2013 | *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (1): 155–71

The two conceptions of value

André ITEANU, *Centre national de la recherche scientifique, École pratique des hautes études*

At present, in Euro-America, value is usually associated with equality and not with hierarchy, which, however, is its natural partner. In this paper, I investigate the status of this proposition. Using the French veil debate as my principal example, I investigate the intricate ways in which the idea of *laïcité*, a crucial democratic value for the French, is related to the social hierarchy that exists between mainstream French society and the *banlieues* (marginal neighborhoods) where new immigrants are offered residence. Because this hierarchy is not generally taken into account by the French actors in the headscarf debate (although it is perfectly apparent to foreign observers), I propose that some invisible social mechanism must persuade them that the subordination of the *banlieues* and the value of *laïcité* are totally independent. I conclude by arguing that the dominant ideology in Euro-America, which posits that hierarchies are exclusively founded on political power, leads those who are in a position to act to track a mistaken, elusive culprit, instead of trying to strike some kind of bargain with the hierarchy of values.

Keywords: value, hierarchy, religion, French veil controversy, immigration, assimilation

---

In his Radcliffe-Brown lecture "On value," Dumont (1980)[1] claims that many of his colleagues misunderstood his use of the notion of hierarchy. Therefore, he struggles to examine whether he could replace this term with our notion of "value" and the concepts associated with it. The reader soon realizes, however, that his attempt raises serious difficulties. Dumont relentlessly tackles the notion of value from different angles, but finally gives up his attempt and returns to hierarchy to complete the argument. The hypothesis I want to defend here is that his failure does not result from a lack of ability, but from the fact that values, inasmuch they are social—that is, shared among several persons[2]—are always associated with a

1. See *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (1): 286–314. —Ed.

 ISSN 2049-1115 (Online)

hierarchical ordering. Therefore, if one examines a situation where values are important, one cannot but resort to hierarchy, sooner or later, to fully describe the case.

This inseparability between the two notions does not pose a problem to those who live in the many societies where hierarchy is regarded as a natural phenomenon. On the contrary, in other places, and particularly in Euro-America, hierarchy is held in contempt and often considered incompatible with anything that deserves to be valued. This is, for example, the case in the many current political and even philosophical discourses that promise a better world if only people were to respect some values, among which are gender equality, color equality, cultural equality, and generation equality. However, if social values and hierarchy are, as I suggest, inseparable, these statements should immediately appear to be unreliable to the public, lest some devices are at work in these societies to conceal this solidarity. I therefore use the term "an ideological twist" to refer to any such device, conscious or not, operating to blur the link between value and hierarchy.[3]

In today's globalized world, such ideological twists are numerous, or more accurately, their effects can be perceived in many different contexts. For example, a recent book, *L'empire de la valeur* by André Orléan (2011), an economist who had a part in the creation of the Euro currency, uncovers that which lies in the way money is conceived. Indeed, as Dumont (1980: 209), among others, has noted: "Then, in common parlance, the word [value], which meant in Latin healthy vigour and strength and in medieval times the warrior's bravery, symbolizes most of the time the power of money to measure everything."[4] One would then expect that money should be considered the very object that creates wealth hierarchy. This is indeed the case in Marxist theory, whereby capitalists have superiority over proletarians and, to a large extent, in everyday life, where many think that rich people are superior to poor.[5] Surprisingly, however, in neoclassical economic theory—on which most economists rely today—this hierarchizing aspect of money is avoided.

In Walras' (1954) view, for example, the value of an object is its use-value and not its price expressed in terms of money, which only represents its rate of exchange with all other objects. Because people always have limited desire for any

2. Conversely, to avoid creating a hierarchy, we have developed (in anthropology, for example) an infinite number of ways to assert that the values we support are exclusively personal: from my point of view, for me, according to me, personally I think, and so on.

3. For example, the Christian notion of the individual conversion could be considered such a device that renders all values entirely personal.

4. See also Ton Otto and Rane Willerslev's introduction to this issue.

5. There is an inherent ambiguity in the way I here use the notion of hierarchy. I mix up simple stratification with the kind of hierarchy that Dumont (1980) characterizes as an encompassment. The first type of hierarchy is created by power; the second renders visible a worldview that includes ontological distinctions of value. My contention is that in the Euro-American context, there is a permanent ambiguity between the two sorts of hierarchy. I come back to this in my conclusion.

kind of commodity, the sum of the individual desires for all goods determines the relative price of each good in relation to all others. A proper scale of prices ensures a global balance whereby all objects are always bought and all desires fulfilled. Therefore, in Walras' (1954) view, prices establish a global equality of all actors on the market. Money renders exchanges easier by materializing prices, but does not have any further function.

André Orléan (2011) criticizes this conception of money, as he finds it does not account for what happens in reality. In capitalist systems, he argues, objects are not exchanged for other objects, but are usually obtained for money. Furthermore, contrary to their limited desire for commodities, individuals have an unbounded craving for money. Money is, therefore, different in nature from all other objects. Its only use-value is to be accepted by many people, and therefore, its value is exclusively that of the social network it can give access to. Thus, all tradesmen who want to enter the commodity market must accept it as a value. Consequently, Orléan concludes that money's value bears only on trust and cannot be controlled by economical methods.

