

DAUGHTERS OF FRANCE, DAUGHTERS OF ALLAH

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From news reports, it may have seemed that the greatest threat to France's secular values was Islamic headscarves in public schools. But thousands of the French girls wearing the scarf are trapped in strict Muslim families, forced into marriage, and brutalized for seeking the freedoms all around them.

I really want to thank you for listening to me. The silence is a summation. To speak is very, very difficult. I hope that other young girls find the courage to speak out and to get their freedom to live in another way." The text message on my cell phone, literally translated from the French, had no sender's name, but I knew it was from Yildiz, the young woman I had met the night before in a bleak area on the outskirts of Paris. (Her name has been changed.) Just a few miles from the outlet malls, the area is part of the hidden world of the City of Lights, a dim, desolate substratum of forlorn cités, or housing projects, situated off the Périphérique Extérieur, the highway marking the border of Paris. Forty years ago, faced with a postwar labor shortage, France built these fortresses to house the thousands of Muslim immigrants from Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco, and Algeria allowed into the country to sweep streets and work in factories. The city planners calculated on keeping this uneducated labor force at a safe distance from Paris itself. Later, as France's economy sagged, the jobs disappeared and crime rates soared. After the World Trade Center attack, Frenchmen began to speak of the "benladenisation" of the outskirts. The accused terrorist Zacarias Moussaoui was a product of the cités, as were others arrested for attacks that had taken place on the Belgian border. The police call the worst areas in the projects, a nether region reached on Highway A4, "zones de non-droit," lawless areas.

Egyptian-born scholar Bat Ye'or has a name for the growing world of Islam in Europe: Eurabia. France, with the largest Muslim population on the Continent—estimates run as high as six million, or roughly 10 percent of the population—is Eurabia's most prominent outpost. The outside world enters the confines of the cités mainly through the satellite dishes that dot the balconies and receive news from the Middle East, some of which is just anti-Semitic propaganda. At night the isolation is almost complete. The buses stop running at 10, and people often live several miles from the nearest public transportation.

I was late for my meeting with Yildiz—traffic on the A4 was clogged—and her voice on my cell phone grew increasingly panicky. "My family is looking for me," she said. It was at the end of her work-

day at an accounting firm, so she had a small window of time when she could pretend to still be at the office. I spotted her from a distance, waiting for me outside a darkened patisserie. For a moment, in the light from a streetlamp, she seemed as lively as the young women hurrying past her on their way home from work. She was fine-boned, with short dark hair and small features. A cherry-pink sweater peeked out from her black trench coat. As I got closer, I could see that she was trembling, and there were dark circles under her eyes. We had arranged to meet near Argenteuil, a town north of the city, in a commercial center. We walked to a brasserie that was filled with sports fans watching a soccer match on TV. At nearby tables, young women talked and laughed with their friends over glasses of wine. Like them, Yildiz had gone through the French school system, but she radiated the loneliness of an exile. At one point I asked her, "How do you feel when you see these carefree girls out with their friends?" She replied, "I am reconciled to it. I have always known my destiny was different."

Yildiz taught me the term "femmes des quartiers," women of the quarters. It indicated that she and those like her inhabited a double world, a day world with movies and soccer games, and a world after dark, spent within the tight boundaries of strict Muslim families marooned in a country that has done little to assimilate them. Sometimes the parents do not speak French, and many of them are jobless in the welfare swamp, forced to rely on their children to navigate a society they cannot comprehend.

Yildiz's story, like so many others I would hear, began when she was about 10. That is the age when these young women begin to understand that they "belong to the cités," as French caseworkers put it. For Yildiz, the realization came with the arrival of letters from Turkish families containing photographs of their sons. The boys in the pictures were marriage candidates for Yildiz's older sister, who was 13. A correspondence between the families ensued, and at night Yildiz would hear her sister sobbing. By the time the sister was 17, she was married, and Yildiz understood that her destiny would be the same.

Soon her own candidates arrived. "You would sit there and drink tea while the families observed you like an animal. Were you tall enough? Were you pretty enough? I was not allowed to say a word." Horror stories of what happened to girls who tried to fight their families circulated in the projects. Yildiz knew of girls who had been tricked by their parents into going on a vacation to Turkey or Algeria, only to find themselves being turned over to the families of their new husbands.

The rules in Yildiz's home were tacit but unbreakable. "I only knew life from six a.m. until seven p.m. The outside world, I did not know it," she told me. During the day she played basketball and read Rousseau, but outside of school she was forbidden to speak to anyone French, especially boys. Furthermore, she had to conform to "la loi du silence," the law of silence. Discussing what went on inside the family was tantamount to bringing shame upon her parents.

Yildiz soon learned to negotiate two separate existences—the rigid Muslim life at home and the freewheeling life at school, where she hid her headscarf in her bag and changed into jeans in the stairwell on her way to class. Family meals were eaten in silence, and when there were guests, the men ate first, the women after. Her parents were unusual in that they allowed her to attend technical school and put off marriage until she found a job. Yildiz told me she operated within a tissue of lies. She would forge notes from her parents in order to escape to the movies with friends, and when she graduated and got a job she pretended that the bank where she worked was open on Saturday so that she could have time away from home on weekends.

One night shortly after Yildiz finished school, her mother came into her bedroom. She showed her two pictures and said, “You must choose.” One man was in France and wanted to get married immediately. The other, a Turk, had to wait until he got his papers. “I chose the man from Turkey, thinking that it could buy me time,” she said.

The rise of Islam in Europe is a remote subject for most Americans. There have been detailed reports on the growing number of attacks on Jews in France—more than 1,000 since January 2001—but it is impossible to comprehend the new anti-Semitism without knowing something about France’s Muslim population. Soon after the release of a suppressed European Union report saying that French Muslims, many of them unemployed and angry, were primarily responsible for the assaults on Jewish schools and synagogues, I went to France to investigate the rise of Islam through its women. When I arrived, Paris was roiled by the debate over whether students should be allowed to wear headscarves in public schools. The issue was so controversial that a presidential investigation, called the Stasi Commission, had been convened at the National Assembly and at the Senate, located in the Luxembourg Gardens, to hear testimony pro and con. Next door to the Senate, crowds lined the sidewalk to get into a Botticelli exhibition at the Musée du Luxembourg. The cluster of devout Muslim women in scarves standing in front of immense posters of a Botticelli nude was an irresistible image for the tourists’ cameras.

