Abstract: This is a series of papers that translate and analyze articles, reports, religious decrees, and other documents, written primarily in Arabic by Islamist scholars, clerics, operatives, or intellectuals.

FRANCOPHONE INTERNET FORUMS SHED LIGHT ON CONCERNS AND ISSUES OF ISLAMISTS IN EUROPE
By Deborah Touboul*

Introduction
The proliferation of francophone Islamic websites and forums on the Internet testifies of the growing interest to discuss the place of Islamism in Europe, as well as the strong need among European Muslims to voice their opinions and create virtual communities with other like-minded fellows. There are now hundreds of francophone websites and online discussion groups that provide the opportunity to web surfers to learn about and discuss all aspects of Islam. Whether you are a pacifist Muslim protesting the terrorist practices of Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups, or an Islamist defending Jihad and actively contributing to its further development, or a Muslim trying to avoid all these questions to simply discuss religion or social issues in your country, you will find a selection of websites to adhere to. Even non-Muslims wanting to learn more about religion or new

* Deborah Touboul is a research fellow at PRISM. She is a M.A. graduate of the Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University, Washington D.C.
converts can find the cyber-space that will correspond to their demand. All aspects of Islam are discussed from all perspectives.

The majority of the francophone websites and forums on Islam are moderate and discuss ways to peacefully live in Western societies and to defend their version of Islam—a moderate form of Islam that would never justify atrocities committed by Al-Qaeda and other such Jihadi groups. This paper however takes a closer look at the minority of these sites, which are the fundamentalist ones. Our goal is to identify the issues that Islamists are concerned with today in Europe. We chose to use the francophone web because it seems to be the most developed, considering France contains Six million Muslims, the largest Muslim community in Europe, and the francophone web also includes Muslims from North Africa, Belgium and Canada. Most of the analysis that follows is based on the study of the sites “Voice of the Oppressed” and “Al Mourabitoune,” which are two of the most popular Islamist web sites on the francophone web at the moment. These two sites also provide an interesting illustration of two very different approaches to convey Islamist messages, using different tactics and attracting different sets of participants.

Two Different Approaches/Strategies
The two sites use very different approaches to convey their Islamist message. One, Voice of the Oppressed, is aggressive, political and uses heavy propaganda. The other, Al Mourabitoune, uses a more subtle and societal approach and relies heavily on religious teachings.

Voice of the Oppressed: Aggressive and Propagandist Strategy

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1 Mainly Al Mourabitoune (www.ribaat.com) and La Voix des Opprimés/Voice of the Oppressed (www.stcom.net)
1. Flash presentation before entering Voice of the Oppressed, August 2005, [www.stcom.net](http://www.stcom.net)
Voice of the Oppressed makes heavy use of all audio and video techniques known to appeal directly to emotions. To start with, a powerful Flash presentation, displaying quotes from the Qur’an backed with a man’s deep voice singing them, precedes access to the homepage (screenshot 1 above). Next, on the homepage, at the top, a speedy text scroll in red font reads (screenshot 2 above):

The only way to recruit the Americans or the Europeans and the Russians to the Zionist cause, and by the same token save the Zionist entity of its imminent destruction, is to sacrifice a few thousands of them in awful circumstances, by biological or chemical attacks. Then, in shock and terrified horror of death, the Americans, Europeans and occidentals in general, like one man, will be convinced that the problem is the Muslims, and the massacre of Muslims peoples will become ‘necessary.’ Exactly like the Zionist have diabolized Islam and the Muslims since September 11, 2001.

This refers back to the Surah 3:54 quoted in the Flash presentation, which already mentioned plots of “the others” against Islam. This is the recurring theme in Voice of the Oppressed: Conspiracy theory. Everything, including the September 11 attacks and the existence of Osama bin Laden, is a plot of the Zionists and the Americans to attack and destroy Islam and to take over the Middle East; just like, as many Islamist scholars still argue, the Jews plotted the Holocaust to create Israel.