In my view, this means that money is not only, as neoclassical economists claim, a harmless trading tool, but also, and above all, a value, the recognition of which is inseparable from some sort of hierarchy. I thus believe that wealth hierarchy, which today many complain about, is not an accidental result of capitalist history, but rather the intrinsic outcomes of the promotion of money to the rank of a social value.[6]

Although this hierarchizing aspect of money was recognized as far back as Aristotle (Berthoud 2004), neoclassical economists bypassed it by claiming that money-produced hierarchy is exterior to the economy itself and to the formation of prices. This denial of the link between value and hierarchy is, as I stated earlier, an ideological twist. It operates by refuting the social value of money while constructing economic value as a subjective judgment over the use-value of things. Because it is exclusively individual, such a notion of value does not produce hierarchy, but a global balance between producers and consumers. Owing to this ideological twist, the economy is, against all odds, absolved from creating wealth hierarchy.

The French veil controversy and the value of *laïcité*

Because it addressed important French values while pretending to preserve equality, a similar twist might have been at work in the imbroglio constituted by what was called in France "the veil controversy." This controversy has raged, with high and low tides, from 1989 until today. For those who do not remember it in detail, it started when three schoolgirls residing in a Parisian suburb were forbidden to attend classes after they had decided to come to school wearing headscarves. This incident rapidly gave birth to an immense and violent public debate confronting religion, freedom, feminism, and national pride. The debate was repeatedly rekindled by similar episodes that occurred in schools in different parts of France (Levy et al. 2004). It reached its peak in 2004, when the French

6. My vocabulary is here insufficient. I only use as a shortcut the distinction between use-value as a subjective individual value and money as a social value.

parliament adopted a law precluding wearing visible religious signs in schools and in public institutions.[7] This law, the pro-legislation camp argued, was indispensable for protecting the value of *laïcité* that characterizes French democracy. However, as could be expected, the strategy failed to close down the case, and the number of young women donning headscarves or "Muslim" outfits in the street has, since then, multiplied a hundredfold.

In French, *la laïcité*—which badly translates into English as "secularism"—is considered the touchstone of the separation of the church from the state. However, I (as did the many foreign researchers who wrote about this case) found it difficult to understand in what sense the French considered these young women, who simply exercised their constitutional religious rights, to have violated the value of *laïcité*. Joan Wallach Scott (2007), a quite strong-minded analyst, goes even further than I do in her judgment, admitting in *The politics of the veil* that she failed to figure out why perfectly intelligent people such as the French could consider a few high school girls[8] wearing headscarves to seriously threaten the state. My hypothesis is that this contradiction, so obvious to all foreigners, is made invisible to the French by an ideological twist that blurs the relation between the value of *laïcité* and the social hierarchy.

Because the case this paper presents—the veil controversy—is so French, in what follows, I regularly call on Don Juan, the principal character of a play written by the famous seventeenth-century (1622–1673) Molière, to help me unravel the hidden twists of the situation. Molière's play, *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre* ([1665] 2005), conveniently deals with religion, freedom, revolution, and sex, just as the veil controversy does.[9]

"I pay you if you renounce religion"

Molière's Don Juan is a character that marks a change of era. While in his parents' time no one disputed aristocratic and Christian norms, Don Juan revolts against them. Relying exclusively on rationality, he is a free thinker and a free lover who challenges religion and the fear of the deceased. However, Don Juan never questions aristocratic superiority, but only the very norms prevalent within this order. His dream is to replace them with a new noble ideal dominated by liberty. As for him, he most clearly demonstrates his freedom in his sexual exploits—thus, his reputation as a womanizer.

---

7. Loi no. 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004, Art. L. 141-5-1: "Dans les écoles, les collèges et les lycées publics, le port de signes ou tenues par lesquels les élèves manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit." *Journal Officiel de la République* 65 (17 mars 2004): 5190.

8. Some of the young women involved in this debate attended what in France is called *collège*. This means that they were between eleven and fifteen years old. Others attended a *lycée* and were between fifteen and eighteen years old.

9. Here, I attempt to understand only the French attitude in this case. I do not propose a complete analysis of the notion of *laïcité* nor of the relation between the French nation and its Muslims. Asad (2003, 2006) offers a broader view of these questions. I do not share many of his positions.

One scene of this play is particularly interesting for us. Don Juan crosses a forest on horseback in the company of his servant, Sganarelle. Suddenly, his eyes fall upon a poor beggar dressed in rags. The man supplicates for charity. Don Juan pulls out from his coat a gold coin that's worth a fortune and tells the man, "I give it to you if you curse God." The poor man tries and tries again, but is unable to do it. Then, desperate, he says to Don Juan, "I'd rather starve to death than swear." Don Juan leaves; however, on reflection, he turns back and tosses the coin to him, saying, "I give it to you anyhow, for the love of humankind" (3.2).

Instinctively, this scene could easily be transposed into today's French world. Don Juan offers a clear deal to the beggar—"I give you money if you renounce religion"—and this is roughly what the French state currently proposes to all the immigrants it shelters. This money that the government promises is in the form of access to all kinds of social benefits, but it is constituted as well, and probably more so, by the fortunes that all poor foreigners dream of earning in France.