The battle of the headscarf disguised a much larger issue: Islamization, which was in the headlines of *Le Monde*, in all the newsmagazines, and on the nightly talk shows. Lulled by the balm of multiculturalism, affirmative action, and the messy imperfections of the melting pot, most Americans would find it difficult to grasp the complexity at the heart of the headscarf issue. Recent polls show that 70 percent of French citizens support a ban on young women wearing scarves in public schools. The scarf is seen by some not as an expression of religious belief but rather as a symbol of extremist Islam—terrorism, extermination of apostates, suicide bombers. France, a fiercely secular society, is at a critical juncture, faced with its romantic attachment to its former colonies in North Africa, its sympathy with Third World guerrillas, its history of trading alliances with the Middle East, and its guilt over the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Arabs in the Algerian war. Some analysts

believe that the very future of France is at stake.

The French press, with its need to reconcile political correctness and the reality of the new demographics, rarely raises one increasingly critical question: How many women in the country actually live in repressive conditions without access to the full rights guaranteed by the republic? If you ask the question at any of the tiny storefront agencies trying to help these women, you will hear a startling number: 70,000. The figure comes from the High Council of Integration, a government agency, and refers primarily to women in forced marriages. In America, such a figure would create a national scandal, fodder for every tabloid TV show. Not so in France. "These stories are private," says Ilana Moryoussef, a radio reporter with France-Info. "They are hard to get, and unless they are sensational, the subject of forced marriage remains taboo." Occasionally a murder case will make the news, but the grisly narratives of most of *les femmes des quartiers* slip under the radar of *Le Monde* and the serious talk shows. From time to time a memoir detailing a brutal gang rape in the *cités* may get published—Samira Bellil's best-selling *Dans l'Enfer des Tournantes* (In Gang-Rape Hell) is an example—but, for the most part, the life of the women of the *cités* remains a mystery, an unpopular cause largely ignored by politicians attempting to win the potentially immense Muslim vote. But it is these women who are on the fault line in Eurabia, a mere 30 minutes from the Louvre.

Throughout Paris, women are caught in the maw of cultural relativism as the French hesitate to sound intolerant of another culture. "Given how these women are treated, why does no one make a fuss? There is the danger of being accused of racism. People would raise it and then would be squelched in the newspapers," says political writer Anne-Elisabeth Moutet. The battle of the headscarf is the first sign that France may be turning its attention to "les invisibles" trapped in the prisonlike fortresses of the housing projects.

Conversations in Paris are suddenly peppered with questions involving such things as how many years it will take for France to become an Islamic country. Some demographers predict that by 2020, if immigration and birth rates remain steady, France could be 25 percent Muslim. (Others suggest that these numbers are inflated.) Editorials now routinely parse the question of future demographics.

France is, as always, the test tube of European politics. About a third of the population is over the age of 50, and the fertility rate is 1.8 children per woman. According to Michel Gurfinkiel, editor of the conservative weekly *Valeurs Actuelles*, "the average Muslim family probably has between three and four children." The political calculus of the country, seriously affected by a sluggish economy and the rise of the ultra-right National Front Party of Jean-Marie Le Pen, has become unpredictable. Will France—and for that matter Europe—become Islamic, or will the Muslim population be Europeanized? It is anticipated that the notoriously anti-immigration force led by Le Pen will make

a strong showing in the regional elections this month.

What to do about the French-Muslim population is disguised in endless commentary on the ins and outs of le foulard, the headscarf. News accounts are full of resounding polemics invoking Victor Hugo and Voltaire on the very foundation of the French Republic, the bulwark of France's egalitarianism-laïcité, or secularism. For Dominique Moïsi, a political analyst with the French Institute of International Relations, secularism is "the fourth religion of France," a concept which is singular to the country, and which grew out of the reaction to a church aligned with repressive monarchies. For the woman known as Anne Vigerie, who runs a feminist think tank, the headscarf is "le drapeau sur la tête," the flag on the head, a confirmation of the underdeveloped status of women in radical Islam. "When the girls wear the headscarf, it symbolizes that they accept all the conditions that Islam mandates. And all the Muslim girls who do not do it are designated by Islamists as being at fault," says Anne-Elisabeth Moutet. In the schools in the cités, many of which are predominantly Muslim, girls who do not wear the scarf are seen as whores and potential targets of violence. Gang rapes are common there. "They become fair game for violence," says Moutet. According to Saïda Kada, who testified in favor of the scarf before the Stasi Commission and is co-author of *L'Une Voilée, L'Autre Pas* (One Veiled, the Other Not), "This is a debate that belongs in the Muslim community, not to be decided by the French state. This is a divine prescription."

I traveled through the outskirts of Paris and spoke to a variety of frightened young Muslim women trying to reconcile their loyalties to their families with the desire to live a modern life, including chic intellectuals in suede pants or micro skirts, feminists who study the Koran, apostates who have received death threats, and devout activists who believe that wearing a headscarf is the ultimate act of liberation, a nonpolitical religious expression. Arranging the interviews was difficult; a sense of panic and desperation linked many of the subjects. There are few resources available for women fleeing their families. I soon learned not to react when women shrugged and said "Bien sûr" to the question: Have you ever helped women in crisis? There is a subtle code in the cités. One woman called it "the smile of recognition," which tips a person off to the need to give the assistance that is almost impossible to get in the national system.

