France & the Headscarf
Exploring Discrimination through Laïcité and a Colonial Legacy

Samantha Shea Tropper

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Under the supervision of Professor Ellen McLarney
Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Duke University

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Abstract

On March 15, 2004, the lives of veiled Muslim women in France changed. A new law banned the Islamic headscarf in all public schools, claiming laïcité—secularism—as its reasoning. But this law was not solely the product of Islamophobia leftover from 9/11. It had been building for generations on a history of colonialism in North Africa as well as post-decolonization attitudes about immigration and Islam in the international sphere. This paper aims to disentangle this complicated concept of laïcité and how it has been manipulated in the past century to create a so-called “neutral” public sphere in which Muslims are placed in a subordinate position. Through an analysis of colonialism and its remnants as well as Islamophobia that has resulted from more current events portrayed in the media, this paper outlines the development of Arab and Muslim discrimination in France. In the final chapter, interviews from Muslim individuals in France are used to give them a proper voice in this debate, in which they are so often left unheard. Their stories act as the impetus to promote prolonged research and development of this topic in the future as events continue to unfold in France.
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A Note about Islamic Veils

It is important to distinguish among the different types of veiling in Islam. There are ranges of veil types, from the hijab to the burqa. The generic term “veiling” (“voiler” in French) is also employed to refer to the general practice of covering oneself with any type of Islamic veil. The hijab, or hiyab, refers to a scarf worn by a Muslim woman that covers her hair and her neck and ears, but leaves her entire face visible. It is also most commonly called a “headscarf” or a “veil” in English, or a “foulard” or a “voile” in French. The chador, most commonly worn historically by Iranian women, is a long cloak that covers the body and the head, but leaves the face visible. The niqab is a veil that covers the bottom half of the face, leaving the eyes visible and is worn along with a headscarf. The burqa is the full face-covering veil: it covers the entire body, the head, and the entire face, by leaving a mesh fabric covering over the eyes to see through.

Figure 1. Different types of Islamic veils.¹

¹ Image source: http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m7dr45fs6B1qdjdpo1_500.jpg
INTRODUCTION

On September 18, 1989, three Muslim girls wore their headscarves to their middle school in Creil, France, a suburb of Paris. When asked to remove them, they refused. Subsequently, the three girls were expelled. Thus began the infamous “affairs of the scarves” ("affaires des foulards"). The school’s principal, Ernest Chenière, claimed that he was acting in the name of laïcité—loosely translated “secularism”—when he expelled the students, which he considered an “inviolable and transparent principle, one of the pillars of French universalism.” Chenière’s claim sparked heated debates about the meaning of laïcité and its application in today’s world.

Global media picked up the story but in some cases did little to clarify the incident. An article in The New York Times from November 12, 1989, states that the controversy was about “Iranian-style veils” that are “associated with the most conservative Muslim societies.” The reference to Iran evoked the threat not just of political Islam to French secular society, but also of the Islamic revolution, inflaming French fears about the political mobilization of Muslim populations in France. In fact, the girls were wearing simple headscarves, or a hijab, which are not associated with Iran,

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2 See Bronwyn Winter, Hijab & The Republic: Uncovering the French Headscarf Debate (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 129.
in the way a chador would have been. The media repeatedly blamed immigration issues as the basis for this controversy: “France is experiencing growing conflict from the difficulties of integrating Muslim immigrants from North Africa into society,” stated a New York Times article dated December 3, 1989.\(^5\) Such accounts seemingly overlooked the fact that all three girls were French-born citizens.

This incident provided a site for investigating the changing meanings of laïcité in contemporary French society and especially the role of religious freedom and the freedom of religious expression in a secular society. The girls’ expulsion was appealed to the State Council,\(^6\) France’s highest judicial power, in November 1989. The Council’s avis (ruling) no. 346.893 from November 27, 1989, referred to other laws—both French and international—which cited the freedom of expression as a right. Concepts of religious freedom are laid out in French Constitutions, various European conventions, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.\(^7\) The court’s final conclusion was that students wearing signs of their religion are not automatically in conflict with laïcité, but these signs can still be banned if they become a form of pressure or propaganda.\(^8\) The avis states:

> The refusal of admission in a school of a newly registered student or the refusal of registration in a middle school or high school would only be


\(^6\) Le Conseil d’état

\(^7\) See Conseil d’Etat, Assemblée générale (Section de l’Intérieur), Avis no. 346.893, November 27, 1989, Section 1 Article 3.