One could easily argue that today's situation is different from that described by Molière because his beggar is Christian, while the immigrants we are talking about—those that today's France wants to see renounce their religion—are Muslim. It is indisputable that colonization, which only ended in the 1960s in bloodshed, has durably influenced French ideas about Islam. Many observers even assert that, in fact, it still endures today under a different guise. And indeed, the recent doings of our former president Nicolas Sarkozy in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya seem to confirm their analysis. All this, at least, leads us to suspect that France has a particular bitterness toward Islam.

However, on closer examination, the situation appears more complex. In France, Islam is openly held in contempt only by those whose political affiliation stands at the extreme right of the political spectrum. The veil controversy further offered the opportunity to understand that the rest of the population—the majority—is always quick to express a general hostility toward religion, similar to that advocated by Don Juan. This hostility increases gradually as one moves toward the political left. Therefore, for a large majority of French people, the crucial problem is not Islam per se, but religion at large. The fact that the religion in question is Islam only makes it worse, for some of them.[10]

In French history, Islam was not the first target of the anti-religious mob. Investigation into the court cases of the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth reveals hostility against Catholics similar in its form to that exerted toward Muslims today. During that period, communist or socialist mayors of several towns promulgated ordinances to outlaw religious meetings, to suspend funerary processions, to ban ringing the church bells, and even to prohibit Catholic priests from wearing their cloth outside the church (see, for example, Lalouette 1991). Most of these ordinances were not abrogated and are still applicable if someone complains. In 1904, a law even prohibited any person holding an office in a religious congregation from teaching. As a consequence, twenty-four thousand schools closed overnight, which created a serious crisis.

10. In making this point, I elaborate on a statement by Asad (2003: 165): "I mean only that for liberals no less than for the extreme right, the narrative of Europe points to the idea of an unchangeable essence, and the argument between them concerns the kind of 'toleration' that that essence calls for."

This twist of mind was so persistent in France that it became between 1952 and 1965 the subject of a series of five films starring a most famous French actor named Fernandel. Fernandel played Don Camillo, a priest who lives in a village whose mayor, Pepone, is a communist.[11] Pepone's main concern is trying to chase Don Camillo away from the village by developing the most vicious stratagems. Conversely, the priest does the same to him. However, they are also old friends, and in the end, they invariably help each other in some humanitarian project concerning the villagers. All French people of today's politicians' generation have seen these films, which feature a major and enduring French concern in a popular and comic guise.

Just as in the first half of the twentieth century the French *banlieues* were inhabited by Catholic immigrants originating in the French countryside, during the second half, they mainly hosted Muslim immigrants from Maghreb, so the antagonism toward religion has shifted from Catholicism to Islam. However, this shift produced a whole new political situation.

Formerly, people on the politically right side supported the Catholic religion and those on the non-religious left side were antagonistic toward it. Therefore, just as in Don Camillo's films, France was then traversed by an almost balanced tension between religious and anti-religious that matched its political division. Now, this balance has disappeared. The right side dislikes Muslims for the aforementioned colonial reasons, while the left side dislikes them because they are religious. Therefore, today in France, public opinion almost unanimously rejects the Muslim religion. Just as advocated by many classical Enlightenment philosophers, such a large ideological and political agreement is dangerous for the proper working of democracy.

Denying the republic

Don Juan is a double-sided character. Son of a noble family, born with a silver spoon in his mouth and certain of his superiority, he ridicules all simple people. He mistreats women, seduces them with lies, and then deceives them. He abuses his father and mocks the dead commander whom he has killed with his own hands and whose daughter he has raped. He is not a very commendable person. We hate his arrogance.

And yet, we love him. He is free. He does only what he pleases. He loves love for its own sake, liberated from any moral commandments. Above all, he is a rational man, not fearing superstition, religion, or ghosts. He believes that his judgment has intrinsic value and does not need to be supported by admitted truth. He's also brave, ready to fight the whole world to make freedom triumph. And he dies while pursuing this task. Considering him under this guise, I sometimes think of him as some kind of Che Guevara.

11. These five films are *Le petit monde de Don Camillo* (dir. Julien Duvivier, 1952), *Le retour de Don Camillo* (dir. Julien Duvivier, 1953), *La grande bagarre de Don Camillo* (dir. Carmine Gallone, 1955), *Don Camillo Monseigneur* (dir. Carmine Gallone, 1961), and *Don Camillo en Russie* (dir. Luigi Comencini, 1965).

This second aspect of the character reveals revolutionary leanings characteristic of French thought. Two centuries after Molière, Tocqueville, in his famous *Democracy in America* (1835), asserts that the major difference between French and American democracy is that the former was established in a violent fight against aristocracy and religion, while the latter did not have to go through such an ordeal. Tocqueville ([1835] 2009: 752) writes, "In America, people have democratic ideas and passions; in Europe we still have revolutionary ideas and passions."

This distinction is still so vivid today that one can find traces of it in the contrasted ways in which the Americans and the French conceive of the wars they fight. Whatever were the unspoken reasons for both the Iraq and the Afghanistan wars, the discourse that was deployed about it in the United States revolved around the idea that it was important to establish freedom in these countries. In this context, freedom means to possess a government able to ensure the safety of all groups, especially religious and ethnic ones. By contrast, when the French talk about the Maghrebian wars they recently fought, they call them *la Revolution Algérienne*, *la Revolution Lybienne*, and the like. In the French view, *les Révolutions arabes*, like all other revolutions, are twofold: they have a political goal—to establish freedom and equality—and a *laïque* one—to loosen the religious grasp. Only after both of these goals have been completed can a free democratic citizen appear and manifest his or her rational will.

