Claiming space, when Muslim women of marginalised social housing neighbourhoods declare themselves citizens

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Abstract

Islamophobia in France is not a new phenomenon, but in the period that followed the terrorist attack on the French weekly satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* it became even harder for Muslims to make themselves heard. The embodied experiences of difference that all racialised people deal with in France, increasingly became part of the everyday lives of Muslim people. In the period post-attack, the space for Muslim activism rapidly narrowed. The fact that they are not heard does not mean, however, that they remain silent. The example of the Muslim women's collective Nous Citoyennes serves as an illustration for processes of politicisation and depoliticisation, and the role space plays in these processes. It is in space that political organisation takes place, but access to these spaces has become considerably more difficult in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

Keywords: citizenship, subaltern studies, political mobilisation, marginalised social housing neighbourhood, Islamophobia

Résumé

Si l'islamophobie en France n'est pas un phénomène nouveau, dans les semaines qui ont suivi l'attaque terroriste sur l'hebdomadaire *Charlie Hebdo,* il est devenu encore plus difficile pour les musulman·e·s de se faire entendre. L'expérience d'une apparence physique considérée comme « autre », commune à toutes les personnes racisées en France, est devenue plus courante encore dans leur vie quotidienne. À la suite de

l'attentat, l'espace déjà réduit que pouvait occuper l'activisme des musulman·e·s s'est considérablement rétréci. Mais la difficulté à se faire entendre n'implique pas qu'elles et ils soient resté·e·s silencieux·ses. Cet article prend l'exemple du collectif de musulmanes Nous Citoyennes pour analyser les processus de (dé)politisation à l'œuvre, et le rôle joué par l'espace dans ces processus. En effet, c'est dans l'espace que l'organisation politique prend place, mais l'accès à cet espace est devenu considérablement plus difficile après les attentats.

Mots-clés : citoyenneté, *subaltern studies*, mobilisation politique, quartiers Politique de la ville, islamophobie

Introduction

> "One year later, I am still not *Charlie*. *Charlie* can say whatever it wants because it is in a dominant position. We are not equal faced with this. We always hear from the same people and there are some from whom we will never hear, even though they have important things to say." (participant[1], field notes, 12/01/2016)

After the attacks against *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, the slogan "I am *Charlie*" (*Je suis Charlie*) spread all over the world through social media and was everywhere on banners during the demonstration that followed nationwide, in which 400,000 people participated (Houllier-Guibert, 2016). Islamophobia or generalised anti-Muslim feelings increased concerningly in this period (Beaman, 2021), a rift was formed between, on the one hand, Republican France ("us") and, on the other hand, Muslims ("them") and the marginalised areas they were associated with (Niang, 2019). "*Charlie*" came to be synonymous with freedom, equality, democracy, and *laïcité*, while those that were opposed to *Charlie* were associated with obscurantism, barbarism and violence. As a result, Muslims in France could not make themselves heard. Spivak's expression that subalterns cannot speak resonates therefore very strongly with the quote above.

Muslim women are subject to a triple process of silencing: first as Muslims; second as inhabitants of marginalised social housing neighbourhoods (MSHN) where the voices of residents are turned into noise (Dikeç, 2007), increasingly so when MSHN became associated with the threat of Muslim terrorism. After the attacks, these neighbourhoods came to be seen "as laboratories for the incubation of global Islamist terrorism" (Niang, 2019, p. 53). Third, and finally, Muslim women are not recognised

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1. When quoting from interviews, I use pseudonyms, following ethical guidelines of the University of Basel, despite interviewees' preference for using their real first name. When I quote from public debates, I use the term "participants".

as agents (who have free will or self-determination) because they are seen as submissive, in particular when wearing a veil (Hancock, 2015; Najib and Hopkins, 2019).

These forms of silencing lead to depoliticisation, i.e. dominant actors keep those marginalised away from exerting political influence and impede their politicisation, and lead to a withdrawal from public space and a retreat to private spaces. In this context impeding politicisation means impeding the translation of anger into political claims by a marginalised group. An approach to social justice that focuses on the injustice that certain groups are victims of, introduced in the United States by Iris Marion Young (1990) and in French geography by Philippe Gervais-Lambony and Frédéric Dufaux (2009), goes against the dominant approach in France that frames inequality in territorial terms rather than in ethno-racial terms (Hancock, 2009).