I heard about Yildiz from a social worker named Gayé Petek, the director of Elélé, a small association that helps Muslim women in distress. The daughter of Turkish intellectuals, Petek has a deep voice and the stolid gravity of a French bureaucrat. When she was growing up, her parents insisted that she learn French and assimilate into the secular world. "I was lucky," she told me. "It has always been tough to be an immigrant. But you cannot view yourself as a victim." Trained as a sociologist, she worked for an association that focused on the problems of Turkish immigrants in France. In August 1993 she heard on television about the murder of Nazmiyé Ilikpınar, a 15-year-old Turkish girl in a grim project near Colmar, in eastern France, not far from Strasbourg. Forty percent of Nazmiyé's school was of immigrant descent, but, according to the news accounts, she did not wear

a headscarf and swam in the local pool. She was the daughter of a factory worker, who had chosen a Turkish boy for her future husband. Nazmiyé resisted her parents' wishes, because she was in love with a Moroccan boy. When her older brothers discovered the relationship, the parents' reaction was violent. Nazmiyé petitioned a social worker and a judge to place her in a children's home for protection. She was sent to Strasbourg, but she missed her Moroccan boyfriend and returned to Colmar. Soon after that she was found dead in a ditch. "She had either been smothered or strangled," Le Monde reported. A year later, one of Nazmiyé's brothers was sentenced to life imprisonment for her murder, and the parents and a cousin received 20 years.

Petek realized that, since Nazmiyé was a *femme des quartiers*, her case would quickly fade from notice in the newspapers. Paris is a city of elitists, and stories coming from poor neighborhoods carry little weight. The killers had lawyers, Petek told me, but there was no one to defend the dead victim in the court system. French discourse is often lofty and academic, and intellectuals take up much of the time on nightly news programs. There is no French Oprah to turn a Nazmiyé Ilikpinar into a national martyr. Petek knew all too well that, unless the cause of women such as Nazmiyé was embraced in an academic colloquy or adopted as government policy, French commentators would avoid the subject as being potentially racist and politically incorrect.

Petek understood that within the confines of Eurabia there was little chance for social mobility for women. "The killing in Colmar was a scandal. It threw light on the issue of forced marriages in France. But because the family was Turkish, they lived in an entrenched world," Petek told me. Nazmiyé's death forced Petek to change her tactic. She lobbied the state to change the law so that she could appear as an advocate in the case, and organized a colloquy at the Senate to grab the attention of the establishment.

She went around speaking in mosques and schools. "The girls did not want to talk to anyone," she said. "They were all terrified." Petek understood the need for caution in a culture which, at its most extreme, sanctions brutality if a woman dares to challenge the authority of the family. The threat to Petek's own safety was always implicit. At most of her appearances, she said, she would look up to see a Turkish man or woman—sometimes in a full head covering—standing in the back of the room. (They were neighborhood enforcers, known as *les soldats verts*, the green soldiers.) Petek learned to choose her words carefully. "I explained that the problem in the culture was the issue of the forced marriage. It was against France." At one early meeting, a young woman rose and said, "This is the most important day of my life. At last I feel understood."

Soon a pattern emerged, according to Petek. "A young girl arrives at the office with the boyfriend. The boyfriend will say, 'We saw you on TV. My girlfriend is Turkish and I am French. The parents found out about us, and they want to kill her. She had to run away.'" These situations are hard on everyone involved, Petek explained. "It is very difficult for the Muslim parents of the first genera-

tion. They do not speak the language. Many do not have jobs. The daughters need protection, and it is very difficult for them to leave their families. The parents say, 'Are they Turkish or are they French?' I tell them it is like asking to choose between a mother and a father."

By the time Yildiz met Petek last summer, she had made the decision to run away from her family and seek help from Elélé. There was little Petek could do for her, but she dutifully wrote down her history in a casebook. Yildiz's marriage had been set for July 2003. She had already attempted to establish a new life, setting up a secret bank account so that she could hide her earnings from her family and taking her younger sister into her confidence. However, the fear of reprisal from her family caused her to abandon her plan to escape. On the day before she was to leave for Turkey and her arranged marriage, she told her boss she was going on vacation. "Why do you look so sad?" the woman asked her. Yildiz started to cry and confessed everything. Her boss was horrified and said, "You cannot go through with this. I will hide you." That day Yildiz went to the police and told them that, though her parents might report her missing, she was actually in hiding from them.

In Petek's office, near the Marais, there are hundreds of folders containing similar cases. But why was there no public outcry? For Petek, this was a clear matter of human rights, and she could not understand why French intellectuals chose to remain silent on the subject.

The headscarf controversy started in the town of Creil, in the Department of Oise, in October 1989. Ernest Chenière, who had been hired as the new high-school principal two years earlier, seemed well suited for the job. He had spent two years in Morocco and spoke fluent Arabic. A devout Christian who had spent his childhood on the island of Martinique, he had an understanding of different cultures, but he adhered to the French education system, with its strict fidelity to the notion of complete equality. There were almost 900 students in the school, 90 percent of them Muslim. The political establishment of the town was mainly socialist and Communist—not unusual in that part of France. When three North African girls—Fatima, 13, Leïla, her sister, 14, and Samira, 14—insisted on wearing headscarves in school, Chenière attempted a compromise, telling them that they could wear their scarves in the halls but not in classes. The compromise held for several months, but when the girls started wearing their scarves in classes again, they were sent home from school. Then the father of Leïla and Fatima appeared at the school and said, "My daughters wear the veil of their own free will. I didn't order them to." (Chenière recalls, "I answered him in Arabic, asking him if he took me for an idiot.") A town official's wife wrote a scathing article about Chenière for the local newspaper. Before it appeared, Chenière had warned her, "Be careful of what you write." He was concerned about the rise of the National Front and did not want to set off more anti-Muslim sentiment. The event soon mushroomed into a national incident, including a government inquiry, and Danielle Mitterrand, the wife of the then president, weighed in against Chenière. The controversy drew the attention of French Islamic leaders, several of whom went to Chenière's office to discuss the problem. As they were leaving, one of them predicted, "Islam will be victorious. In a

year or two, all the girls will be covered from head to toe.” Along with thousands of letters of support, Chenière received eight death threats. Out walking his dog one evening, he was attacked by a gang of Muslim teenagers. When he showed them he was carrying a gun, they fled, but one yelled back, “Your day will come!”

Chenière later parlayed the headscarf episode into a brief political career. After he was elected as a deputy from the Department of Oise, he attempted to introduce a bill that would change the slogan of France to “Liberté, égalité, fraternité, laïcité,” but he got nowhere. “Poor France, it is rusted and archaic,” he says today. “Fifteen years later we are still faced with the same problems.”

