

## **RAPublicans and jihadists or The missed chances of French integration policy. An analysis of rap songs and music clips.**

**(Eva Kimminich, Potsdam)**

France's banlieue has repeatedly been a hot spot of violence and anarchy for the past decades. The former workers' settlements became home to migrants and their children's children. Today they appear to be hotbeds, or, in the words of Yvonne Kunz, "fast breeder reactors of Islamist terrorism" [own translation].<sup>1</sup>

Immigration, integration policy, housing and rap, which has unfolded in France since the 1980s, are closely related, in spite of some rappers from the middle class and rap being popular among all classes in France. The lyrics of the past 35 years are thus partly a mirror and seismograph of a development which allegedly turned RAPublicans into jihadists. Rapper Médine ironically sharpens the problem in the song *Don't Laïk*, which was published shortly before the attack on Charlie Hebdo in 2015. Médine, also known as Médine Zaouiche, born in le Havre in 1983, has Algerian roots. He has his own studio and label (Din Records). Since 2004, Médine – together with Kery James, Axiom, Oxmo Puccino and Abdel al Malik – campaigns against prejudices that the Franco-French population has against Muslims. Médine's song and clip were hotly debated in relation to Islamist terrorism and considered as an affront to the secularity of the country by Marine Le Pen. In view of his show at Bataclan announced for the 19th and 20th October 2018, the rapper is attacked again because of this and other songs. The fierce debate, led by numerous media, has grown into an "Affaire Médine". This signifies another politicisation of rap lyrics, following the "Affaire NTM" of 1996<sup>2</sup> and the charge of the rappers Sniper, Ministère A.M.E.R., M.R. and others after the riots of 2005<sup>3</sup>. The charges back then were made by right-wing and extreme right-wing politicians and still today it is especially Marine Le Pen who aims to ban Médine's show. She sees the concert as an affront against the victims of the Bataclan attack of 13 November 2015 and uses the songs "Don't Laïk" and "Jihad" as proof of Médine's affiliation to Islamist terrorism.

These debates may be considered as signs of an increasing Islamophobia in France, which takes over from the xenophobia that led to the failure of integration policy, the casualisation and the religio-cultural turn of many banlieue inhabitants with migrant background.

### I.

I therefore firstly explain the development of the banlieue, which demonstrates why the integration policy failed and which also visualises the problems deriving thereof. Since I have extensively described this development until 2005, I will merely refer to this article without repeating all sources here.<sup>4</sup> Beforehand it is important to note that the French integration policy is based on a model from the 3rd Republic, hence stemming from the period between 1870 and 1940. Back then, the state limited the influence of the Catholic Church by a differently constructed secularity which nowadays is part of the French identity. In his book *Laiçité im Konflikt*, which also provides my basis, Dimitri Almeida precisely explains how it was originally defined and how its interpretation has changed within the party political context.<sup>5</sup>

---

1 Kunz 2016: 18.

2 Hüser 1999: 271–294 and Scooter 2011: 239–253.

3 Cf. Schuhmann 2011: 315–326, here: 324–325.

4 Kimminich 2006: 505–538.

5 Cf. Almeida 2017.

The separation of church and state was first legally prescribed by the *Loi relative à la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat* through prime minister Émile Combes (“Loi Combes”) in 1905. This secularisation of society was supposed to be done via the education system. Teachers had to communicate republican values and norms of French society as the foundation of citizenship, because an identity based on *citoyenneté* was considered a guarantee for a successful democracy. This way, secularity and *citoyenneté* became prerequisites of national identity and a sense of belonging. At the same time, the practice of religion shifted to the private sphere. Religious education was banned at public schools and the public display or installment of religious symbols was and still is prohibited. Moreover, this impeded the public recognition of religious communities that differed from state religion – a circumstance which changed under president François Mitterand in the 1970s. He fulfilled the state duty to secure religious freedom, particularly with regard to the practice of the Islamic religion. For instance, a charta designed during the *Conseil consultatif des Musulmans de France* facilitated an institutionalisation of Islam in France. Concurrently, the charta also demanded abidance with the laws of the republic and the advancement of interreligious dialogue. Secularity is therein defined as religious neutrality of the state that must guarantee freedom of religion.

In the 1970s, the number of immigrants in France increased and this entailed two opposed developments: on the one hand a growing interest in non-European cultures and the emergence of civil solidarity movements. Simultaneously, the problems of the terminating industrial society became obvious: Unemployment rates went up and this especially concerned the immigrants. This, led to stigmatisation, segregation, discrimination and a strengthening of the nationalist *Front National*.

Since the end of the 1980s, the social decline of immigrants and their French-born children accelerated, and this happened at a time when those children – who had gone to school in France – were already culturally integrated. Their economic and social integration however failed to materialise, contrary to what their parents had experienced.

Xenophobia rapidly increased with the general deterioration of living conditions, which included the Franco-French population, especially with the change of government under Jacques Chirac in 1995. Right-wing parties exploited this latent racism by presenting the cultural difference of the immigrants as an insurmountable obstacle for their integration. The argument of those parties was above all supported by the claim made by the former Franco-French colonisers that immigrants be resistant against integration. There even was a stage model, with immigrants from the former colonies in North and West Africa at the lowest stage. This was due to their affiliation to Islam, despite the fact that the integration of those immigrants had not been particularly more difficult than the integration of immigrants from European countries.

In spite of having French citizenship, the propensity towards violence among later immigrant generations thus rose because they were treated as aliens (and not as *citoyens*) and therefore marginalised. This in turn seemed to confirm the xenophobic patterns of perception held by the Franco-French population, which intensified the exclusionary mechanisms and the predisposition for politicised racist reasoning. Stigmatising North and West Africans as not or hardly assimilable was reflected in their spatial, economic and cultural marginalisation.

