [. . . and] say to themselves that others are experiencing it in a certain way [. . .]. They imagine that their religion is a battle, a war to be waged to defend its principles and establish it. That is how, for someone who wants to be a good Muslim, violence becomes the royal road.”

Although the phenomenon was pointed out over a decade ago in pioneering works such as those of the sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L’Islam dans les prisons (Islam in Jails)* and *Quand al-Qaida parle: témoignages derrière les barreaux (When al-Qaeda Speaks: Testimonies behind Bars)*, the state proved incapable of gauging its importance. Over the following years, a high price was to be paid for this blindness.