Analyses of obstacles faced by inhabitants of MSHN in France in accessing the right to the city in political terms tend to focus on state responses to political mobilisation (Diamond and Talpin, 2019; Dikeç, 2002; 2007; Hajjat, 2008). The difficulty of political subjectivity for racialised MSHN inhabitants should be understood in relation to the French history of urban policy, its neoconservative turn in the 1990s (Dikeç, 2007), and its gendered nature (Niang, 2019). I broaden Dikeç's focus on urban policy as a factor of depoliticisation by describing the more subtle means of racism and Islamophobia (Beaman, 2017; 2021), through which MSHN inhabitants, and Muslim women in particular, are kept out of the political domain. I draw on the narratives of Muslim women involved in political action, about the obstacles they face in the process of conscientisation and group formation. For this purpose I turn to subaltern studies, which I argue can also be applied to the postcolonial context in France (Dijkema, 2021). The construction of epistemic frameworks legitimises and enshrines practices of domination (Galván-Álvarez, 2010). Epistemic violence denies Muslim citizens in France political subjectivity, its function is to "damage a given group's ability to speak and be heard" (Dotson, 2011, p. 236). One's capacity to speak (Spivak, 1988) can be measured through the ability to make one's claims heard and to leave traces in official records. The silencing of particular voices involves power, because through the exercise of power one "determines what is audible and visible, which utterances are of concern for the community and which are to be dismissed as unworthy noise" (Selmeczi, 2012, p. 499). The alienating effect of embodied experiences of difference is partly responsible for avoiding politicisation.

The political philosophy of Jacques Rancière (1999) serves as background to understand that openly challenging structurally asymmetric power relations in society through political action is an inevitable part of democracy. Politics, according to Rancière, is not the exercise of power nor the struggle for power (Rancière, 1999; Dikeç,

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2007), but instead is the arena where experiences of inequality can be challenged. A more equal distribution of power only happens when one challenges the place one is attributed within this order. Challenging this place is a long and complex process which includes in its early stages at least five actions:

- Translating the experiences of the marginalised group into words, and producing speech in order to break with self-silencing practices
- Questioning the interiorisation of inferiority and acquiring the feeling that, as marginalised, they can legitimately contradict or reject dominant discourse
- Constituting a group, defining and agreeing on a we-group identity
- Producing (collective) discourse, formulating claims
- Publicising claims

In politicisation processes, space has varying functions: e.g., there are spaces that allow the formation of counterpublics, such as community centres and autonomously run gathering spaces. Group formation does not necessarily take place behind closed doors, as the creative and playful interventions in public space of Madame Ruetabaga demonstrate (Dijkema, Cohen and Fourier, 2018). Public spaces such as streets and squares also serve as more confrontational spaces where claims are publicised toward a target audience (Iveson, 2007). Nancy Fraser defines subaltern "counterpublics" as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinate social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (1992, p. 129) and they "help to expand discursive space" (ibid., p. 124). This discursive expansion of space is inherently linked to the access to material space because "all groups, whether subaltern or dominant, cannot constitute themselves unless they produce a material space" (Springer, 2011, p. 539). Obviously politicisation goes together with policing, and those responsible for the police order undertake, in response, actions with the aim of depoliticising, demobilising, and disorganising. Since the terrorist attacks, discursive space has shrunk and the access to public space and community centres has become more difficult.

To break away from the dominant approach to depoliticisation in MSHN, I focus on the experience and analysis of MSHN inhabitants. I collected their views during public debates organised by the Université populaire in Villeneuve, a marginalised neighbourhood in Grenoble. The working group of the Université populaire of Villeneuve, of which I was a member, organised a series of debates between 2015 and 2018.[2] The experience of one group of participants is central in this article: Muslim women who were part of the Nous Citoyennes collective, a Grenoble-based group of

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2. For a detailed account of the research methodology, see Dijkema, 2021.

Muslim women who take position on political issues as French citizens. This focus fills a gap in literature on Muslim women's responses to Islamophobia, in particular working-class women in France outside of the capital.