Comparing their situation to that of the *travailleurs immigrés*, it was them who had done the badly paid work with a low level of education during the post-war years. They were accommodated in suburban concrete estates which had once been erected for the migrant workers from the French provinces. As mentioned before, it was notably immigrants and their children that dropped out of the economic flow due to concomitant increasing rate of unemployment caused by the economic crisis. They were assigned the specifically run-down suburban estates. This was how deprived areas developed.

Even the housing policy, pursued since the 1970s and aimed at improving the livability in the suburbs, had no influence on this development. Admittedly, some settlements were renovated and others were newly built, while quotas were introduced in order to counteract the concentration of ethnic groups. However, even back then there were ‘filters’ in the process of housing distribution in order to keep ‘aliens’ away from the better residential blocks. As a consequence, child-rich North and West African families were concentrated in the *cités*, which not only turned their social structures into special kinds of ghettos, but also changed how French society perceived the *cités*. As Didier Layperonnie states, these ghettos must on the one hand be understood as shelters from everyday racism and lack of prospects:

“Dans cette communauté particulière, les relations entre la famille et la rue d’un côté et les questions raciales et sexuelles de l’autre sont au centre de l’organisation collective, de la construction d’un contre-monde qui permet de faire face aux discriminations, au racisme, à la pauvreté et aux institutions. [...] Le ghetto protège ainsi ses habitants du monde extérieur, des humiliations et des échecs. Il procure les ressources sociales et culturelles nécessaires à la survie.”<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, the social networks, which established in the *cités* and served as resources, reduced individuals to stereotypical sociotypes who themselves contributed to a negative external perception.

“Il [le ghetto] offre le cadre dans lequel la dignité de chacun est reconnue. Pour le construire, les habitants se replient sur leurs relations primaires, la famille, le groupe de pairs. Ils exacerbent les définitions traditionnelles des rôles sociaux, notamment les rôles familiaux et les rôles de genre. Ils en font une morale sociale contraignante, bigote et parfois brutale.”<sup>7</sup>

With regard to how these new suburban zones were understood, it needs to be noted that the *banlieues* were now not any longer considered as working class quarters but as *quartiers sensibles*. They were associated with alienness and primitivity, in spite of their fairly heterogenous and ethnically diverse population, among them the so-called *poor whites*. The *banlieue*, initially a neutral term, hence was declared a lawless and dangerous zone. The myth of no-go areas emerged,<sup>8</sup> paving the way for the stigma of the violent *banlieusard*. Based on a colonial argumentation, the usually dark-skinned *banlieusard* or *zonard* became the postmodern ‘savage’ (*sauvageon* or *barbare*). This made him *a priori* suspicious and triggered a rejection mechanism that made him the scapegoat of all hardships. It was merely his residence that rendered him a criminal, a circumstance which is informally paraphrased as *délit d’adresse*.

The increase of racism and a lack of prospects led to growing rage and violence, resulting in recurring riots since the 1980s. Although there were subsequent special programmes to improve housing situation and youth unemployment, police presence was also successively raised. Safety policy had been tightened through the *loi anti-casseur* (anti-riot law) and the *brigades anti-gang* already since the 1970s – apparently required and justified by the label *quartiers sensibles* and *zones de hors-loi*. A bunch of anti-terrorism measures was already installed through the plan *Vigipirate* in 1978. In the late 1990s, a first militarisation phase began through the deployment of the CRS units (*compagnies républicains sécuritaire*).<sup>9</sup> These special units were recalled from their missions in Kosovo and at the Ivory Coast and were

---

6 *Demain la ville* 2009: 22.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Piriou 2012: 59-104, here: 87.

9 *Ibid.*: 65-67.

known for their radical intervention. As a result there were repeated *bavures* (physical abuse) during police checks, even with lethal consequence. Such incidents caused several riots, for example the death by headshot of 17-year-old Makomé M'Bowolé in 18th arrondissement in 1993. The adolescent was being questioned for cigarette theft at the police station. The responsible police officer stated that he had only wanted to intimidate, but a bullet discharged. Matthieu Kassowitz' film *La haine* (1994) was inspired by this case.

## II.

The outlined developments are mirrored in the rap songs of the past decades. Rap in France developed at a time that was favourable in terms of cultural policy. Jack Lang's cultural policy during the era of Mitterrand supported multicultural projects in the suburbs.<sup>10</sup> Rap, which evolved in the 1980s, benefitted from this. It was utilised by French-born immigrant children in order to cope with the rejection and to form their identity. The lyrics of this *rap engagé* focused on social messages that showed the underprivileged how to deal positively with their situation instead of firing indiscriminately, as for instance Joey Starr put it: "Pose ton gun, mec, sinon c'est dix ans / Plus la mort d'un homme sur la conscience, c'est pesant" (NTM, "Pose ton gun", on: *Paris sous les bombes*, Epic/Sony 1991). Neither should they whiningly give in to their victimhood: "Mais pour survivre dans le ghetto / il faut être débrouillard / Ne pas s'apitoyer sur son sort / Ne pas être pleurnichard", according to Neg Marrons in "La monnaie" (on: *Le Secteur Ä – Live à l'Olympia*, Hostile Records/Virgin 1998).

Developing creativity and imagination is presented as a way to fashion one's life as a self-determined agent under the pressure of social and political absorption. Many rappers therefore committed as "acteurs sociaux" to concrete involvement and used the governmental funding. Especially groups like Assassin, Prodige Namor, IAM, La Brigade or cooperatives like the Strasbourg initiative *Les Sons d'la rue* mentored breakdance, graffiti and rap courses and writing workshops in juvenile prisons. Rap hence developed into a subtle tool with which hegemonially generated patterns of identity and , as well as socially constructed notions of specific snippets of reality could be 'de-viewed'. For only those who obtain discursive power may contribute or enforce their perspectives and morals to a society.<sup>11</sup> Rappers used their song lyrics as a medium of self-expression and correction of the stereotypical perception through Franco-French society. They reflected upon the current living conditions in the context of socio-historical contexts and attacked politics and police with aggressive choice of words. In this manner they were able to participate in the public political discourse.