Paris did not really awaken to the plight of les femmes des quartiers until a young woman named Sohane Benziane was burned to death in October 2002. That incident became the trip wire that forced the French establishment to pay attention to its Muslim women. Rumors, including one of gang rape, surrounded the case, according to *Le Monde*. Sohane had been considered a beauty in the cité of Vitry-sur-Seine. Her sister, Kahina, recalled her fondness for makeup and hair coloring and her preference for anything pink from the boutiques in the local mall. Encouraged by her father to attend school, Sohane developed a passion for the French music channel, especially when Celine Dion, Mariah Carey, and Whitney Houston were on. Shortly before her 18th birthday, she was accepted into a local beauty school. Frightened by the frequent violence in the projects, she determined to get out of the cité and move into Paris. Her fears proved to be warranted. Sohane’s boyfriend allegedly slapped the girlfriend of a boy he didn’t like, and later beat him in a fight. The prosecution believes that Sohane’s death was an act of revenge: Sohane was not there when the violence occurred, but the other boy retaliated by tracking her down a few blocks from the cité, luring her into a garbage-disposal area, and setting her on fire. Sohane’s story provided France with a rare glimpse of how little young women are valued in the cités.

I heard about Sohane from Nadia Amiri, a secular activist, who was preparing to testify in front of the Stasi Commission. “The case of Sohane was beyond anyone’s comprehension,” Amiri told me. “It was impossible to believe this could have happened. This was a suburb of Paris, and she was killed like that. It was the beginning of an awareness that has really yet to seep into the media.” An outsider in the social structure of France, Amiri is well known for her studies on discrimination against minorities. Her work has focused on the fact that there are no French citizens of Arab descent or female immigrants in the French Parliament. In her cité apartment, she has letters from Muslim girls she has helped to rescue from their families. One reads, “I will never forget what you did for me. My father will come back from Morocco tomorrow. I am a little bit scared.”

Amiri was the first Muslim woman I contacted in Paris, and she cried as we spoke on the telephone. That day she had received an e-mail saying, “Do you realize what you are doing to your own

people?” It was, she told me, one of many threatening messages she had received, and they were not to be taken lightly. Everywhere she went, she said, she had to be on the alert. We arranged to meet at her favorite brasserie, Le Train Bleu, in the Gare de Lyon. Arriving in the grand space, under a soaring ceiling covered with murals, Amiri, who looked to be in her 40s, wore a floor-length skirt of tiny ruffles the color of Pepto-Bismol and a thin sweater that showed her shoulders to advantage. It was the entrance of a star, and I watched the lunch crowd raise their eyes from their oysters to take notice. Making her way to the table, Amiri seemed more like an exotic orchid than an academic. She was very animated, insisting at one point that the waiters bring her extra chocolate sauce for her profiteroles. Why the need for such theatrics?, I wondered. It would take days for me to understand that the femmes des quartiers are such invisibles that each of them develops a particular strategy to survive.

During the Algerian war, Amiri’s father was a member of the militant Front de Libération Nationale, fighting the French. Imprisoned and tortured by his French captors, he later moved his family to Paris, where he found housing in a cité. With his salary at a Renault plant, he supported a family of six. By the time Nadia was 10, she was taking care of her little brothers and sisters. “I was not allowed to wear pants, go to the movies, or have a French friend,” she said. “When a teacher or a man talked to me, I was scared.” Because of brutal conditions at home, she tried to kill herself, and a court placed her with a foster family. At 16 she was supporting herself and going to nursing school. “French society was blind,” she said. “It didn’t see or try to understand the problems of the girls in the immigration.” She wanted to be a lawyer, but she could not afford the textbooks. She worked as a nurse in a hospital, and female patients who were Muslim confided in her. Some of them were covered in welts from beatings. Some were in France illegally, so they were afraid to go to the authorities. “I would see the bruises, the evidence of what it is to live in fundamentalist Muslim families. They would talk to me about forced marriages. The stories were never written in the newspapers then, because the banlieue [outskirts] was not a priority,” she told me. “For some of the women, it was like Saudi Arabia in France.”

Like Amiri, Hamida Bensadia, 43, is an academic; she grew up in the cité of Clamart and lived in two worlds, “modern in school and traditional at home,” as she said. When she was 11, her family took her to Algeria for a holiday. “It was the moment that they decided they would marry me off. I met the boy, and my mother said, ‘Voilà, this is who you will marry.’” Hamida’s mother felt indebted to the boy’s family, who had been kind to her when she was young. Hamida said that over the next three years her future mother-in-law would send letters to the family in France: When she goes to school, do not allow her to talk to anyone. Do not cut her hair. Teach her to cook.

In high school, while Hamida was struggling to get her accounting classes out of the way so that she could study literature, she fell in love with a French boy. Gradually the Algerian she had met when she was 11 faded from her mind. The letters, however, continued to arrive from Algeria, and

it became clear to Hamida that her parents expected her to marry when she turned 17, so she attempted to run away from home. "I went to the police and asked for help," she told me. "And they said, 'There is nothing we can do.' For them it was a typical teen problem and an Algerian family problem.

"Then I had an idea. I would not go to school for three months. I wrote a note, a fake medical excuse. In the mornings I would leave for school, but I would go to my boyfriend." She had no intention of moving to Algeria. With her sister as her confidante, she stayed away from home. One day her sister told her, "Don't worry, they've changed their minds. You can come back. The family will not make you marry."

When Hamida returned to the house, her parents appeared to be sympathetic. "We will take a family holiday to Algeria. You'll see. It will be nice. There will be no problem," Hamida recalled her father saying as he showed her tickets that could not be returned. In Algeria, however, his tone changed, and he told her she was there to get married. It was 1977. Hamida was still a minor. "I had no recourse. There is no way to describe what happens when girls are taken on these holidays. You cannot make a move without asking your father. The law is for men. If I went to the police, they would immediately return me to my family. So I had to get married."