The notion of rationality is crucial in the French view as an indispensable attribute of a democratic citizen. It is not conditioned by the quality of the person, by his or her personal wealth, or even by his or her creativity. Political decisions must be made neither on sentiments nor even as the result of family education, but on rational bases only. A true political citizen is therefore a person who systematically puts into doubt all established beliefs and, to begin with, all religious dogmas.

Why girls?

Today in France, many Muslim schoolboys wear beards and jellabas over their jeans, and sometimes carry chaplets, but they are never harassed for that. Some schoolgirls wore a discrete scarf or even a bandana over their hair, and this created a huge problem. Why, then, did this happen to girls and not boys?

Don Juan is not the only noble of his time to be licentious. However, while most others conceal their debauchery, he does it in public, presenting it unlike a vice—that is, as a moral quality. A century after Molière's death, before and during the time of the French Revolution, this state of mind spread widely. It is enough to mention the names of the Marquis de Sade and of Laclos, author of *The dangerous liaisons*, to recall that the eighteenth century was in France a period of sexual license. Debauchery was then highly sophisticated, but above all it was a way to put into question Christian faith. In his famous book *Juliette*, Sade ([1797] 1971: 35) says, "The very conceiving of this so infinitely disgusting phantom [God] is, I confess it, the one wrong I am unable to forgive man." A few years earlier, his *Philosophy in the bedroom* ([1795] 1971) is indeed a long sexual orgy described in a matter-of-fact tone; however, in the middle of the action, the participants stop their sexual activities and start reading and debating a political declaration whose

central theme is the relation between religion and democracy. In Sade's time, sex and citizenship were not far removed from each other.

On the brink of the French Revolution, nobility as an order was contested, but not the idea that human beings differed in personal value. One could easily imagine, then, that the French Revolution consisted of not only, as Tocqueville asserted, a fight against the distinction by orders, but also varied attempts to invent new forms of social hierarchy—not founded on birth or on religious creeds, but on something else. One of these attempts, I argue, was led by former nobles and their allies, who claimed that their rationality, manifested by their personal sexual freedom, raised them above the uneducated, credulous crowd.

Ever since Molière's day, the distinctiveness of nobility has waned. However, it is amusing to note that those who today hold superior positions in France, such as the politicians, are still known for their particularly free sexual behavior. This was true, for example, for our former presidents Valery Giscard D'Estaing, François Mitterrand, Jacques Chirac, and Nicolas Sarkozy. This was again the case with Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the 2012 favorite candidate for the French presidency who stumbled over a notorious sexual scandal in a New York hotel. Of course, married people all around the world have lovers, but in France, since the revolution, to show it openly amounts to asserting one's rejection of religion and to giving proof of one's rationality.

This notion of visible sexuality was also an important dimension of the veil controversy. Several interesting analyses have developed around the idea that in France the violent reaction against the Islamic veil was partly because it constituted a breach that impeded the free flow of sexual relations between men and women. For example, Scott (2007) keenly perceived that political legislation of the situation was only possible because it presented itself as a protection against women's sexual repression. Yet, misled by the ideological twist that I am trying to pin down, she ended her book by supporting the law against the headscarf, in the name of gender equality (2007: 173–74).

What Scott missed is that the sexuality at stake in the veil controversy is not that which opposes the two sexes, but that which confronts open sexuality to its contrary: puritanism and religion. In France, the fight against the veil is above all a struggle against all norms, especially religious ones, that prevent individuals from accessing a superior liberty that finds its best expression in free sexuality.

The most horrible of Don Juan's deeds is not that he kills the commander or that he rapes the commander's daughter—no, it is that he seduces Done Elvire, a nun in a convent. Done Elvire wears a Catholic veil, but the rational Don Juan, through sexual enticements, manages to free her from her enslavement.

Why did all this happen?

Several authors have analyzed the political context in which the veil controversy arose. They have shown convincingly that what the West understood as a solidification of a globalized Muslim identity contributed to a general anti-Muslim atmosphere. French people, among others, were therefore mentally open to a debate such as that about the veil. Furthermore, different French politicians used the veil controversy as an argument in the election campaigns held during that period. Consequently, the press also massively amplified the matter. Finally, the feminist movements offered the discussion its conclusive argument. No matter

what those who wear it and those who see it think, the veil, they claimed, is always used to make women submit to men. As it produces or enforces sexual inequality, it is unacceptable.[12]

All these facts are perfectly true, and the veil controversy would probably not have reached such a magnitude in a different context. However, just as John Bowen (2007: 155) puts it: "But this account rests on the surface of things. Why is it that so many people became so concerned about *a bit of cloth*? We need to see how the *voile*[13] touched several raw nerves at once, that these were nerves of some philosophical depth, and that the French news media did their best to inflate the resulting anxieties."

The succession of generations

When French people discuss the problem that veiled schoolgirls pose, they focus exclusively on certain girls. A diplomat's daughter wearing a headscarf in Neuilly, the fancy western suburb (*banlieue*) of Paris, is not considered to be posing a problem. The expression "the problem of the veil" automatically refers to girls who live in the *banlieue*—a term that, this time, refers to neighborhoods that host mainly low-income, recently immigrated people. This *banlieue* has a terrible reputation for violence, breach of the law, drugs, bad schools, and many similar problems.