The textual engagement with ascribed public images, behavioural patterns or alleged deficits served as a means of self-reflection to reconstruct their identity, in as much as the stigmatised reinvented themselves, as for instance the song *Je m'ecris* (on: *A l'ombre du show business* 2008) by Kery James shows:

"Si je ne pouvais écrire je serais muet,  
 Condamné à la violence dans la dictature du secret,  
 Submergé par tous ces sentiments sans mots,  
 Je m'effacerais comme une mer sans eau.

Chorus:

Entre le marteau et l'enclume  
 J'ai dû aiguiser ma plume.

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hüser 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Maierhofer-Lischka 2013.

Quand je suis perdue dans la brume  
 Je fais chanter mon amertume.  
 Alors j'écris, je crie, j'écris,  
 J'ai pas le choix j'écris, je crie, j'écris.”

Various rap lyrics document<sup>12</sup> how the songs first and foremost concentrate on the description of their own life and experience in the local environment. Especially the effects of everyday racist situations are highlighted. In his song *Je suis l'arabe* (Pias 1996), Yazid for example describes the sense of life which emerges through stigmatisation in the banlieue and which may spark and promote hatred and violence:

“A mon passage je sens l'odeur de la rage  
 Qui se dégage  
 Malgré vos tentatives de camouflage.  
 Me revoilà fusillé des yeux,  
 La honte on vit avec, dans l'dos une étiquette.  
 Certains l'acceptent, d'autres la rejettent  
 et ça s'exprime en violence.”

The keywords are linked with the help of assonances: the threatening *rage – dégage – camouflage* or the sharp *étiquette – acceptent – rejettent* that indicates the reaction.

How the banlieusards deal with the stigmatisation and marginalisation through the Franco-French society can be read off the lyrics which derive from personal experience and intellectual processing. The aura of barbarousness and savagery ascribed to the suburbanite was also reviewed: “ils nous mettent dans les cages comme des sauvages”, “quelle gratitude devrais-je avoir pour la France / Moi Joey Starr qu'on considère comme un barbare?” (*NTM*, „Quelle gratitude“ in: *Authentik*, 1991).

In the 1990s there are increasingly reflections on the simplistic, caricatural falsifications in media coverage, for example by Sniper in “Pris pour Cible” (on: *Du Rire Aux Larmes*, Est West/Warner 2001):

“Ouais j'ai le look, typique, banlieusard. [...]
 Bien souvent, bien souvent, j'ai ressenti dans le regard des gens
 De la méfiance à mon égard, mis à l'écart et c'est vexant. [...]
 Les médias nous cataloguent, nous salissent et nous niquent la santé.
 On montre toujours les mauvais côtés,
 Dans les films c'est abusé pour quoi on nous fait passer, j'suis médusé!
 Faut pas pousser! J'suis pas un arracheur de sac à main.
 Survêt, basquettes, casquette mais dans le droit chemin.”

Here again the keywords are linked through assonances (*banlieusard, regard, méfiance à mon égard, écart*), making an effective chain memorable: that of a first-person narrator who becomes self-aware, and who explains what it means to be a *banlieusard*, namely to be excluded and hurt by the others. The victims are explicitly listed and the perpetrator of the stigmatisation is determined: “Les médias nous cataloguent, nous salissent et nous niquent la santé”. The first-person narrator admonishes this abuse of media coverage and ‘confidently’ rejects the derogatory typing as exorbitant exaggeration: “Je ne suis pas un arracheur de sac à main” and positively reevaluates the style of clothing typical for a banlieusard: “Survêt, basquettes, casquette mais dans le droit chemin.”

---

12 Cf. Boucher 1998: 185-201, Kimminich 2003, Hüser 2004.

Songs like these address the effects of everyday racism and of the social and spatial marginalisation on the construction of identity and behaviour. But what happens with the values of the secular French society as mediated at schools? The discrepancy between experienced reality, media coverage and the knowledge about French history and culture acquired at school led to a critical reflection on the institutional education programmes, especially on the seemingly fragmentary historiography. At the heart of the critique of 1990s rap lyrics are thus the non-existent or insufficiently taught colonial history, as well as the mythologised aura of republican human and civil rights: liberty, equality and fraternity, or their poor implementation. The generation which felt culturally integrated had them internalised, but constantly had to experience their invalidity. In 1997, Roquin'Squad (Assassin) reminded the politicians of the special responsibility that particularly France held due to its revolutionary achievements for the realisation and maintenance of these democratic ideals, because the French people had shed its blood for them.

“Tout pays au monde expulse ses immigrés clandestins,  
C'est vrai,  
Mais la France a une autre responsabilité entre les mains  
Les faits sont historiques.  
Le peuple français a fait couler son sang  
Pour écrire noir sur blanc  
Les bases d'une démocratie en Occident.  
Que les dirigeants s'en souviennent, attends je les illumine.  
Droit d'asile pour les populations victimes de la misère du monde  
Combattre le racisme, le fascisme, le sexisme  
Et toutes sortes de xénophobies.”

Many groups at that time declared to give the values of the French Revolution and Republic a position in cultural practice, according to Dietmar Hüser by acting as RARepublicans in the sense of legitimate “citoyens de la République”.<sup>13</sup> This is done by using revolutionary and republican symbols, the *Marseillaise* or an additional colour for the tricolour (for non-accepted French and French with migrant background): “Allons enfants de la patrie / Le jour de gloire est arrivé pour ceux qui se mettent à crier / Une couleur de plus sur le drapeau” (KDD: *Une couleur de plus sur le drapeau*, Columbia/Sony 2000).