The article is structured as follows: first, I describe the difficulties Muslims faced in the post-*Charlie Hebdo* period when they felt that they could not speak; second, I demonstrate that othering is a spatial phenomenon, because it is in space that people are made to feel out of place through embodied experiences of difference; third, the example of Nous Citoyennes illustrates the role of space in enabling group formation, politicisation, and publicising political claims, but also demonstrates how the access to public space became increasingly difficult as a result of Islamophobia. The article concludes that Islamophobia is responsible for impeding Muslim women's access to the spaces that are key to politicisation, which drastically reduces possibilities to participate in society as political subjects.

When Muslims can't speak because *Charlie* is hegemonic

Charlie Hebdo is known in France as a left-wing, anti-clerical satirical magazine. Over the years, it came to defend an increasingly pro-Israeli and Islamophobic position, increasingly so after 9/11, and warned against the danger of *communautarisme* (Lizotte, 2020; Neffati, 2021). "Communitarianism" in French is synonym for not being integrated, or rather of refusing to be part of France. According to Dena Montague, "the term is used by a majority group to deny the speech acts and political expression of minority groups (in this case Muslims) who are perceived as carriers of 'infra-political demands' vis-à-vis the French nation-state" (quoted in Neffati, 2021, p. 289). In 2006, the weekly printed the controversial Mohamed caricatures that were the object of the rage of the terrorists responsible for the massacre of the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial team in 2015. Despite the fact that the opinions of the weekly were controversial and contested in France before 2015, after the terrorist attacks, "being *Charlie*" became synonymous for "being French" (Todd, 2015). The magazine *Marianne* associated being French with "laughter, making fun of and provocation" (figure 1). The magazine seems to place conflict and disagreement at the centre of French democracy and what it means to be French. It is therefore paradoxical that after the terrorist attacks, Muslims felt silenced in name of freedom of expression.

Figure 1 : "Rire, se moquer, provoquer, c'est ça la France." (*Marianne* n° 976-977, 24 December 2015 – 7 January 2016)

Those that did not recognise themselves in *Charlie* were considered to be in favour of violence and were alienated from the political community. Hayeth, for example, felt dispossessed of her identity as a French citizen: "France is attacking our very existence, I don't have a country anymore" (field notes, 13/01/2015). She felt as if

she was no longer recognised as a French citizen as a result of media images of Muslims and statements by politicians. Zeynab formulated her feelings after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack as follows:

> "I was born and raised here but if you are against *Charlie*, [it's as if] you are against the Republic. After the attacks, I felt under surveillance. I have no inner peace, what will this person think of me? In the news [you hear that] people [are] put under surveillance because of what they say." (Zeynab, Université populaire, 11/03/2016)

This remark poses an important political point, which is that Muslims face attacks of an ontological embodied and intimate nature due to Islamophobia. Because *Charlie* was present everywhere and could not be contradicted, I argue that *Charlie* was hegemonic: if expressing dissent is impossible one can speak of hegemony.

The French national education system was one such actor involved in creating the hegemonic position of *Charlie Hebdo*. The imposition of a minute of silence in primary and secondary schools for the victims of the attacks was perceived as very problematic by participants of the Université populaire, in particular because these commemorations were under the motto of "*Je suis Charlie*". For example, high school students (12-15 years old) were invited in (some) schools to make "*Je suis Charlie*" signs. When Ahmed's son refused to make such a sign because he did not feel included in the slogan (he was not *Charlie*), he found himself in a very difficult position at school (field notes, 13/01/2015). Muslim children spoke at home about their impression that for them freedom of expression did not exist, and several parents stated that they briefed their children not to express themselves during these debates, but instead to remain silent, and avoid responding to any provocations.