Obviously, in French, the term *banlieue* has two different meanings, but why does this create a moral distinction with regard to the veil? The schoolgirls of both Neuilly and the *banlieue* are similarly Muslim. They have probably comparable good results in school. Furthermore, proportionally, no more *banlieue* schoolgirls wear a headscarf than do diplomat's daughters—rather, the contrary. However, the immigrants' *banlieue* holds a different status in the context of the French state. While no one in France would attempt to change a diplomat's daughter, the *banlieue*, as I have shown elsewhere (Iteanu 2005), is a sociological institution whose function is to transform newly arrived immigrants from more traditional contexts into modern urban individuals. This is equally true when the power is in the hands of the right and left political parties.

From the sixteenth century onward, the *banlieues* of the French large cities have first transformed generations of Christian immigrants (French, Savoyard, Breton, and subsequently Italian and Spanish, among others) from rural villagers

12. This was the position of the dominant French feminist movements. However, other feminists, such as Leila Ahmed, have shown that the targeting of the veil as the symbol of women's subordination in Islam was a colonial invention (Ahmed 1992: 144–68). She argues convincingly that within the colonial discourse, the veil was meant to demonstrate the cultural inferiority of Muslims. In many ways, one can say that targeting the veil had a similar connotation within the veil controversy. However, my argument is that the notion of the veil could only be used as a demeaning argument, both during the colonial period and in the veil controversy, because it already had this connotation in the context of the fight against Catholicism. When the term "veil" appears at all in France, it is always religion that is targeted. This is all the more obvious in the veil controversy because none of the girls expelled from school ever wore any kind of veil, but only different types of headscarves and bandanas.

13. "Veil" in French in the text.

into urban dwellers—and then only later Muslims originating abroad[14] (for the sixteenth century, see Zeller 2004). For centuries, this transformation has had consequences over three generations, each of which has a specific orientation.

Those who settle in the *banlieue* always first claim to have come for economic reasons. However, an examination of their biographies shows that they also often hope to engage in a personal trajectory leading to success, wealth, and individuation.[15] This very strong emphasis on personal achievement is also a silent feature of the many interviews given by the veiled schoolgirls' parents. Most of them advised their daughters to give up the veil and to adapt to the circumstances in which they live (see, for example, Bowen 2007: 66–97; Chouder et al. 2008). However, very few of these first-generation settlers fully achieve their personal goals, and they put the burden on their children to do better than they did.

The children of the former, the so-called second generation, are a different matter. Most of those who belong to this cohort burn all bridges with their parents' culture regarding religion, language, marriage practices, and family structure. It is telling, for example, that while those belonging to the first generation of immigrants from Maghreb had many more children than the average French family had, their children have fewer. In many cases, this contrast creates conflicts between generations within the families.

The third generation is, on the contrary, that of a return to tradition, albeit reinvented. This appears in some of those belonging to this cohort learning the language of their ancestors, being interested in the history of their forefathers, and being tempted by religious practice, among other things.

The relative number of those implicated in this description decreases as generations go by. My depiction of the first generation applies very widely to almost all its members; that of the second, only to a portion of the generation; and that of the third, to a minority only. Therefore, the return to tradition is only a very limited tendency.

My contention here is that the minority of girls who decide to wear headscarves in school behave according to the third generation pattern. Extensive interviews with these girls show that most of them do not consider their involvement in religion to be a continuation of their family tradition, but rather a personal choice (Chouder et al. 2008). All of them strongly insist on their individualistic take on religion. Some of them have even declared that they have tried, with more or less success, to convert their parents, whom they consider to be bad Muslims. From this evidence, I am tempted to say that these girls are what we could call converts, even if their families are of Muslim origin.

Hanifa Chérifi, whose parents originated from Kabilia, and who occupied the position of ministerial mediator for the headscarf in 2003, seems to have made a similar judgment, even if she did not explicitly talk about conversion. She declared to a journalist that when confronted with a conflict over the veil, she looked with favor on a girl who wore a headscarf in school because she was asked to do so by

14. Many of them were French nationals due to diverse colonial arrangements.

15. There are other forms of immigration, such as Jewish immigration, political refugees, and Chinese immigration. But those populations rarely settle in the *banlieue* as defined here.

her family, while she had a negative view of those wearing it against the will of their parents (Rotman, 2002). In my view, what she implies is that she considers respect for elders and the continuation of tradition favorably, but she is suspicious of what I call individual "conversion."

Reaching a personal decision

It is well known in France that throughout the country, schoolgirls between twelve and eighteen years old have better results in secondary schools than schoolboys do. Nonetheless, given the very high rates of success for both genders in the *Baccalauréat*,[16] this does not carry important consequences. However, in the *banlieue,* because a proportion of schoolboys actually fail school, the difference between the sexes becomes significant. Consequently, schoolgirls in the *banlieues* are said to be more integrated than the schoolboys are. Most of them obtain diplomas. They do not speak with a heavy *banlieue* accent and thus can find a job much faster than boys can. They respect their parents and take on family responsibilities. In sum, they tend to extricate themselves from the reputed negative *banlieue* context faster than boys do.