In particular, *Marianne* is repeatedly ‘questioned’ how she adheres to the migrants, for instance in a lyric by Sinistre and Bams (“Est-ce que ça vaut la peine”, in: *Sachons dire Non!* Reel Up/EMI 1998). The song incorporates the children’s counting rhyme “Elle m’aime / Elle m’aime pas”:

“Mais est-ce qu’elle m’aime vraiment?  
Un peu, beaucoup, à la folie, pas du tout ou passionnément?  
J’té dis qu’elle t’aime – Est-ce que ça vaut la peine qu’elle m’aime  
Quand elle-même, elle sait qu’entre nous se pose un grand problème / [...]  
Elle m’aime, elle t’aime, est-ce que la France m’aime?  
Elle t’aime, malgré moi et mon HLM?  
Elle t’aime.”

The wish to be integrated as responsible citoyens was not fulfilled. Rather, the republic has pushed away its unwanted children. The frustration and anger about the hopelessness of their

---

13 Cf. Hüser 2004.

situation was mirrored in the metaphorical formulations of the song lyrics. Although the rappers continued the fictitious dialogue with Marianne, but they ceased asking whether she liked them and instead declared her a whore, as for instance Princess Anies and Amara in the title song of the compilation “Ecoute la Rue, Marianne” (2007):

“Je sais, j’suis pas l’fils dont t’as rêvé, je sais  
 Mais arrêtez!  
 M’reproche pas c’que j’deviens car c’est toi qui m’a élevé.  
 C’est d’ta faute si j’ai dévié, c’est qu’j’voulais monter en grade.  
 Toi, tes règles ne m’ont réservé que les tâches ingrates,  
 Arrêtez ton baratin, [...].  
 J’t demande rien, juste le respect qu’tu m’dois et qu’tu m’as promis,  
 (Rappelle-toi) T’as brisé mes rêves et mes buts,  
 Désolé d’t dire ça – mais pour moi tu n’es qu’une pute.”

M.R., who earlier argued in a republican sense, also employs the metaphor of the whore in his song “La FranSSe” (on: *Politiquement incorrect*, Bmg 2005) both in lyrics and video.<sup>14</sup> But not only the choice of words became more aggressive from the 1990s onwards<sup>15</sup>, the riots as well became increasingly more violent, such as when on 27 October 2005 in Clichy-sous-Bois two adolescents died in an electrical substation when they were chased by the police. They, too, had not done anything wrong. Initially, then interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy commented pejoratively. He called the suburban adolescents “racaille” – quite in the tradition of the derogatory terminology that was already used in the 19th century to denote the *classe dangereuse* – and promised the Franco-French population who was concerned about their security to clear the suburbs “of the vermin with the Karcher”<sup>16</sup>. His wording fuelled the riots. Some rappers and *grands frères* subsequently tried to reassuringly appeal to the suburban youth and rapper Axiom directed his song “Lettre au Président” towards Jacques Chirac by analysing the situation from a historical perspective and making clear who the banlieusards actually are:

“Monsieur le Président,  
 Avec tout le respect que je dois à votre fonction  
 Je vous demanderais un peu d'attention.  
 Je me présente à vous en tant que citoyen, [...].  
 Je suis Français, ai grandi dans les quartiers populaires,  
 Mes grands-parents ont défendu la France pendant la guerre.  
 Mes parents eux aussi ont reconstruite cette république  
 J’accuse trente ans de racisme et d’ignorance.  
 J’accuse votre politique, vos méthodes archaïques,  
 Vous n’avez fait que diviser, laissant l’extrême droite avancer.  
 Monsieur le président,  
 Votre ministre instaure la terreur  
 Et l’histoire dira bientôt que ce fut une erreur.  
 Monsieur le Président de la peur découle la haine  
 Les luttes politiques sont loin des valeurs républicaines [...].”

---

14 He was charged after the riots, but discharged in 2006. RIAD 2012: 207-226, here: 207-209; Schumann 2011: 325-326.

15 Vicherat 2001: 87-97. Due to racist police chicanes and the *bavures*, the aggressive wordings of the lyrics from that time are primarily directed against police and state.

16 His wording was taken up in rap songs and turned around, for example by Keny Arkana in “Nettoyage au Karcher” (on: *Entre ciment et la belle étoile*, 2006) in which she calls for a cleaning of the Elysee palace with the Karcher.

Rappers of the first rap generation also chose a more moderate wording in light of the events and the deliberate misinterpretations of their lyrics through conservative politicians. However, their lyrics were in no way less critical.<sup>17</sup> They had realised that especially their use of aggressive formulations prevented their discursive involvement and maintained the clichés of the violent banlieusard and rapper.<sup>18</sup>

### III.

For lack of a palpable improvement of the situation, the riots in Villiere-le-bel followed in November 2007. The trigger was again the death of a banlieusard during a police check. The state's reaction was a second phase of militarisation. Drones and helicopter were employed in the hermetically sealed neighbourhood and it was called for denunciation.

As an alternative to violence, some of these “outcast children” of the suburbs turned to Islam for comfort, as the sociologist Michel Wieviorka observed as long ago as 1999.<sup>19</sup> Even then the religious community lent itself to some adolescents as an alternative for the social order of the secular state. Since the state had not kept its promises of social and economic equality based on universalist republican values, Islam seemed as the reverse reflection of a decayed republican universalism, as for instance Nabil describes:

“Il y a un brassage ethnique dans l’islam, c’est ça qui est bien. C’est une religion qui accepte le monde entier, il n’y a pas de discrimination. L’islam c’est pas seulement pour un seul peuple, c’est pour l’univers.”<sup>20</sup>

The now Islamic banlieusard could now in turn use stereotypes in order to dissociate himself from ‘the French’, ‘the Christians’ or ‘the hedonistic capitalists’ and generate a positive self-image (individual and collective):

“Epouser une religion particulière est une façon d’inverser la domination sociale, politique, économique. Ce n’est plus le regard des autres qui prime, mais celui de Dieu. Le rap musulman s’inscrit alors dans une forme contemporaine de dawa, c’est à dire une sorte de prosélytisme convivial où le rappeur se fait imam.”<sup>21</sup>

Since 11 September 2001, religious conversions have quadrupled, which was called “the other September 11 effect”<sup>22, 23</sup> Many French rappers also converted. This in turn resulted in a rise in different religious fundamentalisms.<sup>24</sup> The expansion of Islam and specifically of its increasingly extremist interpretation consequently found expression in a new rap genre, namely jihad rap: so, no longer “nigga for life” but instead “muslim for life”.<sup>25</sup> As terror researcher Peter Neumann observes, jihad rap was adapted by the same disillusioned male youth of the American ghettos to whom gangsta rap offered an identity of being stronger and

---

17 Maierhofer-Lischka, 2013: esp.: 123-124.

18 This view motivated the group La Brigade, whom I interviewed in 2001 and 2003, to use virtually “high French” and poetic lyrics.