Quotes: “They wish to put out Allah's light with their mouths. But Allah insists upon perfecting His light, in spite of the disbelievers. [Qur'an: 61, 8]”; “It is Him that bestows clear verses upon His supporter so that he makes you come out of the darkness to the light”; “They [the others] plotted. Allah caused their plot to fail. And Allah knows best their scheme! [Aal `Imran, verse 54.]”
The rest of the page is filled with a few more verses from the Quran, some of today’s topics on the forum and a list of news about “Occupied Palestine,” “Occupied Algeria,” “Conspiracy” and so on. On the left, the reader also finds a list of articles such as “Sheikh Bin Laden: The Arab General” or “The Americans abused us sexually” or “Video message of the commandant of Islamic resistance of Afghanistan for the eid al Adha,” along with a “Boycott Israel” logo. Moreover, new videos are often posted on its homepage consisting either of simple and raw filming of random scenes, such as a lion “distinctly screaming the name of Allah at the time of prayer,” or of sophisticated short movies retelling history from an Islamist perspective, thereby aiming at convincing the viewers of the authenticity of the story and motivating them to pass to action; an example of this was a recount of the past as a constant attempt by the Christian Crusaders to defeat Islam, logically leading to the current world events.

Al Mourabitoune: Subtle and Religious Strategy
By contrast, Al-Mourabitoune focuses not on propaganda but on Islamic religious radicalism. Its homepage is simple, pleasant to the eye and not aggressive in any way (see screenshots above). The page is static, containing only a few neutral images as forms of illustration; no flashy logos, texts or intense pictures. It is divided into several sections—publications, updates, audio & video, books and quotes—just like any regular site. At first glance, the site contains mostly educational information about Islam, such as articles on “Faith and Obedience” or “The signification of Iqamat Al-Hujjah,” audio and video items on “The Quran and Education” or “Charity toward Parents.” A classified ads section also allows members to post job offers or
qualifications in various fields from Real Estate or Telecom to Islamic Centers and Mosques. And a Marriage section attempts to link up hundreds of Muslim men and women, mostly residing in France and Belgium but also Morocco, Algeria and other 50 countries all over the world:³

The matrimonial agency of Al Mourabitoune is a service that has only one goal: Help the Muslim brothers and sisters in difficulty to get married. Hence, it is in no circumstance a meeting agency! The philosophy is as follows: Some brothers and some sisters lack contacts with the rest of the Ummah because of their family, work, geographic situation, etc. It is to help them find a companion and marry Islamically that Al Mourabitoune put this service in place.

Looking closer however, the content clearly demonstrates the Islamist character of the site. The publications and updates include translations of Arabic texts from well known and respected radical Sheikhs on “Jihad in America” or “The virtues of Jihad,” clearly advocating and justifying Jihad and martyrdom. Audio & video include items like “The armed resistance in Iraq 1, 2 & 3” and this is an example of the quotes:

Allah says: Infidels do not believe, they do not care whether you warn them or not: They will never believe. Allah sealed their hearts and ears; and a thick veil obstructs their sight; and for them there will be a big punishment. [Surat Al-Baqarah, 2 Verses 6-7]

Additionally, on the left hand side, a survey asks “Jihad in Iraq… a) Is an obligation for all Muslims (Fardh ‘Ayn); b) Is an obligation for the masses; c) Is not an obligation, actually there is no Jihad; d) Is forbidden without the endorsement of the believers’ commander?” 82 of the 166 respondents answered a) and only 15 answered c).

Websites’ Audience and Forums’ Participants
As the two sites use such different tactics, they also attract different sets of audience. Voice of the Oppressed’s audience is mostly of a young age, not necessarily religious, either strongly supporting jihad or wanting to learn more about it, and not very knowledgeable about Islam. In the forums, the tone they use is just as aggressive as the site’s language and presentation; they often get in arguments and insult each other; they either use no sources to back up their claims or the ones they do use are of dubious origin. By contrast, on Al Mourabitoune the audience is generally extremely traditional, very knowledgeable about the Islamic religion, history and culture; they also highly support jihad, although it is less obvious due to the variety of topics discussed (see

³ Statistics provided on the website indicate that the ration men/women using this service is almost 1/3 (1300 men for 500 women); it also gives a list of countries they are from:
below). They address each other respectfully and are generally required to back up their claims with scholarly sources and/or direct quotes from the Quran.

**Who are the participants of the forums?**

**a. Religion**
The forum’s participants on Al-Mourabitoune are mostly very traditional Muslims or aspiring to become more traditional; they are either already well educated about religion or seeking knowledge and religious guidance. On Voice of the Oppressed, the participants seem less religious and less knowledgeable about Islam. On both sites, most of the participants are Muslims by birth but based on testimonies there is also a significant amount of converts, although it is difficult to estimate how many; they are welcome and encouraged by the others. As for non-Muslims, even though a site like Al-Mourabitoune has a section just for them, their participation is limited.