> "After the attacks I couldn't say I was not *Charlie*. I said to my son (18 years old): 'Don't give your opinion [at school]'. All the mums told their children: 'Don't say you're not *Charlie*.' Things got out of hand. If you were against *Charlie*, it was as if you were for [this violence]. I'm afraid of being judged." (participant, Université populaire, 11/03/2016)

There were about seventy cases of pupils who refused to participate in it, and who as a result, were summoned to the police station, along with their parents (e.g., Hojlo, 2015; Niang, 2019). These incidents were widely perceived as "the latest sign of an Islamic fundamentalism fed by migration from former French colonies and long-fermenting within France's marginalised suburban neighbourhoods, the banlieues" (Lizotte, 2020, p. 1). The Ministry of Education responded with an initiative involving disciplinary and pedagogical measures to promote *laïcité* in the schools, called the Great Mobilisation for the Republic's Values (*grande mobilisation de l'École pour les valeurs de la République*). For a detailed account of attempts by the French State to

extend central control over peripheral spaces by promoting "a state-sponsored model of universal citizenship that regards French Muslims' identity claims with mistrust", see Christopher Lizotte (2020, p. 1).

It is paradoxical that as a result of the framing of the issue, in the name of freedom of speech, an entire segment of the population felt silenced. The following quote is another piece of evidence that Muslims could not speak in the period that followed the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre.

> "We couldn't give our opinion. We couldn't give it. We were not heard [...]. They didn't understand us, so it was better to keep a low profile [*raser les murs*] and try not to be noticed, it was like that." (Tina, interview, 09/05/2017)

The French expression for keeping a low profile, used by Tina, is "*raser les murs*", which literally means to walk very close to the wall. This spatial metaphor echoes with Rancière's illustration of the distribution of the sensible (2000), as a result of which those at the centre can walk in the middle of the pavement, and those at the margins have to move to the side. The expression is frequently used in reference to the position within society of first generation migrant labourers who were expected to remain invisible. It is quite telling that this expression was used in the period after the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre as it indicates that the position of Muslims moved back to that of their (grand)parents, and not in the direction of obtaining an equal position in France. Kawtar Najib and Peter Hopkins (2019) found similar results about keeping a low profile, in particular after the paroxysmic violence of terrorist attacks, through adapting clothing styles. To extend this spatial metaphor I look in the next section at othering as a spatial phenomenon that takes places through embodied experiences of difference.

Embodied experiences of difference, a spatial phenomenon

Racialised participants of the Université populaire evoked the reactions their bodies provoke in public space, recalling the moment they first realised that their bodies were designated as different and undesired, something they were confronted with sooner or later in life. There are recurring and gendered patterns in these stories about the reactions racialised bodies produce in public space. Both men and women mention experiencing fear and rejection: racialised men because they are associated with crime and drugs, and Muslim women because of the negative associations of wearing the veil (see also Guénif Souilamas, 2000). Embodied experiences are central to geopolitics (Hancock, 2011; Hyndman, 2004; Pain and Smith, 2008; Schenk, Gökarıksel and Behzadi, 2022). Bodies and everyday lives are key sites of the

production of "us versus them": discourses and strategies that target Muslim women, be it as victims, terrorists, or enemies, enable recreating boundaries between who are considered to belong and those who do not, such as Muslim others (Schenk, Gökariksel and Behzadi, 2022). Here, I focus on the embodied experiences of difference of Muslim women. It was when Nadira started to wear a hijab that she understood that she was considered "other" and felt obliged to position herself differently in public space, and within society as a whole. Jeanne, a white woman who converted to Islam, shares this experience and also feels that she is unwelcome and out of place in certain spaces in France:

> "I am French, born in France, and I no longer feel at home in my country because I am not accepted as I am. I feel kind of marginalised because they don't accept us anywhere with our veil." (Jeanne, field notes, 06/01/2017)