19 Cf. Wieviorka 1999.

20 Quoted in *ibid.*: 106.

21 Quoted in *ibid.*

22 Cf. Aidi: URL: <https://www.merip.org/mer/mer229/let-us-be-moors> (last access 20-8-2018).

23 Cf. Kunz 2016: 25.

24 Bizeul 2004: 137-175, here: 158.

25 Kunz 2016: 17.



of dominance, above all in the no-man's-land of urban European agglomerations populated by migrants.<sup>26</sup> The soundtrack of gangsta rap was suited for calls for terror and violence. In Great Britain for instance, rapper Lyricist Jinn became Abu Kalaschnikow who executed John Folley, or German gangsta rapper Denis Mamadou Gerhard Cuspert alias Deseo Dogg<sup>27</sup> hyped IS with rap. But the Salafists have, as Kunz observes, developed an own battle song genre based on their traditions, the Anashis. By emphasising its value to consolidate the warriors in their battle against the infidels and in their willingness to die as martyrs, the absolute ban on song and music is evaded. The ultra-conservative members of the al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) then replace the beats with sabre clanging and boot stomping or similar in their own audio production company (al-Ajñad Media Foundation), in order to extinguish any musical element. These battle songs then not only serve as propaganda, but also as an emotional ballooning of suicide assassins shortly before their deed and death.<sup>28</sup>

In the French terror group of the Daech<sup>29</sup>, rappers made jihadists may be tolerated, but the non-radicalised rappers are a thorn in their side. They are labelled – following a strict interpretation of Quran – as ‘allies of the devil’ who should be ‘sent to hell’. Thus, the death list of assassin Larossi Abdalla, who killed two police officers in Magnanville on 13 June 2016, not only contained further police officers and journalists, but also a couple of rappers.

How then did French rappers react to this development, because also in the banlieue fundamentalist groups headed off adolescents searching for stability, gave them rules, goals and self-esteem, just to then prepare them for a battle against the exclusive secularity. In this regard as well, some rappers took (and take) an educational stand. They were often converts themselves, but lived their religion without fanaticism and in the abovementioned universalist sense, such as Abd al Malik, Kery James or Médine.

Abd al Malik, grown up in Strasbourg's deprived area Neuhof and member of the local rap group (NAP), authored an autobiography published at Albin Michel in 2005, *Que Dieu bénisse la France*. In this book he describes how he became part of extremist Islam (Mouvement des Tabligh). His fondness of hip hop however enabled him to disentangle himself from the indoctrination of the Tabligh. Ever since he has been promoting a Sufistic interpretation of Quran via rap and slam. The presentation of his personal history was persistently discussed in French society, Malik was guest in numerous TV shows. His book was made into a film in 2014.

Kery James, who already had converted from Christianity to Islam in 1999 “because, as he himself put it, in hours of doubt it was easier to find an imam who would listen to him than a priest”, published a compilation of rap songs and religious songs in 2004. The title is programmatic: *Savoir et vivre ensemble*. He himself describes the album, on which 30 hip hop artists of all confessions and cultural roots make statements about the universal values of Islam, as “une manière de lutter positivement contre les injustices dont on peut être victime.” In 2017 he broadened his socio-political commitment with a stage play (*À Vif*) in which two lawyers discuss the problems of the banlieues, one blames the state, the other the citizens. Eventually though, the vision of a peaceful coexistence is painted.

The retreat to a moderate Islam was therefore an option for many rappers and adolescents of the suburbs to create a space to unfold, an option which French society had not given them. There they share their mutual values, experience a positive identity and have a mission in life – now no longer as RAPublicans, but as preachers of religious and human values and as critics of a secular society that excludes them.

---

26 Cf. Neumann 2016.

27 Cf. Kunz 2016: 70-91.

28 Ibid.: 57-61.

29 DAECH, Arabic abbreviation for “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant” (ISIS).

## IV.

And with this I will return to Médine's song clip "Don't Laïk". In this clip he portrays the male suburban youth, the unloved "islamo-caillra", so the converted "racaille" of marginalisation policy. This "islamo-caillra" deliberately embodies the public image or enemy image designed by the Franco-French, hence the banlieusard who is stigmatised as resistant to integration due to his religious affiliation. In the name of this "racaille" that retreats into religion, Médine points out the causes of the failed integration policy: that is the secularity demanded during the 3rd Republic which is supposed to provide access to national identity and which should offer the same rights and duties to everyone. It has provided the banlieusards who grew up with republican values neither with work nor with appreciation or life perspectives. Secularity was, especially recently, instrumentalised by conservative right-wing parties in order to demonise Islam. Particularly under the guidance of Marine Le Pen since 2012, secularity became a key term of her campaigning policy. She demands a secularity disconnected from the right to freedom of religion as an indispensable countermeasure against the proclaimed Islamisation of France. In this, she relies on media-effective debates on the wearing of headscarves, pork-free school lunch or public prayers. All this supposedly shows how far the Islamisation of France has come. In 2011 she coined the term of the "islamo-racaille", when she first spoke of an Islamisation of France on the occasion of a public prayer by Muslims in Rue Myrrha.