**b. Fundamentalism**
The majority of the participants to these forums are Islamists and pro-Jihad. After terrorist attacks, one can easily find in the forums arguments such as:

There is no innocent Zionist person in Palestine; there are only invading colonizers, Zionist moreover, and that Allah and his prophet have ordered to kill, even hidden behind a tree.

Even though most forums say in their charter that they will not tolerate racism and extremism, the forum administrators rarely stop or ban radical discourse; they encourage it instead. In response to a question on why so many people on the forum use pictures of bin Laden or Jihadi fighters and if that meant people caution such action, one of the administrators answered:

The day the kuffar will stop eating Muslims for breakfast then we will be able to change our avatars into birds and butterflies. Until then, I think that taking arms and defending the Muslim blood that pours everyday is a priority; this is how Islam is.

Similarly, one of the main moderators on Al-Mourabitoune affirmed:

Bin Laden is my brother in (belief of) Allah. May Allah allow me to meet this brother. Amin. May Allah enlighten our brothers wherever they are. Amin May Allah accord a life long and miserable to those who denigrate the mujahideen. Amin.

This is not to say that all participants agree with these claims; the level in fundamentalism varies. Actually, the recent debate within Islamists over the means
used to conduct Jihad, which erupted mostly as a result of the Madrid and London attacks, is clearly reflected in these forums. Many argue that the practices used by these suicide bombers are unislamic in that they wrongly target innocents including Muslims; but these relative moderates are most often reprimanded, insulted and ejected from the forums by the other participants.

c. Location
Most participants seem to either live in France or Belgium and to be originally from North Africa; some live in Canada as well. Some participants write “On the front” or similar location information, which leads to believe that some of them may be feeding information directly from Iraq, Afghanistan or other such battle zones, but it cannot be verified. As for the sites’ information, Al-Mourabitoune’s owner is registered in Peshawar, Pakistan and its Administrator in Paris, France; Voice of the Oppressed’s registrant and administrator is in London but its technical contact is in Virginia, USA.

What do participants look for?
Overall, the participants seem to aspire mainly to two objectives: Information sharing and community-building. First, online discussion is about sharing information and exchanging opinions, whatever the topic. In this case, the participants look for an opportunity to discuss Islam based on their surrounding environment (from the situation of their country to the world state of affairs). As we will see later, the topics vary to include issues of religion, culture, society, politics, etc.

The second objective of these participants is the creation of a virtual community composed of like-minded individuals that will comfort them in their ideas and provide them with the religious, moral, emotional and even material support they may need. Through these forums, they are able to express themselves freely about their religion and to find people with the same beliefs, with whom they can share their views and from whom they can learn: “Is it forbidden to shake hands with someone of the opposite sex when saying hello?” “Is martyrdom allowed?” They can also find the moral and emotional support in many situations from dealing with “Islamophobia” to being a single Muslim woman with three children and no job. Examples of material support include:

There is a young sister with no papers and two children (one of them is a 1 month old baby) who has no resources sobhanallah (praise to Allah). Not to overwhelm you, I will not ask for

4 Source: www.allwhois.com
money but just food, diapers for her baby, clothes, etc. or even better a husband ready to marry her and to take charge of this sister and her two kids. Barakallahu fikum (Allah blesses you).

This multi-dimensional support is what actually seems to bring a lot of the participants to the forums, especially in the case of Al-Mourabitoune, and the response to their plea for help is most of the time very kind and comforting. For instance, a woman who was living with her husband and baby in very poor conditions in France asked for help and received not only advice but also very generous offers like sharing someone else’s home, receiving money and other practical help, along with many comforting words and prayers. The sense of religious and social solidarity is much more prominent in these sites than in Islamist sites in the Arab world, in Arabic. It reflects the sense of being a minority in Europe.

Like participants of all web forums, radical Muslims seek a sense of community, which they have difficulty finding in real life, especially considering that they live in societies they usually despise and feel rejected from. Their customs and opinions are so different not only from the Westerners but also from the majority of the Muslim communities, which are more moderate, that they feel the need to create bonds over cyber-space, which in turn become real life bonds as well.