Through staring (*regards*), one can be made to feel undesired. Staring is charged with invisible and unspoken tensions that are clearly understood by those who are stared at (see also Hancock and Mobillion, 2019). Fahija identifies the city centre as a space of exposure to disapproving gazes, and where she is made to feel out of place and uncomfortable (field notes, 06/01/2017). For similar experiences in Paris and London, see Najib and Hopkins (2019), in Malmö, see Carina Listerborn (2015), and in Amsterdam see Reza Shaker, Bettina van Hoven and Sander van Lanen (2022). The practice of staring and its negative charge is systemic and has an impact on Muslim women's mobility and their "right to the city" (Najib and Teeple Hopkins, 2020). Who is stared at and the emotion it is charged with is subject to the influence of a changing sociopolitical context. The *Charlie Hebdo* massacre and the terrorist attacks that followed had a significant impact on participants' everyday life, reinforcing their embodied experiences of difference. These experiences of being treated differently bring me to the issue of what place Muslim women can occupy in France. When the latter "cannot be present in public spaces without feeling uncomfortable, victimised and basically 'out of place'", we must question, as Joe Painter and Chris Philo have argued, whether they can be regarded as citizens at all (1995). Moreover, participants of the Université populaire have said that whenever they publicly manifest discontent they are reminded of (*renvoyer vers*) their immigrant, non-French origins, and concern is expressed about their compatibility with the principles and values of the French Republic. As a result of not being considered French, they cannot claim the right to have rights, as in Engin Isin and Greg Nielsen's definition of citizenship (2008, p. 8), and are treated as second-class citizens, or as "citizen-outsiders" (Beaman, 2017). They are basically denied political subjectivity. In the next section, I demonstrate how the Nous Citoyennes collective politicised their experience as Muslim women and

positioned themselves as French citizens but also the difficulties they met in political organising.

Politicisation, *Nous Citoyennes* challenges Muslim women's marginalisation

Nous Citoyennes formed in 2012 in the context of two legal developments. First, a bill adopted by the Senate on 17 January 2012, which extended "the obligation of religious neutrality to private structures in charge of early childhood".[3] The collective contested the implications of the bill that prohibited day care assistants from wearing a veil in their own houses when taking care of children (see de Galembert, 2015). Second, the circulaire Chatel enforced the principle of *laïcité* (France's idiosyncratic form of secularism) in the entire education system, extending its application from civil servants all the way to parents accompanying school outings.[4] After being dormant for some years, the Nous Citoyennes collective remobilised in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks against *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015, at a moment when political space for Muslim activists was rapidly shrinking. However this momentum did not last, but came to a standstill again after the November 2015 attacks on several places of leisure in Paris that caused 130 deaths. In reference to Fraser (1992), I argue that Nous Citoyennes functions as a counterpublic or counterhegemonic space. The role of subaltern counterpublics in stratified societies is dual, according to her:

> "On the one hand, subaltern counterpublics function as spaces of withdrawal and regrouping; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides." (Fraser, 1992, p. 124)

Nous Citoyennes fulfils this double function of a subaltern counterpublic. The main narrator of the story of Nous Citoyennes, Nadira, insists that at the beginning the collective fulfilled a need to talk about their experiences, to meet other women, and to share information. It was in (semi-)private spaces that they met and that they spoke, and it is in these relatively safe spaces that they became a counterpublic, that they identified as Muslim citizens, and formulated claims. Nadira described the move from conscientisation to confrontation as an important element for forming a counterpublic, literally insisting on the latter term. From the (semi-)private spaces of the first meetings, Nous Citoyennes decided to invest other (semi-)public spaces, such as spaces of debate and the street, in order to confront their perspectives with those

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3. See article L. 423-22-1 of this bill.
4. For a critical reading of this legal text, see Ismahane Chouder, *Saphirnews.com*, 05/05/2012, accessed 10/02/2020

of the established and to publicise their claims. I put in bold the words that indicate the forms of organisation that help a person to break out of their isolation and form a group.

> "Nadira: We felt a wave of **revolt, injustice and incomprehension**, that such laws [*circulaire Chatel*] could be voted for, simply to exclude us, because the aim of these bills is really just to exclude veiled women. So we said to ourselves: what can we do? I think that was the trigger, because we already felt injustice and a lot of negative emotions and, to start with, **the need to talk** about them. When we **got together** at the beginning it was to **discuss** those [experiences of injustice], and [to discuss] what can we **do**? What **voice** can we have to **make ourselves heard** and to **say**: 'Well, these laws are unjust and as women we feel that we are citizens above all, not Muslims.' Our priority is to say: 'We are Muslim citizens,' because we cannot deny the fact that we are Muslims, but we are here and we want to **participate** in society and **not be excluded**. So all of a sudden we **organised debates**, we participated in **public debates**. We **met** people, we met women, we met people who were confused about all of this, and we realised that there were many people who **were not aware** of these bills that were being voted on in the National Assembly, **without us being aware**. So, as a result, we said that it was important to **talk** about it, to **react**, and to **raise awareness** among women and men.