Both Islam and secularity were a chance for many banlieusards with migrant background to build up a positive identity in a racist society. Therefore, Médine embarks on the problem with a parody on Marianne who, wearing the bonnet rouge, eats a piece of cake in the colours of the tricolour. She personifies the decay of republican universalism which was originally aspired through secularity and the connected freedom of religion. Lyrics and video contain numerous ironic innuendos and intertextual links in this regard, also realised on the image-iconic level. Some verses will be commented here in view of intertextualities, socio-political and culturally specific references.

## 1. verse

"laïcité ente l'Aïd et la Saint-Matthieu":

This is an intertextual reference to the song "Le prix de la Vérité" (on: Réel, Believe Music 2009) by Kery James (feat. Médine). It sarcastically addresses the fundamental equality of Christians and Muslims in regard of the practice of religion. This means that when a secular state celebrates Easter, also Islamic holidays like Aïd al-Kabîr, the commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice, should be accepted.

"Face aux évangélistes d'Eve Angeli":

Eve Angeli is a pop singer who participated in the télérealité *La Ferme Célébrités*. She and her kind – the ev-angelists – are labelled supporters of capitalism who demonise Islam.

"Je porte la barbe, j'suis de mauvais poil / Porte le voile, t'es dans de beaux draps":

Both word plays, "être de mauvais humeur (être de mauvais poil)" and "porter la barbe" and "être dans de beaux draps" (to be in a predicament) and "porter la voile" address stereotypical ascriptions made on appearance.

"Crucifions les laïcards comme à Golgotha":

This is a verse often quoted by right-wing parties. However, it does not call for violence against French citizens, as Marine Le Pen repeatedly claims. In the lyrical context it is rather ironical since the ones to be crucified are right-wing ideologists using secularity against Islam, rather than the founder of a religion.

“Le polygame vaut bien mieux que l’ami Strauss-Kahn”:  
The vers upvalues polygamy through moral criticism of Western double standards.

“Islamocaillera, c’est ma prière de rue”:  
Innuendo on the public prayer in Rue Myrha in the 18th arrondissement; in 2011, Muslims had to pray on the street there because the lack of space within the mosque. The media reported on the incident and as mentioned, it was especially Marine Le Pen who took it as a sign of the Islamisation of France.

2. verse:

“Marianne est une femelle tatouée ‘Fuck God’ sur les mamelles”:  
Delacroix’ painting *La liberté* shows Marianne with bare breasts. This triggers an association with Femen who speak up against restrictions for women determined by religious bans. It is also an innuendo on the stamp affair of 2013. Stamp designer Olivier Ciappa was inspired by Femen activist Inna Shevchenko for the portrait of Marianne. Conservative politician Christine Boutin, who was minister for housing and urban planning in prime minister François Fillon’s government, called for boycott of the stamp.

“Où était-elle [Marianne] dans l’affaire d’la crèche”:  
The verse alludes to the demand made by ultral-secularists to not set up nativity scenes in townhalls during Christmas 2014, since they would be opposed to the secular state. In 2015 and 2016 there were national decrees which determined the religious and culturally festive character of the nativity scene for the temporary installation in secular public places.

“Une banane contre le racisme”:  
This is a reminder of the reaction by Brazilian football player Dani Alves (FC Barcelona): When someone threw a banana on the pitch, intended as a racist reference, he picked it up and ate it.

The chorus addresses the discardment of the banlieusards who get lumped together under the label of Islam. This concerns appearance, clothes and particularly faith. The postposed ‘don’t laïk’, which is homophone with the English ‘don’t like’, is an intertextual reference to the title of a song by Médine, as well as a book, *Don’t panik*, which Médine published together with journalist Pascal Boniface in 2012. Book and song (see appendix) deal with reducing the fear of Muslims. The half-verse “On ira tous au paradis” is an intertextual reference to the same-named song by pop singer Michel Polnareff from 1972, a humorous ode to the equality of all people.

A last look is taken on the outro in which the lyrical I becomes an exorcist: “Que le mal qui habite le corps de Dame Laïcité prononce son nom”. An exorcism aims at freeing Marianne from the wrong, Islamophobic secularity. It is also reminiscent of the long history of secularity in France (“cet enfant vieille de cent dix ans”). Secularity is supposed to be re-installed in its original sense of a republican universalism by demanding the demons to leave Marianne’s body (“annoncez-vous ou disparaissez de notre chère valeur”). The ‘demons’ mentioned by name are Nadine Morano, member of the conservative UMP who often made polemic and uniformed statements about Islam, Jean-François Copé, also UMP politician and accused of a defamation that he introduced: Muslims had apparently stolen the traditional *pain au chocolat* from children during Ramadan. The clip also brings this to mind on an

image-symbolic level. Pierre Cassen is mentioned, he is founder of the Islamophobic website *Riposte laïque*<sup>30</sup> on which, among others, Islamophobic conspiracy theories are propagated.

## V.

So much for some of the references and intertextual contexts of the song. They should have made clear that no call for the Islamist battle against heretics is intended, but instead an ironic criticism of secularity as instrumentalised by right-wing parties. Due to the intentionally politically-oriented misinterpretations of his song, Médine frequently took a stance on the respective verses. In 2015, he objected to a constructed relation between his song and the attack on Charly Hebdo on 7 January 2015, only one week after his song was published. But he also admitted that provocation only makes sense where it provokes a debate, not where it hardens the fronts.<sup>31</sup> With regard to the history of critical French chanson, he compares himself to chansonnier George Brassens, a comparison which has often been quoted in the media:

“*Don’t Laïk* est précisément une caricature tendue aux fondamentalismes. Une caricature qui singe à la fois ceux qui font de la laïcité un outil d’exclusion, et à la fois ceux qui la subissent et l’expriment à travers une réaction d’hyper-identification de circonstance. M’attribuer l’apologie des concepts derrière ces termes comme «islamo-racaille» est malhonnête et dangereux. Reprocheriez-vous à Brassens dans sa *Mauvaise Réputation* d’être apologiste de ce qu’il s’attribue lui-même à travers la bouche des autres?”<sup>32</sup>

The number of accusations against him have been increasing since his show at Bataclan in October 2018 was announced.<sup>33</sup> The public debates are in particular instrumentalised by right-wing parties. In order to present Médine, who for the past 15 years has been active against any kind of fundamentalism, as an Islamist and terrorist, purported links to Quran verses are drawn. For example in an “educational video” by Franco-Lebanese author Lina Murr Nehmé who makes a direct connection to the attack on Charly Hebdo in her video<sup>34</sup>. She isolates some song verses from their context and reinterprets them in alignment with Quran so that they may be read as a call for Islamist terror. Such a treatment of a text does in no way comply with a philologically correct reading. Others use Médine’s song “Jihad” (see appendix) to proof his alleged terrorist intentions, only quoting the title as evidence. However, when one reads the subtitle “le plus grand combat est contre soi-même” and the lyric, it becomes clear that it deals with the violent human history and the individual personal development. Considering the current use of the term jihad, this example again shows that its original meaning (‘endeavour to become a better person’) has been resemanticised due to Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri since the 1990s. Thus, in Western usage it evokes

---

30 <https://ripostelaique.com/>

31 Cf. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/konzert-im-bataclan-konservative-franzoesische-politiker-wollen-hip-hop-konzert-verhindern/22688304.html>

32 Cf. <http://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/1305180-ma-chanson-don-t-laik-vilipendee-c-est-pourtant-du-pur-esprit-charlie.html> <https://www.nouvelobs.com/politique/20180610.OBS7977/un-survivant-du-bataclan-tance-wauquiez-vent-debout-contre-un-concert-de-medine.html>; <https://www.20minutes.fr/arts-stars/culture/2287059-20180610-video-medine-bataclan-concert-rappeur-fait-polemique>

33 Cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwbGZK3gvxc>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQfTaxeojdA>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8elf52lvNUM>, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNq\\_PuIFVEQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNq_PuIFVEQ), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkclzKS67yg>

34 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQfTaxeojdA>

a ‘holy war with suicide vests’, while in Islamic use it still refers to the development of the own self.<sup>35</sup>

Politicians, sociologists and rappers have been discussing the “case Médine” controversially in numerous shows and Internet forums for months. This controversy reveals that the discursive power play between rap, politics and society unfolds not only around words, but that is especially about interpretational sovereignty with regard to societal realities. In the meantime, the survivors and relatives of the victims of Bataclan have taken up position. They decidedly defy their politicisation and instrumentalisation, for instance Emmanuel Domenach who replied to the Twitter statements by Marine Le Pen and Laurent Wauquier. Domenach opposed Wauquier’s statement in which he called Médine’s show in Bataclan a sacrilege against the victims: “Et vous qui vous servez de l’attentat du 13 novembre à des fins politiques, ça se situe à quel niveau sur l’échelle du déshonneur?” and reproaches Le Pen: “C’est fou comme vous vous souvenez des victimes de terrorisme pour vos polémiques stériles ... Quel ‘dommage’ que vous ignoriez notre sort le reste de l’année quand il s’agit de nous aider vraiment.”<sup>36</sup> Legally speaking a ban would be difficult to enforce anyway, because freedom of opinion and public order must be weighted against each other. Most judicial decisions in comparable cases were in favour of the freedom of opinion.<sup>37</sup> On 21 September 2018, after some weeks of silence, Médine declared on Twitter that he would cancel the concert because several extreme right-wing groups had announced demonstrations in front of Bataclan during the concert. He therefore sought to prevent the victims’ families of renewed confrontation with the painful incidence and also to protect his audience upon his arrival. Instead, the concert takes place on 9 February 2019 at Zenith, Paris’ biggest concert hall.<sup>38</sup>

In order to summarise:

In metaphorical terms, the outlined developments give reason to conclude that Marianne did not listen to the streets. The latent racism, taken over from colonialism into the present, has derailed the integration policy, which was impeded by deindustrialisation. French-born generations of immigrants were integrated neither economically nor politically and socially, while at least the second and third generation were culturally and thus in republican terms influenced by the secular school system. The rappers, self-understood as mouthpiece of the banlieusards, therefore at first acted as RAPublicans. But their try to be incorporated into French society as French citizens and to be heard as an equal social group was unsuccessful due to French society and politics and drove many suburban adolescents from unemployment into either violence and crime or into Islam, including the fundamentalist one. The banlieues as social hot spots hence became self-regulated ghettos with an increasingly strict traditional social order. The resulting formation of sociotypes offered a social counterworld that at least offered shelter from racism. When observed from outside, the image of a dangerous and culturally alien parallel society that threatens French society was confirmed.

Some of the rappers, often converts themselves, analyse(d) these interconnected developments and warn(ed) of a suburban Islamisation fuelled by marginalisation and segregation. Where their lyrics first still formulated a (self-)critical view on their own living situation and its causes, this was soon replaced by irony and sarcasm and a more aggressive wording. The increase in violence in the cités, impacted by a higher rate of unemployment and everyday racism, was answered by the state not with an improvement of the living situation and the chances, but with a militarisation of police measures. Xenophobia was

---

35 Cf. Kunz 2016: 61-62.

36 Both quotes available on: <https://www.nouvelobs.com/politique/20180610.OBS7977/un-survivant-du-bataclan-tance-wauquier-vent-debout-contre-un-concert-de-medine.html> and <http://www.francesoir.fr/societe-faits-divers/medine-des-victimes-du-bataclan-denoncent-la-recuperation-politique>

37 Cf. <http://www.francesoir.fr/en-coop-jean-philippe-morel/medine-au-bataclan-le-concert-pourrait-il-etre-interdit>

38 Le Monde (online) 21th of September 2018.

eventually followed by Islamophobia which deepened the societal gap and made the always explicit and commentarial genre of rap political. This was done by isolating single verses from the contexts and by taking metaphors literally in order to document the danger that apparently originates from rap lyrics. When deliberately misinterpreted, they become a puppet of socio-political forces, as demonstrated by the case of Médine's show in Bataclan announced for October 2018. Again, some of his formulations are exploited in order to legitimise right-wing populist politics. The battle of discourses here is not only obvious, but it is also replicable in detail in its formulations and interpretations.