**Topics Discussed on the Forums**

**Voice of the Oppressed**
- Jihad
- World
- General
- Right to Respond
- Knowledge Base

**Al Mourabitoune**
- General
- International News
- The Roqia Forum
- Politics – Theological Debate
- Non Muslim Space
- Family and Society
- Computer Science
- Together for the Ummah

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5 Topics organized from most to least popular, based on number of messages as of August, 2005
Once again, the two different approaches used by Voice of the Oppressed and Al-Mourabitoune are exemplified in their choice of topics for their forums. Voice of the Oppressed concerns itself almost exclusively with Islamism and contemporary issues that face Islamists of Europe specifically. Al-Mourabitoune, while focusing on these issues as well, also addresses itself to a wider audience by giving Muslims living in Western societies a space to speak about their family and societal issues, by giving women the opportunity to talk among themselves and by giving other individuals that are not Muslim a chance to get answers to their questions and to express their views. Like in the actual websites, we find in the forums a more aggressive and political feel in the topics of Voice of the Oppressed and a more religious and social one in Al-Mourabitoune’s. Still, by looking closer, we find that some principal issues concern both audiences just as much. They are: Islam, Jihad and Europe.

1. Islam
Even though a first impression would lead to think that Islam itself is not interesting to the participants, based on the numbers provided above showing religious topics such as particularly unpopular, the reality is that considerations on Islam and its practice are central to all topics and threads. Whatever the issue discussed, it all comes down to what the Quran and its various interpretations say. In Al-Mourabitoune, the most visited thread is a game on Islam and Muslim History, as part of the ‘General’ topic. Also within this topic, by far the most popular one, a participant circulated the results of his research on what were the “important subjects” being discussed: “Women in Islam,” “Ummah and the Religious World,” “Roqia and the Parallel World (Djinns),” “Religious Practices and Dogmas of Islam,” “Scholar’s Fatwas,” “Invocations and the Quran,” “The Prophet and Hadiths,” “After Death and Day of Last Judgment” and “Sects and Factions in Islam.” It is clear from this list that basics of Islam are at the center of almost all discussions.

Similarly, the most popular thread in Voice of the Oppressed is a discussion on the legality in Islam to be a suicide bomber or a Martyr. The “Politics - Theological Debate” topic of Al-Mourabitoune also clearly illustrates this, as participants mostly discuss the different factions in Islam and different scholars, leaders and thinkers of Islam, such as Sheikh Rabi’ Ibn Hadi Al-Madkhali Al Qahtani, or Sheikh Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdesi, Ahmad Shah Mas'oud, Sayyed Qutb, etc. They also hold debates on issues like the fatwas of Yousef al-Qaradawi, the use of smilies (visual
representations of human expressions, which is not permitted in Islam), whether the beard is obligatory or simply advised, Sunni versus Shi’i Islam, etc. The Non-Muslim Space topic is also almost exclusively dedicated to learning about Islam. It contains mainly postings from Muslim participants sharing basic information about Islam, discussions between Christians and Muslims on the differences between the two religions as well as messages from people contemplating conversion. The latter are very encouraged with links on how to go about it, advice, stories, reassuring and welcoming words, and so on.

In other topics, such as Family & Society, people ask about what Islam says about matters such as divorce, adultery, love, celibacy, even sex, and above all, how to apply these rules to their lives in the West. The basic understanding is that all subjects are acceptable, even the most personal ones, as long as the purpose of the discussion is to discover what Islam admits and does not admit. Women’s role for instance, is an issue that attracts a lot of interest. Questions such as, Can a woman work or should she be at home taking care of the family, are very popular. A closer look at these issues is following later on, as they mostly belong to the topic of being a Muslim in Europe. In brief, Islam is present in all conversations and is the topic that triggers most deliberation.