\(^8\) See the “key paragraph” from the Council’s avis in Winter, Hijab & The Republic, 138.
justified by the risk of a threat to the order of the establishment or to the
normal functioning of the educational service.9

Prior to this statement, the avis clarifies that the student’s behavior must “severely disrupt
the functioning of the public service,”10 meaning educational services.11 In the words of
anthropologist John R. Bowen, the girls “had a right to wear the scarves as long as they
did not disturb school life,” in accordance with the avis, but “none of this changed the
reality for those three middle school girls, who remained sequestered in the school
library.”12 This ruling essentially left the decisions about individual cases to school
administrators themselves, and its ambiguity left much open for interpretation. As a
result, issues like this one continued to occur in French schools. The vague nature of the
avis, allowing individual school administrations to make decisions about religious signs,
did not bode well for Muslim girls who wanted to express their faith, because of the
rampant anti-Islamic sentiment in France at the time. Any expression of Islamic faith
could be deemed “a threat to the order of the establishment” in an avowedly secular, but
implicitly Christian, French society.

The issue of the headscarf would continue to be at the forefront of French politics,
especially in the post-9/11 era. France and its domestic politics took over international

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9 “Un refus d’admission dans une école d’un élève nouvellement inscrit ou un refus
d’inscription dans un collège ou un lycée ne serait justifié que par le risqué d’une
menace pour l’ordre dans l’établissement ou pour le fonctionnement normal du service
de l’enseignement.” Section 2 Article 3.
10 “perturberait gravement le fonctionnement du service public”
11 Avis no. 346.893, Section 2 Article 3.
12 John R. Bowen, Why the French Don’t Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public
news in 2011 when Nicolas Sarkozy passed the so-called “burqa ban.” Headlines blared news that “Muslim Women Protest on First Day of France’s Face Veil Ban,” “2 Arrested as France’s Ban on Burqas, Niqabs Takes Effect,” and “France’s Burqa Ban Adds To Anti-Muslim Climate” in well-known Western media outlets. French laïcité appeared to interpret Muslim women’s dress as a threat to the others of the republic.

In recent years, scholars have analyzed at length such bans and other quasi-legal actions against Muslim modesty dress in France. John R. Bowen’s notable 2008 book, *Why the French Don’t Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space*, explores how laïcité has developed and affected French politics surrounding the headscarf. By tracing the concept’s evolution through history, he can explain how laïcité has affected French politics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Bronwyn Winter’s *Hijab & The Republic: Uncovering the French Headscarf Debate* (2008) begins in a similar way, with the history of laïcité turning into an in-depth analysis of France in the 1980s to the 2000s; however, the last section of Winter’s book, “Feminists Caught in the Contradictions,” offers a different side to the argument. This section highlights the arguments of different feminist organizations in France and analyzes the politics surrounding these debates and discussions. A similar thematic can be seen in Joan Wallach Scott’s books *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (1996) and *Parité!: Sexual

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17 See Bowen, *French Don’t Like Headscarves*.
18 See Winter, *Hijab & The Republic*.
Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism (2005), which discuss feminism in France in a broader sense.¹⁹

Scott’s other crucial work for this topic is The Politics of the Veil (2007), which places the headscarf debate within a larger frame of racism in France.²⁰ Thomas Deltombe, in L’Islam imaginaire: La construction médiatique de l’Islamophobie en France, 1975-2005 (2005), traces the development of Islamophobia in France through the lens of the media.²¹ Beyond headscarves, Deltombe focuses on different events in the Arab world and analyzes the media attention they gained in France, correlating them with the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment throughout France. Seeking also to explain French anti-Muslim attitudes, Benjamin Stora bases the growth of “anti-Arab” racism on the history of colonization of Algeria by France in Le Transfert d’une mémoire: De l’« Algérie française » au racisme anti-arabe of 2000.²²

While all these sources are informative about the basic facts surrounding the headscarf debates in France, they do not delve deeply into the development of secularism in modern French history or the issues surrounding the veil’s politicization in the late 20th century. These topics are analyzed in Chapter One.

Chapters Two and Three provide new insight into the veil controversy by illustrating how discrimination against Arabs and Muslims has shaped the evolution of

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²⁰ See Scott, Politics of the Veil.
the concept of laïcité, a concept that has claimed itself to be religiously neutral. From 19th century colonialism to developments as recent as 2011, growing racism can be observed through various aspects of French politics and media that have shaped both popular attitudes and the realities of law enforcement. Chapter Two focuses on the colonial time period and traces the emergence of anti-Arab sentiment in mainland France both among civilians and among public and political officials. Chapter Three delves more deeply into the atmosphere in France after the Algerian War (1954-1962). North African immigration to France and an increasing global Islamic presence at the end of the 20th century incited a fear of a Muslim takeover among French civilians. This fear led to the passage of laws geared toward regulating post-colonial Muslims and their activities in French cities.