## References:

- Aidi, Hisham: Let Us Be Moors: Islam, Race and 'Connected Histories'. URL: <https://www.merip.org/mer/mer229/let-us-be-moors> (last access 20-8-2018).
- Almeida, Dimitri: *Laïcité im Konflikt. Religion und Politik in Frankreich*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS 2017.
- Bizeul, Yves: "Kulturalistische, republikanische und zivilgesellschaftliche Konzepte." In: *Idem* (ed.): *Integration von Migranten. Französische und deutsche Konzepte im Vergleich*. Frankfurt/Main 2004: pp. 137-175.
- Boucher, Manuel: *Rap: Expression de Lascar*. Paris: L'Harmattan 1998.
- Demain la ville*, Dossier n°4 Mai 2009: Ghetto urbain ed. by Adil Jazouli.
- Hüser, Dietmar: "Vive la RAPublique" – Botschaften und Bilder einer "anderen Banlieue". In: *Historische Anthropologie*, 7/2 (1999): 271–294, ISSN (online) 2194-4032, ISSN (print) 0942-8704, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7788/ha.1999.7.2.271>
- Hüser, Dietmar: *RAPublikanische Synthese. Eine französische Zeitgeschichte populärer Musik und politischer Kultur*. Köln: Böhlau 2004.
- Kimminich, Eva: "A Third Space for Dissent: Raps Peripheral Semiosphere, Its Making and Effects." In: *Lexia* 13-14 (2013): *Protesta/Protest*: pp. 209-226.
- Kimminich, Eva: "Autobiographie und Authentizität: Selbst(er)erzählung und Wirklichkeitsentwürfe in Songtexten französischer Rapperinnen." In: Brigitte Jirku, Marion Schulz (eds.): *Performativität im autobiographischen Diskurs von Frauen*. Frankfurt/M.: Inter-Lit, 12, 2012: pp. 91-116.
- Kimminich, Eva: "Black Barbie & Co. Migrations- und Rassismuserfahrungen in Songtexten französischer Rapperinnen." In: *Freiburger Geschlechterstudien*, 25 (2011): Migration, Mobilität, Geschlecht: pp. 75-92.
- Kimminich, Eva: "Citoyen oder Fremder? Ausgrenzung und kulturelle Autonomie in der Banlieue Frankreichs." In: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 46: Integration und Fragmentierung in der europäischen Stadt. Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf. 2006: pp. 505-538.
- Kimminich, Eva: "Lost elements im MikroKosmos. Identitätsbildungsstrategien in der Vorstadt- und Hip-Hop-Kultur." In: Kimminich (ed.): *Kulturelle Identität: Konstruktionen und Krisen*. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang 2003: pp. 45-88.
- Kimminich, Eva: "Rap: Vom Chanson enragée zum soziopolitischen Multimedien." In: Fernand Hörner, Ursula Moser (eds.): *Das französische Chanson im Spiegel seiner medialen (R)evolutionen*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2015: pp. 239-258.
- Kimminich, Eva: *Illégal ou légal. Anthologie du rap français*. Stuttgart: Reclam 2002.
- Kunz, Yvonne: *Jihad Rap: an den Rändern muslimischer Subkulturen*. Mainz: Ventil Verlag, October 2016.
- Lafargue de Grangeneuve, Loïc: *Politique du hip-hop. Action publique et cultures urbaines*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail 2008.

- Lapeyronnie, Didier: *Ghetto urbain. Ségrégation, violence, pauvreté en France aujourd'hui*. Paris: Robert Laffont 2008.
- Maierhofer-Lischka, Theresa: *Gewaltperzeption im französischen Rap: diskursanalytische Untersuchung einer missverständlichen Kommunikation*. Tübingen: Narr 2013.
- Neumann, Peter: *Der Terror ist unter uns: Dschihadismus und Radikalisierung in Europa*. Berlin: Ullstein 2016.
- Piriot, Emmanuelle: "Die Banlieue als politisches Experimentierfeld des französischen Staates." In: *Kollektiv Rage, Banlieues. Die Zeit der Forderungen ist vorbei*. Berlin/Hamburg: Assoziation A 2012: pp. 59-104.
- RIAD (RuhrgebietsInternationalismusArchivDortmund): "Das Leben ist eine Demo, Frankreich eine Glasscheibe und ich ein Pflasterstein." In: *Kollektiv Rage, Banlieues. Die Zeit der Forderungen ist vorbei*. Berlin/Hamburg: Assoziation A 2012.
- Schuhmann, Adelheid: "Le Rap en France, expression de rage et de violence de la jeunesse Black-Blanc-Beur." In: Isaac Bazié, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink: *Violences postcoloniales: représentations littéraires et perceptions médiatiques*. Berlin / Münster: LitVerlag 2011: pp. 315-326.
- Scooter, Pégram: "Not condemned to fail: Examples of 'rapped' resistance and cultural uplift in French hip-hop." In: *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 24/4 (2011): pp. 239-253, DOI: [10.1080/08893675.2011.625206](https://doi.org/10.1080/08893675.2011.625206)
- Vicherat, Mathias: *Pour une analyse textuelle du RAP français*. Paris: L'Harmattan 2001.
- Wieviorka, Michel: *Violence en France*. Paris: Ed. du Seuil 1999.