She was suddenly being prepared for an elaborate wedding. "I was crying. The parents-in-law intuited that I had been with a man. They could see that I was not the same young girl. My father came to me and said, 'Your parents-in-law do not want you anymore. But if your husband still wants you, then you will get married. I hope that you have not ruined the honor of our family.'" Hamida did not see her husband before the ceremony. Speaking of her wedding night, she said, "I was lucky. That day I had my period, and I bled all over the sheets, which proved I was a virgin." The following day, her own mother appeared and took the sheet with its rusty stains and marched through the village, according to local custom.

For the next few years, Hamida said, she was kept a virtual prisoner in the house of her in-laws, and shunned by her husband's family. "I would try to help in the kitchen, and my mother-in-law did not allow it." Her one link to the outside world was the French radio. "My mother-in-law would hear me laughing at the comedians, and she would shout through the door, 'Who are you talking to?'" Hamida was finally able to persuade her husband to move them into an apartment, but she was not allowed to have visitors or to smoke, and he often beat her. "My husband's family became convinced I was having a nervous breakdown," she said. "They believed there was a devil in my body." After 13 years Hamida was finally able to return to France with her children. "My own family fought me on it for a very long time," she said. "Finally, it was my grandfather who took pity on me and said, 'Your daughter will die if you let her remain in Algeria.'"

The term “femmes des quartiers” was coined in 2001 and gained currency at a meeting at the Sorbonne in January 2002. There, in the shadow of the Panthéon, 350 women from the cités came to share their stories. The meeting had been organized in part by a relief association called Ni Putes ni Soumises (Neither Whores nor Doormats), run by Fadela Amara. Amara has become a minor celebrity in France, and recently won the Political Book of the Year award for her memoir, *Ni Putes ni Soumises*. However, her operation is woefully modest. Located not far from the Place de la République, it is above a small Internet café. The day I visited, I saw a mouse scurrying across the floor.

Amara, who is 39, is in constant motion, and her intensity is such that she has become the most public face of France’s women of the cités. Like many of those she helps, Amara escaped from a traditional Muslim family. The young women who come to her are interviewed by a psychologist able to evaluate their cases. An attempt is then made to find them shelter and work, but the budget for this is tiny. Recently Amara was given access to 50 apartments, and she considered that a triumph. At first she could not get any mention of the distress of these women in the press. “I would call editors. When I announced what I wanted, they would hang up on me.” The death of Sohane Benziane and the publication of Bellil’s *In Gang-Rape Hell* changed the public awareness, however, and French Elle championed the cause.

Late last year, *Le Figaro* broke a story on Muslim women who would not allow French male doctors to examine them. For weeks the writer, Cécilia Gabizon, had visited hospitals in the outskirts and talked to doctors, many of whom were afraid of reprisals if they came forward. Gabizon specializes in problems in the cités and the differences among the Maghrebian populations—Tunisian, Moroccan, and Algerian. She told me, “These people are living with a traditional Muslim humiliation, and their children are French.... You want to please your family because you are so isolated in these housing complexes, which are like prisons, miles from the city. People living in the cités are afraid of the world. Some of them live right on the commuter lines, but they have never been to Paris. They are living in a closed world.”

The word “exclusion” refers to France’s tendency to ignore the difficulties of its immigrants, particularly its Muslim population’s problem of assimilating into the secular system. The subject of secularism is peculiarly French, a crucial part of the national political psyche. The Third Republic ushered in a golden age in which science and secularism flourished. In 1881, France instituted compulsory free education for everyone, and teachers began inculcating republican values in all students. In this steamroller of egalitarianism, France even cracked down fiercely on the use of dialects in the classroom. The situation was greatly complicated in the 1960s, when, at the end of the Algerian war, thousands of Muslims were thrown into the mix. For years, the French buried this dark part of their history, even delaying the release of Gillo Pontecorvo’s masterpiece, *The Battle*

of Algiers, for five years.

The French have continued to exhibit a willful blindness to those who do not conform to the system. Jobs and education were once closed to most Muslims, so it was assumed that this group would be forced to assimilate, but it did not. Instead, crime and unemployment became rampant in the cités. There are now almost 1,000 imams in France, and only 9 percent are native-born. As the crime rate rose in the suburbs and towns, public officials suggested that the imams keep Muslim kids off the streets. However, the government could not monitor the growth of radical Islamic thought. The result has been increased isolation, exacerbated by a lack of assistance from the government for the Muslim population. Apart from the cités on the outskirts of Paris, Lyon, and Marseilles, there are villages all over France where the Arab population has grown in 40 years, and the problems of exclusion have become severe. “No one will give you a job,” Gharib Roubiaux, a French citizen of Arab descent in St.—Florentin, recently told *The New York Times*. “How long can we stand here, leaning against the wall, before we blow a fuse?”

The deep rage that permeates the Muslim community is very evident at the headquarters of Mecca Cola, the soft-drink manufacturer. If reporters familiar with Islamic Paris are asked to name some of the most dangerous figures in the Muslim community, Tawfik Mathlouthi, the creator of Mecca Cola, inevitably makes the list. Mathlouthi claims he has sold more than 165 million gallons of the cola in its first year, but that could be an entrepreneur's exaggeration. He also owns Radio Méditerranée, which broadcasts to an audience of 600,000, mostly French of Arabic descent, and he makes no pretense of being objective. The word ³Israel² is never mentioned on Radio Méditerranée. Rather, Mathlouthi insists on the term “the Zionist entity.” “I refuse to say the name Israel for two reasons,” he told me. “It is partially a satire. Israel is the name of a high prophet, and I refuse to give the name Israel to Zionist people who are terrorists and criminals. This is my obsession. Israel does not have a legal right to exist.”

But what if Ben-Gurion were still the prime minister of Israel?, I asked him, referring to that historical period when no wars were fought over the annexed West Bank territories. “No, Israel should not exist,” he countered. “It was a Zionist ideology. No one can impose an ideology as a right. Jews cannot impose their book on the rest of humanity. They believe in that book. I do not. I believe in the Koran. They do not.” He showed me an array of the dozen flavors of Mecca Cola, which are sold widely throughout France. The bright-red label reads, “Ne buvez plus idiot, buvez engagé” (Stop drinking stupidly, drink with commitment). Posters and billboards feature a young Palestinian protester. Mathlouthi says he has plans to sell Mecca burgers in London, Brussels, and Dubai, and he brags that his cola is being produced and sold from Singapore to Morocco. “When someone buys a Mecca Cola, he is making a protest. In France they are used to the Arab world going to work and shutting up. I do not want to shut up anymore.”