2. Jihad
Jihad can be identified as the second most discussed topic in the forums. In Voice of the Oppressed, Jihad is actually the first topic, but it is second most popular in Al-Mourabitoune, as part of the International News section. More specifically, aside from debates on the meaning and legitimacy of Jihad in general, Jihad in Iraq is what attracts most interest. Jihad in other parts of the world, i.e. Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kashmir, Palestine and Chechnya, are mentioned but not nearly as much. As one participant of Al-Mourabitoune said more than a year ago, and is still valid now, “today (08/20/2004) the execution of the CIA agent and the decapitation of an American in Iraq are number one of the box office International News.” Number two is a section on News in Iraq, followed by several discussion threads, or more accurately photo galleries, of “Pictures of heroes of history,” “Pictures of our Mujahideen brothers in Algeria,” “Link to images of the greatest lions of our time,” “the top 10 of the Mujahideen,” and so on. Communiqués, videos, audio messages and other messages from the resistance, the Mujahideen, Osama bin Laden and other radical Islamists, are also retransmitted or redirected from there.
In Voice of the Oppressed, the emphasis is also on news reporting from all sorts of sources, but they are most of the time hard to believe, unreliable and untraceable. There we find threads such as “Proofs that the occupiers are the ones targeting the civilians,” “Americans accuse Israelis in Iraq” or “Now we know why the CIA kills Arab diplomats.” Among the most visited threads is one called “Katrina,” in which it is argued that the hurricane that hit New Orleans is Allah’s doing as a punishment and revenge for the war the Americans are waging in Iraq. Among the other top visited threads are videos of the Shiites entering the battle in Iraq, a discussion of how to explain the killings of the Algerian diplomats; a thread called “What a shame!” that expresses anger against Algeria for letting the U.S. use its land for anti-terrorist operations; a heated debate between the pro-jihad and the anti-jihad in which the anti-jihad are insulted and rejected for being disbelievers, a series of videos from Iraq, videos of “the Islamic army’s victories over the last 6 months” and two messages of the Army of Ansar Al-Sunnah praising Mujahideen who engaged in missions killing a significant number of “renegades.”

In both sites however, the bulk of the threads are videos and pictures of Jihad. Actual discussion among members is not very deep; the pictures and news are looked at and praised more than they are actually debated on. Some participants also consider the act of participating to these websites and forums and to their development as a contribution to global Jihad, by providing translation of texts, promoting Jihad and building support for it. Interestingly, Voice of the Oppressed and Al Mourabitoune do not seem to contain training materials for Jihad like Islamist sites in Arabic do. There are a lot of links to Arabic sites however. The implication of women in Jihad is mentioned but not much discussed either. One participant in Al Mourabitoune did open a thread called “Sisters and Jihad,” in which she wrote an eloquent message in support for female martyrs:

I tell them Mashaa Allah. I see the sisters of Europe with whom I have conversations and I can assure you that they are not pro-Jihad and I can’t understand them. Should we let ourselves be tarnished by pigs coming from all parts of the world? Should we not do anything against these heartless people who prone human rights and who kill father, mother, children and husband in front of our eyes? Why all this? Because we think like the kuffar that martyrdom is a sort of suicide subhana Allah. I personally would be capable based on simple vengeance to kill these people who try to destroy my honor and my dignity and who destroy my family… I act and I go straight into it. May Allah help all of the combatants who suffer every day. May Allah give them one of the best locations in paradise. Amine.
3. Europe: What is happening in Europe and Being a Muslim in Europe

After Islam and Jihad, what the participants of these French Islamist sites are most concerned with is Europe. Voice of the Oppressed concentrates on providing ‘news’ about “What is happening in Europe?” (part of the World section), which is the second most popular topic, while Al-Mourabitoune contains more in-depth discussion on the situation of Muslims in Europe. In Voice of the Oppressed, participants use this section to post their version of the news about Europe, mostly in recent months, about the bombings in London and Madrid and other such events, which they constantly try to link to the Israeli Mossad or the Americans. The postings include threads such as “Blair is a member of a Zionist Satanist sect,” “The Spanish services facilitated the attacks in Madrid,” “Omar Bakri works for the Mossad” or “Sarkosy is going to blow up France with his buddies from the Mossad.” The threads that attract most viewers all relate to some conspiracy theories about the Israelis and/or the Americans being behind events of terrorism. These include “Were the London videos altered?,” attempting to prove that the videos linked to the bombings in July were fake; or “Al-Qaeda does not exist,” arguing that this group was only virtually created by the CIA and the Mossad to blame Muslims and find reason to attack their lands. These threads lack any real discussion and do not serve any other purpose than to present different information than the one given in the general media, so as to blame the enemy (mostly Israel and the USA) for all the tragedies happening in Europe. French and British officials are also highly criticized and described as racist puppets of the enemy.