To illustrate this point, it is worth noting that among the few government ministers originating from Africa who were named and then sacked by Sarkozy in the last several years, there were only women. So, generally speaking, one can state that girls are less discriminated against than boys are. Therefore, the decision that girls make when donning a veil can be understood as that of members of a group who, feeling less discriminated against than former generations were, think it possible to re-adopt cultural practices left aside by their parents for fear of discrimination. However, this interpretation was rejected by several feminist organizations that claim that, on the contrary, the veil submits those who wear it to a twofold discrimination: once because they are Muslim and once because they are women.

These clashing explanations occupied the heart of the heated debate led by politicians and by the press over the veil's law. However, almost everyone forgot that what was discussed concerned a limited number of girls whose stories appear to follow a similar pattern: A girl or two appears at school wearing a headscarf and refuses to take it off during classes. Immediately, a teacher expels her or them from school. Soon after, a higher authority—the director of the school; a regional authority; and even sometimes the Conseil d'État, the highest French administrative court—demands that she or they should be reintegrated. All the teachers then immediately go on strike on account of their authority being scorned and the presence of veiled girls in class preventing them from teaching properly.

Paradoxically, these situations turned into conflicts instead of finding a compromise because the girls concerned were all well behaved and had good grades. Therefore, the teachers could not expel them on any other grounds than wearing a headscarf. This conflicted with the Conseil d'État's position stating that the veil is not in and of itself a sufficient reason to suspend a pupil. For boys, the situation is different. Many of those who assume a religious appearance are far

16. The *Baccalauréat* is the diploma that allows students to enter a university or other forms of higher education.

from being satisfactory in terms of grades or behavior.[17] When a teacher decides to discipline one of them, he or she does it on other grounds. Consequently, the boys are out of school only for a few days, while the girls are expelled once and for all if they refuse to abandon their headscarves.

All this can be summed up by the fact that what mired the veiled girls (the large majority of whom were French nationals, well behaved, and good students) was not their lack of integration into the French culture, but rather that, despite this integration, they had made the very personal decision to act as converts. As conversion results from a personal choice, it can be considered a fault and punished by exclusion.

When is religion unacceptable?

The youth who live in the *banlieue* say that it is a place of low status, a place of relegation. For this very reason, it is also paradoxically a place of relative freedom. This characteristic is an integral part of the transformative function attributed to the *banlieue*. If immigrants have to be transformed, it is, in the first place, because they are different. Therefore, the *banlieue* must somehow tolerate these differences. Everyone in France acknowledges the relative freedom and acceptance of diversity prevalent in the *banlieue*, but in a different and sometimes even contradictory manner.

The youth say that they own their territory and that they do what they want on it—that instead of the police doing so, they themselves make and enforce the law. Thus, they feel protected there. Then, at times, the government recognizes that the *banlieue* is *une zone de non droit*, or "a zone where law is absent." However, it only takes action against this situation when there is a political interest in it or when things have, as the government says, gone too far. Except during these repressive episodes, the authorities admit that the *banlieue* does not exactly follow the same rules as the rest of the territory does. Finally, the general public sees the originality of the *banlieue* mostly in its violence, but also in its music (e.g., rap), its graphic creations, and its slang expressions that everyone ends up adopting. It is common knowledge that *banlieue* youth are able to create these innovative forms of expression because they are less restrained by norms and laws than all the other youth of their generation are.

Of course, I do not claim that the *banlieues* are objectively freer than any other place in France is, as I have no clue about how to measure this. I just affirm that French people's representation of the *banlieue* includes the notion of a particular freedom. Similarly, in the *banlieue* schools, the youth are not excessively pressed regarding their attitudes or their grades. This relative tolerance, the personnel of the schools say, is necessary because the pupils need time to adjust. However, once it has become obvious that the banlieue has transformed them into urban citizens, things change. If they envision surpassing their subordinated social status—that of a *banlieue* inhabitant—to enter mainstream French life, they are urged to first renounce the freedom of the *banlieue*. This is exactly the situation that most *banlieue* girls are in.

17. This contrast between boys and girls based on the French view of gender agency merits a longer discussion that is beyond the scope of this paper.

In short, wearing a headscarf or a beard or a jellaba is not a problem in France as long as someone accepts, as many boys do, the subordinated status of the *banlieue* inhabitants. However, when girls, who are clearly on the course to exit the *banlieue*, convert to Islam and assume a religious appearance, it means that everyone who has partaken in their transformation, and particularly the teachers, has failed. The teachers did not manage to allow those they had charge of to climb the hierarchical ladder to reach mainstream social life.

Why did the law enforce exclusion?

One of the features that puzzled all foreign observers of the French law concerning the veil was that expelling the girls from school was obviously counterproductive. Their transformation failed, it was predominantly said, because they were influenced in their religious decision by their kin (i.e., fathers, mothers, brothers), by the radical Islamists that taught in mosques, and by the men in general who exerted control over them. In that case, it would have then been logical to keep them in school, the paradigmatic place where religious influence could be counterbalanced by a secular education. Although many intellectuals and associations made this argument public, it was not taken into account, and the law enforced exclusion anyhow.[18]

This form of exclusion is not new in France but recalls the arguments used for years to prevent women from exercising their political rights, until 1945. Women could not vote, it was said, not because they were not persons possessing natural rights, but because they were unready to be citizens. As women were less educated than men were, their vote, it was feared, would be influenced by the Church priests and by their husbands. They therefore could not exert a true citizen's free choice. To counteract this problem, school was made free and compulsory for both boys and girls. In France, humanity is natural while political citizenship results from a secularist education.