Mathlouthi has a weekly radio show and speaks with the ardor of a circuit preacher. “The problem

is the new generation—they are French. They are in ghettos. The fathers are not used to civilization. Some of them have never seen a light switch. If we do not help them with psychological support, how can you ask them to be part of the society? The politicians from the left and right blame them for the criminality and the anti-Semitism—for all the suffering in France. I live with Islamophobia every day. When the concern is Jewish, everyone stands like one man. When it concerns Muslims, no one pays attention.”

Tariq Ramadan came up in almost every conversation I had in Paris. One of Europe’s premier Islamists, Ramadan is immensely popular in the Muslim community. The brother of the notorious Hani Ramadan, who directs the family-run Islamic Center of Geneva, Tariq wrote the preface for Asma Lamrabet’s book, *Musulmane Tout Simplement*, which condones, among other things, the stoning of women who commit adultery. Ramadan’s grandfather Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, was assassinated in 1949 but remains, according to Christopher Caldwell of *The Weekly Standard*, “a figure of inspiration for fundamentalists worldwide.” The Brotherhood has been called “the Freemasons of Islam” and is said to have ties to Hamas, the Islamist terrorist group. Based in Geneva, Ramadan recently toured American colleges and was warmly received at Dartmouth. Notre Dame has hired him as the Henry R. Luce Professor.

None of this surprises Michel Gurfinkiel, who describes Ramadan as a master of anti-Semitic double-speak, a smoothy with perfect pitch, “l’abbé de la cour,” the court abbot. I asked Yasmina Dahim, 29, what Gurfinkiel means. “It is that he suggests to his followers that if they follow the West and leave Islam they will die.” Dahim met Ramadan when she interviewed him for an article she was writing on his Koranic essays. At first an admirer of his writings, she later, through her analysis of them, began to be suspicious of their hidden content.

When the historian Shimon Samuels, the director of the Wiesenthal Center in Paris, noticed that Tariq Ramadan was going to speak at the European Social Forum last November, he wrote to the mayor of Paris, who had committed one million euros to the forum, saying that unless he distanced himself he was going to be “financing hate.” For Samuels the forum represented a once legitimate organization that had been hijacked by anti-American and anti-globalization extremists. Samuels is an expert on the anti-Semitic propaganda broadcast on Arab TV in France, but his warning went unheeded. A few days before I arrived in Paris, Ramadan had been on prime-time TV in a debate with Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy. It is not uncommon in France for government figures to debate with their adversaries on the issues of the day, but Sarkozy had a strategy behind his appearance. Relentlessly ambitious, Sarkozy not only validated Ramadan’s importance to the Muslim voting bloc but also endeared himself to the right wing by appearing to beat him handily in the debate.

A new code word for anti-Semitism has entered the language— “communautarisme”—and Ramadan has been instrumental in its spread. Last October he submitted an editorial to *Le Monde* and the leftist newspaper *Libération* entitled “Critique of the (New) Communitarian Intellectuals”—meaning Jews. To Americans, *communautarisme* may sound benign, but it is in fact a new way of labeling and identifying separateness—who is a Jew, who is a Muslim—and that concept goes against every principle of the French Republic. Both newspapers turned Ramadan’s editorial down, but he promptly posted it on the Web site *Oumma.com*, the most important Muslim Web site in the country. It read in part, “There is a phenomenon which muddies the facts. For several years (even before the second intifada), French Jewish intellectuals, who until then had been considered universalist thinkers, started from the national as well as international point of view to develop analyses that were more and more influenced by a communitarian concern, which tends to minimize the importance of defending universal principles of equality and justice.” The communitarians cited included some of France’s most distinguished intellectuals—philosophers Alain Finkielkraut and Bernard-Henri Lévy and former health minister Bernard Kouchner. During his debate with Ramadan, Sarkozy confronted him on this point. “My text is not anti-Semitic,” Ramadan said. “I condemn anti-Semitism with dire resolve.” On the subject of the stoning of women, he was less conclusive: “I have asked ... for a moratorium to enable a true debate among Muslims,” he said, which caused a furor in the French press.

According to Shimon Samuels, *communautarisme* provides a camouflage for racism against both Jews and Muslims. “Anti-Semites now cover their tracks by being huge boosters of the Holocaust and demanding memorials for every Holocaust remembrance day. That means dead Jews, not live Jews. And those who hate Arabs in France and want them out are often huge boosters of the Palestinian cause, which covers up their reluctance to deal with the actual population.” The most glaring example is Jean-Marie Le Pen himself, who, Samuels says, “reviles the Muslims but was the first to run to the Middle East to embrace Saddam Hussein and whose agenda is anti-Semitic.”

Speaking of her arranged marriage, Yildiz said she was “condamnée à se marier,” condemned to marry. “Then in one day my life changed. When my boss said, ‘I will take care of you.’” On the night before she was to leave for Turkey, Yildiz quietly packed a bag. Her parents’ apartment was full of guests. Yildiz had warned the police that she was going to escape and asked them to wait outside in case there was violence and she needed help. Her boss was waiting downstairs in her car. For the next six weeks, Yildiz stayed in her boss’s apartment, afraid to go outside. She bought a wig and sunglasses. Encouraged by her boss, she wrote to tell her family that she was safe and arranged to have the letter mailed from Nice. Yildiz then began to get messages on her cell phone: We are in Nice looking for you. We forgive you. You do not have to get married. Her boss said, “Don’t be fooled. They will never forgive you, because you have broken the ultimate taboo.” The messages grew ugly: We will kill you if we find you. Yildiz’s mother was deeply religious and always wore her

veil inside and outside the house. It was her belief, Yildiz knew, that as a Turkish Muslim she would go to heaven only if her daughters were virgins when they married.