Al-Mourabitoune addresses the issues on Europe very differently. The conspiracy theories are barely ever mentioned and politics in general is not the main issue. The participants of this site are more interested in how to live in Western communities. The discussions vary from very practical everyday life matters, such as television, education, Halal restaurants, etc. to more fundamental discussions such as the basis for staying in Europe as opposed to moving away, but most conversations focus on relationship/family issues. It is very difficult for most traditional Muslims in France, Belgium, Spain, and other countries, to create an impermeable environment that does not get affected by the Western culture. This is even more so in families where one parent is a Muslim and the other is not, or where some members of the family converted to Islam and are confronted to their ‘disbelieving’ surroundings. Should they entertain a relationship with the other members of their family that do not practice? Should they avoid them? Should they hate them? Should they, to the contrary, love them and try to show them the way to Allah? These are all questions that these individuals struggle with. For instance, a woman opened a thread called “How to deal with disbelieving relatives?”
Many examples can be cited. One of the most popular threads tells the story of an atheist woman married to a practicing Muslim threatening to leave her because her boss is a man and she occasionally has to be alone with him, which is not acceptable for him as a Muslim. She came to the forum to understand his argument and to see if her position was defendable Islamically. The debate among the participants turned into a more fundamental issue: The marriage of Muslims with not only non-Muslims but also atheists. She was kindly advised to let her husband go because the problem was likely to be deeper than just this work issue: The fact is that she is atheist and by Islamic law he is not allowed to be married to her and that therefore they would always be in conflict. She eventually thanked them and confirmed that they were correct, that she and her husband had talked about it and that they separated so he could live in accordance with his faith. She was congratulated for her decision and invited to come back to the forum if she wanted to learn more about Islam and eventually maybe convert.

Another issue that attracts a lot of attention and is a good example of a conflict of cultures between Muslims and non-Muslims is polygamy. Would you accept to share your husband with other women? How do both men and women deal with this situation, especially in a Western society? People discuss this very openly and share very personal stories with the other participants. A woman opened a thread called “Polygamy and my life,” in which she announced that her husband was about to get married with his second wife and she asked for moral support to accept it and win over her jealousy. Even though this practice is illegal in Europe and most of these individuals were born and raised there, polygamy is still something they widely accept because it is legal in Islam. Women mostly assert it is their role to accept it even if it is very difficult; some complain and say it is not a way to treat women but they are quickly reprimanded by the more religious participants, both men and women, who tell them this is a teaching of Islam and their discourse is contaminated with western values.

Islamophobia and racism is also discussed. Participants often claim that there is a discrimination problem in Western societies, especially against the traditional Muslims who wear the veil or the beard, and that they are prevented from advancing professionally like the rest of the population. Some people strongly attack the French or the Belgian systems for being racist. Yet, interestingly, most participants agree to say that Muslims are responsible for the difficulties they encounter and that they should not blame everything on racism. In response to an argument that “the goal of the
entrepreneurs in France is to weaken the expansion of Muslims (thus Islam),” one participant stated:

Please akhy (brother). Let’s be realistic. All bosses of all enterprises in all neighborhoods are not a Sharon or a Bush. The Islamophobes exist like racists exist like xenophobes exist etc. but from there to the generalization that you make, it is a bit much, don’t you think? I think that today we Muslims lack a little realism; there are some things to change in our approach to the different problems that surround us. We overestimate the hostile environment and we underestimate our capacities and potential. The danger is that we take pleasure in our situation of weakness. Not that we are weak.

Another wondered:

Why some Muslims feel comfortable in the role of victims instead of finding constructive solutions and acting?

Actually, the word “racism” appears more when participants discuss enmities within the Muslim community than when they discuss the ones with the Western world. For instance, a lot of the conflict around marriage issues does not seem to stem from inter-faith unions but from inter-cultural ones. This form of racism opposes mainly people born Muslim with converts, and Muslims born in Europe with those born in North Africa. In other terms, it is a conflict between the ‘bledards’ (from the bled, from North African cities and villages), the ‘beurs’ or ‘beurettes’ (term used to describe the French young Muslims) and the ‘little Frenchies’ (the converts). This seems to be a major issue in the life of many youths: Young religious Muslim women complain that their parents, who in general emigrated from North Africa when they were young, are very racist toward the French-born Muslims or the converts, and force them to marry someone they never met from their place of origin to ensure a ‘pure’ succession. They find support in a place like Al-Mourabitoune’s forum, where the main argument is that it does not matter where a Muslim is from as long as he or she strictly follows the religion of Islam.