As most of the veiled girls were good students, many of these French political ideas were obvious to them. This is why, for example, they all start their interviews by asserting that they have made their choice alone, uninfluenced by anyone (Chouder et al. 2008). However, this was only part of the matter. Because their decision involved unquestioned religious dogma impinging on sexual visibility, it cast doubts on their capacity to make a free citizen's choice.

On the contrary, Rachida Dati, who was the minister of justice under Sarkozy from 2007 to 2009, is a good example of a rational citizen. This young woman is probably the most famous politician of North African descent in all French history. In the eyes of the public, she personifies the perfect success story of a daughter of a low-income immigrated family who ended up high in the hierarchy. During her tenure, she became pregnant. As she was unmarried and had no known partner, a huge discussion raged in the press as to who was the father. She refused to say, taking a position that fueled a still bigger uproar in the press. This may be a simple coincidence, but, according to what we know now about French political ideas, it is

18. There were virtually no Muslim schools in France before 2004. Since then, several schools have been created every year.

tempting to see her attitude as the best possible way to demonstrate her sexual freedom.

Although regarding scholarship and behavior, veiled girls seemed to be ready to blend into mainstream society, they have proven unfit for citizenship. Instead of being accepted among equals, they have to be treated in the hierarchical context of love for humankind. For those who make the laws, the best solution to that effect was indeed to keep them out of school so they had no chance to pull away from the *banlieue*.

Molière's beggar does not relinquish his religious beliefs and thus proves unable to be a free individual, equal to Don Juan. However, on second thought, Don Juan gives him money anyhow in the name of love for humankind. This form of love only reinforces the hierarchy that exists between them.

Conclusion

The assumption I started this paper with—that values and hierarchy cannot be separated—is neither new nor original. It is trivial to say that to value is to establish a difference between what is preferred and what is not. However, the analysis I propose here concerning the veil controversy attempts to go further in order to demonstrate that this is true in two different senses: one of which appears obvious, while the other is regularly obscured in societies such as France.

I hope I have shown that just as the character of Don Juan has both a bright and an obscure side, the value of *laïcité* has both a sympathetic edge and another one that is more problematic. On the sympathetic side, *laïcité* consists of personal freedom of faith associated with the obligation to tolerate all religious positions. On the obscure side, as we have seen, *laïcité* is a French culturally specific value that demands the perpetuation of a hierarchy that keeps religion fenced in the *banlieue* to free political citizens of all constraints.

On this second level, Don Juan helped me understand that the value of *laïcité* is inseparable from a particular amalgam of the values of freedom and equality, such as defined by French ideology. In many ways, the meaning of these latter two values has not changed much over the past two and a half centuries. Today, as before, revolution is crucial,[19] anti-religious feelings and publicized sex testify to one's rationality, and love for humankind is a subordinating relation that applies to those who are not yet free. What has crucially changed, however, is that while Molière's Don Juan is convinced that his nobility justifies his privileges, today most French believe that anyone can access freedom, including the immigrants who live in the *banlieue*.

Given the importance accorded today to a potential universal equality, one imagines that from time to time, someone in France argues that the existence of the *banlieue* contradicts this ideal. However, when this happens, the claim is soon dropped because the social hierarchy that is targeted is rendered acceptable by the fact that France, in the name of humankind, spends considerable amounts of public money to raise those who live in the *banlieue* to the status of free citizens.

19. A most recent book of so-called philosophy has undertaken a very typical French endeavor, which is to prove that it is possible to be a revolutionary while being a Muslim believer (Tevanian 2013).

From an Anglo-Saxon point of view, this can easily be judged as an unacceptable practice of assimilation.

However, everything changes when, as in the veil controversy, the *banlieues* and their practices seem to spill out into mainstream society. This shortcoming of the system threatens to expose what can only be considered a shameful hierarchy. Therefore, what I call an ideological twist immediately imposes a reductionist view of the situation: hierarchy is denied and the matter is considered a political conflict in which one of the values must eliminate the other. Owing to this transposition into a war of values, the French authorities felt menaced by a couple of schoolgirls wearing headscarves.

The twofold aspect of the value of *laïcité* that I have just described is in no way particular to the veil controversy or even to this value. In my introduction, I showed that money as a value also possess two senses. On the one hand, money evaluates the relative price of each good according to the subjective value that individuals accord to these goods. Thereby, it creates a balanced market that unifies the infinite differentiation of personal wealth and tastes. This is also the case with *laïcité* when it describes the right of all individuals to determine their personal position toward religion and obliges everyone to respect all religious positions, including agnostic.

On the other hand, however, money is also a value that represents the whole economic network of relations. As one cannot enter the economic world without money, a hierarchic distinction of the nature between those who have and those who have not arises. Similarly with *laïcité*: it is indispensable to partake in the meaning of the French versions of the values of freedom and equality to access mainstream society. This accounts for the hierarchic value-relation that raises the free citizen society above the subordinated *banlieue*. In the cases of both money and *laïcité*, an ideological twist operates to mask the nature of these lively hierarchies by attributing them to the failure of political power.