Yildiz stayed in hiding for four months. "I felt like an orphan," she told me. "I could not take the loneliness." For devout Muslims, a daughter who leaves home brings disgrace on the whole family. "My father would tell people that I was traveling for my accounting studies and that I would come back." One brother was sympathetic and sent Yildiz an e-mail. "He said, 'I understand your behavior. I will help you try to open our parents' minds. But you are causing them to suffer.'" Yildiz wrote back, "For me a forced marriage is not just wearing the beautiful white dress. It is also the sexual act that I do not choose to have. It is nothing more than a rape." Yildiz explained to her brother that she had been inspired by a movie called *Chaos*, about a Muslim woman who helps her younger sister escape an arranged marriage. A few weeks later she agreed to live with her brother and his new wife.

The town of Grigny, south of Paris, is notorious for incidents of violence. I went there with Christelle Raspolini, 28, who is the vice president of *Ni Putes ni Soumises*. The walls of the pale brick buildings of the project are cracked and broken, and in places the insulation shows through. I asked Christelle to take me to the mosques, where many extremist conversions take place. Christelle grew up in a project not very different from this one. "Now I see and work with women who are forced into marriages—much more so than when I was a child." She said there is inevitably a flurry of cases in the summer, as parents attempt to get their daughters to go to Algeria. As we walked through Grigny, we passed a few women dressed in abayas. They made no eye contact. The place was like a war zone without a war, "ready to erupt at any moment," Christelle told me.

We went to a tiny storefront where two Frenchwomen were teaching Muslim women to sew. "We provide a place the women can come to," one told us. Christelle said, "They are incredibly private. Almost never does anyone talk about what goes on inside their families." It is not difficult to understand why women in projects like this turn to religion for their identity. There is no support for women to have any independence. On the border of the project, we saw doors leading to the small rooms that serve as mosques and as places of refuge for teenagers who drop out of school and have no jobs.

The longer I stayed in France, the more difficult it became to understand how the French could have remained indifferent to the plight of all these women under the scarves and veils. The French do not take easily to strategies of personal intervention. Recently, however, a few articles on the subject began to appear in the press. A reporter from *Paris Match* wore a headscarf all over Paris and reported with astonishment what it felt like to be insulted and treated like a freak or a nonentity. A book called *Bas les Voiles!* (*Down with the Veils*), by an Iranian exile named Chahdortt Djavann, came out and sold close to 100,000 copies. *French Elle* interviewed people at social agencies

helping Muslim women and published features on the subject of le foulard.

I met Pinar Hüküm, Gayé Petek's partner, at the Gare d'Austerlitz. A Turkish psychologist who attended an American high school in Turkey, Hüküm does much of the fieldwork for Elélé. She got off the train pushing a little suitcase on wheels, and looked tired from working long hours. I asked her why the subject of Muslim women's oppression was not a priority on France's agenda. Hüküm explained that there had been an attempt in the early 90s to draw attention to the barbarity of arranged marriages. Social agencies soon became overrun with cases, and a program was set up to train teachers in the schools. But then the problem seemed to fade back into the cités.

Hüküm spends weeks in the projects, visiting social centers, trying to talk to women about changing their lives. It is very difficult, she said, because the women are genuinely terrified. "The problem is the life in the ghetto," she said. "There are men who forbid their wives to talk to us. Parents call up and say, 'Do not help my daughter.' And now something new is happening. Girls are going into arranged marriages knowing they will break up. They do it for the sake of their parents, so that they will not be humiliated within the community. This also gives them an identity. There are now proportionally more arranged marriages in France than there are in Turkey." She said a few television producers had looked for cases of young women like Yildiz, but the women were all afraid of being seen. The social agencies have to guard the women's privacy or they will never be able to work in the Muslim community. "These stories are difficult to find," said Hüküm, "for the agencies and even more so for reporters. Everyone is too frightened."

Just as Nadia Amiri was about to testify in the French Senate on the headscarf, I saw a group of reporters and photographers rush from the elegant blue chamber to follow Saïda Kada and a colleague from the Muslim Center of Lyon out to the lobby. Kada, the best-known defender of the veil, stood calmly as the reporters swarmed around her. She wore a light-pink scarf and a leather jacket and radiated an almost palpable serenity. She later told me she had known that she would be facing long and relentless interrogation that afternoon. "It is always the same questions," she said. "It is as if the slave is rebelling against his master. It is not seen as a difference of perspective, but simply as dissent." Indeed, hours later, inside the Stasi Commission hearing, 20 officials appointed by the government pressed Kada and her colleague to explain their insistence on wearing the scarf.

After Kada had talked about her discovery of Islam, a commission member asked her sternly, "What do you think of the girls who refuse to wear the scarf and who are subjected to violence?" Kada ducked the question by saying, "Stop stigmatizing the veil. It is not the explanation for all of the violence." In the toughest exchange of the afternoon, Gayé Petek pressed Kada on the subject of very young girls: "What about the girls who are so young—11 years old in some cases—who do not have a choice about wearing a scarf or not? How is their family forcing them to wear a scarf a mat-

ter of their religious freedom? What about the rights of these children?"

Kada remained cool all during her testimony. She and I had arranged to meet at a café near the Balmain boutique in the Latin Quarter. Kada had two associates with her, and I noticed the French waitress frowning the moment we walked in the door. We sat under a blackboard listing the day's special dishes, and I put my tape recorder and notebooks on the table. The waitress hovered nearby. Kada talked quietly about her spiritual awakening. She had felt detached from any identity in her teenage years, she said, growing up in a family that was not particularly religious. "I believed that you could not be a woman and be a Muslim," she said. "I understood Islam through the events taking place in other countries." She said she turned to religion, free of all the clichés, to find herself.

Today she is one of the most active Muslim proselytizers in France, a heroine in the cités, anathema to secular women, who suspect her of having ties with extremist groups. "The French put people in two camps, and because I wear a veil they group me with the extremists. There is no nuance." I asked how she felt about the fact that thousands of young women are treated badly by their families. Kada was evasive: "There are families where things go well and families where things go less well. The parents are afraid of losing their control over their children." It was, she insisted, impossible for women such as Gayé Petek and most professional French women to imagine "that women of immigrant descent can think on their own. A woman of immigrant descent is by definition [for them] the beurette [little Arab girl] in distress."