> We needed to **talk** to each other and we needed to **gather**.

> I think we need **spaces for dialogue** like that, especially when it comes to things that affect us most deeply, such as women's rights. Even I, who am not a mother, I felt concerned. [...] I feel concerned as a woman. [...] I ask myself how they could have made this kind of law.

> Mariette: Well, on their **own**, of course. Because the main people concerned are never there, right? When you see that they say, 'yes, veiled women are submissive women': it's non-veiled people who say that.

> Nadira: But the worst thing is, and this is also the purpose of Nous Citoyennes in the first place, that there are really a lot of people who weren't aware of these bills. Because if you're not interested in politics, you're not supposed to know what they're doing, bills behind your back, while you're not aware. And from one day to the next, you can find yourself banned from going I don't know where.

> Claske: Raising awareness among the people concerned, so more among veiled women or...?

> Nadira: No, basically it was everybody. We don't go to **public debates** only to talk to veiled women. We know very well what they think... not really, but we have more or less the same ways of thinking. Whereas the aim...

Claske: is to confront others?

Nadira: is to **confront** ourselves to other ideas, to pass on messages, to inform, because not everybody was necessarily aware of it." (Nadira and Mariette, interview, 21/02/2017)

It is striking in above quotes how much of the vocabulary Nadira and Mariette used is in the register of voicing ("voice", "listening", "debate", "dialogue", "confront", etc.) as tools to challenge subalternisation. In these meetings the women of Nous Citoyennes came up with the idea of organising their own polling station in the centre of Grenoble. They engaged passers-by in conversation about the legal developments in 2012 and asked them to vote on it. The public space that Nous Citoyennes occupied in 2012 closed up rapidly in the period following the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre. Several reasons were behind this: the political and media discourse that discursively articulated Muslims as dangerous, the comments that undermined and discredited their political statements, and the state of emergency. The closing of this symbolic space strongly affected their self-confidence and impeded their mobilisation in defence of their rights. The following example demonstrates the effect it had on their capacity to go out into streets and occupy public space to defend their rights when a new labour law was introduced that confirmed private companies' right to forbid the wearing of the veil.

Depolitisation in the post-*Charlie Hebdo* period

The labour law, known as the "El-Khomri law" after the minister who drafted it (09/08/2016), stipulates in article 1321-2-1 that even though an employer cannot forbid "in a general or absolute manner" an employee from wearing religious symbols, they can adopt internal regulations that require from employees the "obligation of neutrality that limits the expression of personal and religious convictions".[5] In other words, the law gives private companies the possibility to deny their employees the right to wear a veil by including this clause in their internal regulations. This provision of the labour law clearly goes beyond the 1905 law that provides the legal framework of *laïcité* in France and that requires the religious neutrality of the State, but not of private actors. This obligation to unveil is based on the argument that clients could be offended by having to deal with ostensibly Muslim women.[6] Jouda, one of the motors behind the Nous Citoyennes initiative, explains in the quote below why they were not

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5. Religion dans l'entreprise : quelles sont les règles ?, accessed 17/02/2020.
6. See, for example, "Affaire Asma Bougnaoui : la justice confirme le droit de porter le voile en entreprise", Le Figaro, 19/04/2019, accessed 17/02/2020.

able to mobilise in 2016 when the law was under debate, and what prevented them from participating in political activism in public space at that moment. In this quote, Jouda describes the subtle working of depoliticisation beyond outright state repression through hegemonic representations of Islam as a threat, inducing feelings of ontological insecurity among Muslims and the withdrawal from public life to private spaces. The relevant words are highlighted again:

> "We [Muslims] have been broken over the last few years. I find that engaging in **activism was very hard**. There were a lot of people, myself included, who needed a break. Personally, I start to **return** a bit [to activism]. [This law] came at a time when they had totally destroyed us, put **pressure** on us, **bludgeoned** us… You turn on the TV, you see veiled women everywhere, Muslims everywhere.
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> [The attack on] *Charlie Hebdo* was a cataclysm for us! It was too hard and this law was passed at that time. And nobody saw it. At least us, **we weren't out on the streets**. Yet we had been on the streets for the law on nannies [circulaire Chatel] and all that. But when you say now: 'come on Muslims, mobilise!', well **nobody could mobilise**. Everyone has **their legs cut off, their arms cut off**. We have to **start again, we have to go back out**. […]
>
> In fact, we don't even have the confidence to go out of our homes anymore, they have **crushed** us. And even in our organisations, however small they may be, we have to **rebuild** our self-confidence. We have **strength**, because we have a lot of **anger**, but at some point we have to put it back in its proper place and channel it and to let it out, **and get going again** because frankly it's too hard." (field notes, 24/01/2018)