In sum, in France, and more generally in the Euro-American context, when one is confronted with an empirical hierarchy, the *banlieue*, a wealth difference, and so forth, one tends to see it as resulting from the exercise of a political power. My analysis contradicts this position. It claims that important values not only are abstract ideas, but they also affect reality by establishing diverse forms of hierarchy. It ensures that the observer who considers that these hierarchies are rooted in political power is a victim of an ideological twist that tends to conceal the fact that these hierarchies are indeed the direct expression of a value. I am of course unable to produce a list that would distinguish the hierarchies that are mainly founded on value from those that result from power. This varies from one empirical situation to another. I only claim that it is worth considering that, even in the Euro-American context, all hierarchies do not exclusively result from power. It is even possible that politicians, no matter how well intentioned they may be, fail to level the social hierarchy that they denounce because they disregard this reality. In such a case, refuting the link between value and hierarchy may severely hamper a person's or an institution's capacity to act politically, because it gives a misleading image of reality. When seen in this light, the ideological twists that conceal the links between value and hierarchy may even be considered as producing a form of alienation in the Marxist sense of the term.

References

Ahmed, Leila. 1992. *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formation of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

———. 2006. "French secularism and the 'Islamic veil affair.'" *The Hedgehog Review* 8 (1/2): 93–106.

Berthoud, Arnaud. 2004. "Monnaie et mesure chez Aristote." In *L'argent: Croyance, mesure, speculation*, edited by Marcel Drach, 85–95. Paris: La Découverte.

Bowen, John. 2007. *Why the French don't like headscarves: Islam, the state and public space*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chouder, Ismahane, Malika Latrèche, and Pierre Tevanian. 2008. *Les filles voilées parlent*. Paris: La fabrique éditions.

Dumont, Louis. 1980. "On value." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 66: 207–41.

Iteanu, André. 2005. "A perfect individual." In *Youth, otherness and the plural city*, edited by Mette Andersson, Yngve Lithman, and Ove Sernhede, 107–38. Göteborg, Sweden: Daidalos.

Lalouette, Jacqueline. 1991. "Dimensions anticléricales de la culture républicaine (1870–1914)." *Histoire, Économie et Société* 10 (1): 127–42.

Lévy, Alma, Lila Lévy, Yves Sintomer, and Véronique Giraud. 2004. *Des filles comme les autres: Au delà du foulard*. Paris: La Découverte.

Molière. (1665) 2005. *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre*. Paris: Pocket.

Orléan, André. 2011. *L'empire de la valeur*. Paris: Seuil.

Rotman, Charlotte. 2002. "Une prohibition de la mixité." *Libération*, April 1. http://www.liberation.fr/societe/0101408243-une-prohibition-de-la-mixite

Sade, Le Marquis de. (1797) 1971. *Juliette*. New York: Grove Press.

———. (1795) 1971. *Philosophy in the bedroom*. New York: Grove Press

Scott, Joan Wallach. 2007. *The politics of the veil*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tevanian, Pierre. 2013. *La haine de la religion: Comment l'athéisme est devenu l'opium du people de gauche*. Paris: La Découverte.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. (1835) 2009. *Democracy in America*. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.

Walras, Leon. 1954. *Elements of pure economics; or, The theory of social wealth*. London: Routledge.

Zeller, Olivier. 2004. "La place des miséreux et des malades à Lyon de l'Ancien Régime à nos jours." In *Villes et hospitalité: Les municipalités et leurs "étrangers,"* edited by Anne Gotman, 79–103. Paris: Édition de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.

Les deux conceptions de la valeur

Résumé: À l'heure actuelle, en Euro-Amérique, la notion de valeur est systématiquement associée avec l'égalité, et non avec la hiérarchie sociale, qui est son partenaire naturel. Dans cet article, j'examine le statut de cette proposition. Utilisant la controverse française sur le voile comme exemple principal, je tente de suivre les voies complexes à travers lesquelles l'idée de laïcité est liée à la hiérarchie sociale qui place la société française dominante au dessus des banlieues où les immigrants récents sont logés. Curieusement, cette hiérarchie n'est généralement pas prise en compte par les acteurs du débat sur le voile (bien qu'elle soit parfaitement évidente pour les observateurs étrangers). J'en déduis qu'il existe un mécanisme social « invisible » qui persuade les Français de ce que la subordination des banlieues est indépendante de la valeur de laïcité. J'en arrive à conclure que l'idéologie dominante en Euro-Amérique, qui postule que les hiérarchies sont uniquement l'effet du pouvoir politique, conduit ceux qui sont en mesure d'agir à traquer des coupables fantomatiques, au lieu d'essayer de trouver une solution négociée dans le contexte de la hiérarchie de valeurs.

André ITEANU is an anthropologist, Directeur de Recherche at the CASE of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, and Directeur d'Études (Professor) at the École pratique des hautes études. Since 1980, he has been doing extensive fieldwork in Papua New Guinea among the Orokaiva and in the Parisian suburb (*banlieue*) of Cergy Pontoise. His most recent publication is an edited volume, *La coherence des sociétés* (Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2010). He has also directed two documentary films shot among the Orokaiva: *Letter to the dead* (Culture Production, France 5, and RTBF, 2002) and *Come back tomorrow* (Mouvement, Lunablue, and RFO, 2009).

Laboratoire CASE CNRS-EHESS
190-198 Avenue de France
75013 Paris
France
Iteanu@msh-paris.fr