Another common issue among the participants of Al-Mourabitoune is the case of those who became traditional Muslims while the rest of their families are non-practicing. Increasingly more young Muslims become more religious than their parents and express their frustrations with their families who are not religious enough to their taste, and who oppose their adoption of a more radical practice of Islam. As one participant said:

Alhamdulillah (praise Allah), the children of the third generation are much more concerned with religion. When I see some young people of this generation, I am impressed. They really loved
the Din since they were very young and grew up going to the Mosque, having many religious principles that we did not have at their age. When I look 10 years back, I tell myself that the progression is enormous. I remember in my Mosque we were 3 or 4 to pray whereas now there are between 30 and 40 people every day! The practice of the religion really augmented in people’s lives, alhamdulillah! If it goes on this way, people from Muslim countries will do Hijra to France to preserve their religion!

This brings up the issue of Hijra, or migration. Religious Muslims wonder if they should stay and fight the Western way of life or leave for a more peaceful and righteous future? This is what participants debated in a very popular thread named “Our Future in Europe: We leave or not?” Most agree to say that they want to leave as they mostly worry for their children who may be contaminated with the Western culture. These traditional Muslims also want to live in a place where they will be accepted for what they are, where they will not be looked at in a suspicious way because they have a beard or wear the Hijab; a place where even if life is not as comfortable and there is not as much freedom, they will still be able to be in better concordance with their beliefs. They view Western societies as an evil place where even the most dedicated Muslim is subject to sin. Some also find Quranic basis to leave Dar-ul-Kufr (land of the disbelievers) for the land of the Muslims. The question then is where is this land? Saudi Arabia is usually the first thought; however most argue that integration would be too difficult there. Some think of their original country, mostly Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, but most do not even consider it because they do not find these places so different from Europe. Then, the most popular choices seem to be the United Arab Emirates, Qatar or Malaysia, countries in which there seem to be some opportunities for immigration and work and where they could live their religious life without too much invasion from the outside world. Saudi Arabia still ranks among the first destinations for Hijra. Some of them finally consider leaving their families behind to do Jihad in Iraq or elsewhere.

This said some also argue that it is necessary for orthodox Muslims to remain in France or Belgium mostly because their parents or grandparents fought to come to these countries and worked very hard to create a decent life for their children. There are a few who further believe that it is their role to stay in these countries and help ameliorate the living conditions and status of the Muslim community in Europe and to contribute to its further development. The following two pictures, which are used as avatars of two of the participants, one from Belgium (1) and one from France (2), are quite revealing of this argument:
There are many other very interesting topics in these two forums, especially on Al-Mourabitoune, which contains so many threads and participants. The Roqia for instance, which is the world of magic, witchcraft and spells, is very popular among the participants of Al-Mourabitoune; but Islam, Jihad and Europe are the three main topics that are most commonly discussed within both forums. Closely monitoring such sites is a great resource for anyone trying to understand the Muslim communities of Europe and to predict future developments. There are clear trends in the evolution of the religious Muslims’ opinions and some of the arguments we find in these forums can be quite different from basic assumptions we get from looking at more superficial sources. These sites provide a direct window into a world that would not have been accessible to outsiders in the past and it can greatly enhance European people’s ability to understand and better deal with their Muslim communities, may they be radical or not. It is important to emphasize however that we have particularly focused on radical sites in this paper, but that they are a minority among the francophone websites built and visited by Muslims. The list of francophone forums that are not fundamentalist, that denounce the terrorists’ actions and that prone peace is much longer than the list of the fundamentalist Islamist sites we presented here. Yet, the number of participants and the radical content of these two sites make them significant enough to deserve particular attention.

**Conclusion**

The Islamic French web sites analyzed above well reflect a society of minorities, in which the younger generations are in constant search for identity. It is typical to Islamic youth in the Arab world, but the reality of being a minority and the challenges of modern life in Europe make it more prominent. If we compare these sites to Jihadi sites in Arabic, where the participants are mainly Arab Muslims in the Arab world, we can see several elements of difference:

- Social issues are more dominant in Europe, unlike the dominance of politics in the Arabic sites.
- Sense of solidarity of Muslim communities is stronger in Europe.
The diversity of Islamic trends is more prominent, unlike the tendency towards strict Salafism in the Arabic sites.

• The effect of living in a European open society is felt much more in the Islamic French sites.

• Issues such as magic, which are widely discussed in the French sites as integral part of popular Islam in North Africa, are forbidden in Salafist sites in Arabic.

Yet, it should be noted that the sense of global conspiracy against Islam and Muslims and conspiracy theories are related equally in the sites in both languages.