During our hour together, Kada's cell phone rang frequently. It was obvious that her assistant had scheduled her time in Paris with the efficiency of an American advance man. After they left, the waitress approached the table and glowered. "You will have to leave immediately. This is a table for four," she said. There were, I could see, plenty of tables available, but the waitress was adamant. Her detestation of my recent tablemates was quite clear.

During my last days in France, I took a train to Geneva to interview the writer Bat Ye'or. Next to me on the train was an elegant man in his 50s, dressed impeccably in cashmere. I noticed that the volume he was reading intently was a Jewish prayer book. We began to talk, and he told me he was a banker and lived in Paris, not far from the Galeries Lafayette. "My children are teenagers, and they were attacked every single day in their school, in one of the best neighborhoods," he said. "This year I have had to put them in a Jewish school so they will be safe." Since 1988, enrollment in Jewish schools has almost doubled, from about 18,000 to 30,000. He, like thousands of French Jews, was leaving Paris with his family in May, he said, and had the good fortune to be able to relocate in Miami, where there was a branch of his bank. When I got off the train and met up with Bat Ye'or, I told her about my encounter. "Of course," she said, "Europe is finished for the Jews. It is

the same conversation all over France.” I had last been in Paris a year ago, reporting on the hundreds of recent attacks on France’s Jews. Many of the establishment figures I interviewed had been cautious, not wanting to “rock the boat”—a common expression among European Jews—and they would dismiss the attacks with a curt two-word dismissal, “out there,” meaning that violence was not in Paris but in the banlieues, where working-class Jews of Sephardic origin lived in close proximity to French people of Arab descent.

One year later, the feeling had changed. “Out there is now here,” Dominique Moïsi said. That week there had been an attack on a Jewish student at an elite private school across from the Luxembourg Gardens. “We’ll finish Hitler’s job,” one of the Muslim attackers reportedly yelled at the victim. Two synagogues were blown up in Istanbul; a Jewish school was set on fire in Gagny, on the outskirts of Paris. Former C.I.A. director James Woolsey gave a speech saying that some of Europe’s cultural elites were anti-Semitic.

In the weeks before I arrived in France, there had been several meetings of the Jewish establishment, including Eric de Rothschild, Dominique Moïsi, and Maurice Levy, chairman and C.E.O. of Publicis Groupe S.A., to discuss the crisis. The ongoing debate about headscarves, this group well understood, was just the beginning of trying to deal with the idea of the new communitarianism, the attacks on Jews, and the separateness that was at the core of the new anti-Semitism.

Dominique Moïsi, the son of a survivor of Auschwitz, called for moderation. He believed that the veil symbolized for the French a potential invasion of fundamentalists, but, he added, “in a country like France, if we want to compete economically, we need to open our boundaries, and that means emotionally as well as economically. We have to let in more Muslims.”

Recently, *Le Monde* took up the issue of such affirmative action, called “positive discrimination.” Without it, many believed, France would be subject to terrorism in the future. French Jews were divided into two camps, Moïsi told me, Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. The Ashkenazi Jews had experienced the last 30 years in France as a golden time, but the Sephardic community saw the continuing attacks in France as a replay of the Algerian war. There was agreement, however, on the severity of the rising problem. The word “catastrophe” was used, Moïsi told me. Suddenly there was a general realization, he said, that “one is being compelled to identify oneself as a Jew.” Moïsi had yet to determine how much of the apocalyptic atmosphere was “neurotic”—his word—but there was no question that the feeling had spread beyond the concerns of the Sephardic Jews in the banlieues and entered the hothouse of central Paris. Moïsi’s children had come to him for reassurance, asking him how serious the crisis was. “This is a result of the faltering economy, the demographics, the rise of the Muslim population, and the politics,” he said.

In mid-January, as the French Parliament prepared to vote on whether or not to ban headscarves in public schools, 20,000 Muslims organized protest marches, and a bomb exploded in Nantes, destroying the car belonging to Aissa Dermouche, the only Muslim prefect, or regional governor, in the Jura region.

On February 10, the National Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority—494 to 36—to ban headscarves and all “ostensibly” religious signs, including large Christian crosses and Jewish yarmulkes. The law would require all students to attend mixed-sex physical-education periods and classes on reproduction and the Holocaust, a provision aimed at the French students of Arab descent. One Communist Party deputy, Alain Bocquet, who voted against the law, said it would “stigmatize” citizens of immigrant origin and “set things on fire rather than calm them down,” reported Elaine Sciolino in *The New York Times*. The vote came one week after France announced that it was preparing an amendment to ban satellite television channels that broadcast “messages of anti-Semitism,” a government minister said. Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin said he and several other ministers had seen some of these broadcasts and found them “unbearable to watch [and] revolting.” In Paris in December, I met with a highly placed counterterrorism official. “Are you worried about terrorism?” I asked. “Very,” he said and talked at length about a series of intelligence precautions the government planned. The following week, France canceled six Paris to Los Angeles flights because of suspected terrorism.

It became increasingly difficult to speak to Yildiz, and when she answered her telephone she sounded fraught, giving one-word answers, then abruptly hanging up. Her parents had become convinced, she finally admitted, sobbing, that she was possessed by a devil. They had taken her to a Muslim seer, who said that an evil force had taken hold of her. Her desire for independence, she had been told, must be treated by a Marabout. In extremist Muslim practice, Yildiz explained, a Marabout is a sort of exorcist. The seer told Yildiz that she could no longer stay with her brother and his wife; she had to return to her parents’ house. Once again, therefore, her family was pressuring her to marry. Yildiz felt that her boss might be in danger for having tried to protect her, so she quit her job. At 25 she again has a curfew: eight p.m. Once, when she was two hours late, her mother called her a whore. She did, however, agree to be photographed for this article. She arrived hours late, visibly shaken, wearing a wig and a partial disguise. “No one can help me,” she said. “I am condemned.”