Jouda uses a very physical metaphor to express the obstacles Muslims encountered in the post-*Charlie* period, having their arms and legs "cut off" (*coupés*) which in French is an expression used for being paralysed by a violent emotion. In case of paralysis one's body cannot come into action, one is not mobile and therefore cannot be part of a mobilisation. This physical constraint to action recalls Frantz Fanon's focus on muscular inhibition as part of the colonial condition (Fanon, 2011; 2010)—colonial violence is experienced at the level of the muscles (Mbembe, 2007). Jouda holds the negative image of Muslims in a context of terrorist violence, shown everywhere on media screens, responsible for this paralysis. The discursive articulation of Muslims as threat to the Republican order very much affected Muslim's self-confidence and inhibited their ability to enter public space. "Return", "go back out", "rebuild" are all references to having to restart the work that Nous Citoyennes undertook in 2012 all over again. Their anger makes them a potential force, says Jouda, but in 2016 this potential force was scattered and split, staying behind the doors of individual and private spaces. The work of convincing women to leave the space of their homes to come together, to share their anger and to channel their scattered

forces into a common voice had to be restarted if they hoped to mobilise for street protests against the El-Khomri law and others yet to come. Disqualifying media images clearly has the effect of silencing the voices of marginalised groups, and of preventing the translation of their experience into political claims.

Conclusion

The example of Nous Citoyennes demonstrates that early phases of political organising are concerned with the formation of a group based on shared experiences and interests, the formulation of collective claims, and making these claims public. This involves a double process of making visible and audible. This example further demonstrates that marginalised groups need space, both in terms of a meeting space and public space, in order to form and exist as a group and to publicise their claims. It is in space where some form of confrontation with the majority society is possible. However, since the attacks this space has been closing, not just the discursive space that gave Muslims the feeling that they couldn't speak, but also material space. It has been harder to access public space because it is there that bodies are subject to the hostile gaze of others. Moreover, over the course of my field research (2015-2018), several meeting places in Villeneuve have either closed or have become less accessible to Muslim women wearing a veil. The political role of community centres was reduced when the management of these centres was transferred from independently run associations into the hands of the municipality. This phenomenon is also referred to as *municipalisation* in French. During my research, I witnessed the closure of several community centres that played an important role in neighbourhood organisation. Both the Maison des habitants (place des Géants) and Osmose, an independently run homework assistance centre and meeting place for parents, both located in Villeneuve, were put under the management of the municipality, which as a result changed their function and could no longer hire Muslim women who chose to veil their hair. These examples demonstrate that spaces for political organising in Villeneuve are under constant stress. With these community spaces being closed or taken over by public servants, inhabitants' independence in terms of deciding on content, and setting their own goals and priorities, was reduced or completely lost. With the closure of these spaces, possibilities for agonism are also reduced. This question of the direct encroachment of the state in the everyday institutions of MSHN and community life deserves further exploration (see for example Möser and Tillous, 2020).

As a result of the consistent presentation of Muslim women as a threat, state actors can "legitimately" repress their claims and respond to them through security measures instead of listening. Muslim women are treated as second-class citizens and

are excluded from the space of formal politics because they are not represented by political parties and they are negated as interlocutors. They are instead seen and dealt with as a danger to the unity and order of the Republic. The idea on which deliberative democracy is based, that through deliberation consensus can be found, denies the conflictual nature of politics as competition between people pursuing different and, at times, conflicting interests (Mouffe, 2000). Living up to the democratic ideal means to open up political space for Muslim women and to open up spaces for autonomous organising, including non-mixed spaces (François, Gilbert, Keyhani et al., 2021), which are not spaces of separatism but spaces where politics becomes possible.

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