Current scholarship about Muslim women and girls in France has, for the most part, omitted a critical element: the individual voices and stories of these women, so often spoken about and seldom heard. The well-informed studies of the French headscarf controversy by Bowen, Winter, and Scott each include a few citations from interviews and other personal stories, but few other scholars focus on the personal experiences and stories of these women in their books. A notable exception is Trica Danielle Keaton’s Muslim Girls and the Other France: Race, Identity Politics, & Social Exclusion (2006), which dedicates a large portion of its 200+ pages to Muslim women’s and girls’ powerful personal stories of bias, prejudice, and illegal treatment. I discovered firsthand the

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disheartening discrimination that veiled Muslim women in France face daily. Between December 15, 2012 and January 7, 2013, I conducted interviews in and around Paris with Muslim women and other individuals with relevant knowledge and experience. Persons interviewed included scholars Jean Baubérot and Benjamin Stora; a focus group with four Muslim women wearing chadors; seven individual veiled Muslim women; four Muslim men; and one non-veiled Muslim woman.

I prepared questions that allowed the interviewees to answer freely and comfortably about their experiences, personal beliefs, and knowledge about the topic at hand. All of the interviews were conducted in French and will be translated for use in this paper. Unless otherwise stated, the translations are my own. Because I claim their voices have been largely hidden in media—and even scholarship—I dedicate my fourth chapter to their stories, which humanize this hotly debated issue and allow the free expression of the seemingly faceless and voiceless minorities involved in the French headscarf controversy.
CHAPTER ONE

Laïcité: Evolution and Transformations

Secularism is a concept that defines itself in opposition to religion, particularly through the separation of church and state. Nonetheless, as recent scholars of secularism have so palpably demonstrated, secularism depends on religion for its very definition. Without religion, secularism has no meaning. The truth of this scholarly insight is exemplified in the case of the French laïcité. The evolution of laïcité in the French republic has indeed depended on the diminishing presence of religion in public life. But it has also advanced by characterizing itself in contradistinction to the Islamic faith, to the role of religion in Islamic societies, and to Islamic practices. The headscarf, one might argue, as the most visible symbol of Islamic faith, has come to stand in for the Islamic religion as the antithesis of French secularism.

Philosopher Charles Taylor describes secularism as thinking within “the immanent frame,” as he calls it, where one “make[s] sense of lots of things entirely or mainly in terms of this-worldly cause and effect,” according to sociologist Craig Calhoun. This basic opposition of this-worldliness versus other-worldliness is at the heart of secularism. Other oppositions are implied in the label secular: “enlightened” versus “backward,” for instance, or “developed” versus “developing.” Calhoun notes the metaphors of human growth implicit in such usages:

The secular is claimed by many not just as one way of organizing life …
but as a kind of maturation. It is held to be a kind of developmental
achievement. Some people feel they are ‘better’ because they have
overcome illusion and reached the point of secularism.26

With these connections, secularism is strongly associated with modernity, understood as post-traditional and rational. Some nation-states, such as Atatürk’s Turkey, have adopted secularism as an “essential sign of modernity.”27

While essential to modernity, the concept of secularism takes various shapes in different national contexts. The secularism enshrined in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution stems from a history of religious persecution that drove European immigrants to America; it results in a prohibition of established state religion (the familiar “separation of church and state”) and a protection of individual religious differences. In India, another version of secularism prevails, where the state “subsidizes religion but seeks to do so without bias for or against any.”28 The French version of secularism, laïcité, prohibits expressions of religion in the public sphere (in contrast to the American ideal, which enshrines the right to freedom of religious expression). The discussion below will tease out the genesis and development of this critical concept.

**The Formation of the French Laïcité**

Defining the term “laïcité” has daunted intellectuals. Roughly, “laïcité” means “secularism,” but not as the English-speaking West would understand it. Bowen points

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26 Calhoun, “Rethinking Secularism,” 47.
27 Ibid., 37.
28 Ibid., 42.
out: “[o]ne view, a recent one, is that it designates not a specific set of rules regarding religious expression but rather a protected, privileged, multifunctional social space within which Republican principles could survive and prosper.” In order to understand laïcité and its evolution over time, we must look to France’s religious history.

Since 496, when the Frankish king Clovis embraced the faith, France has been a Roman Catholic country. France is still considered the “eldest daughter of the Catholic Church.” In the years following Clovis’ reign, the French throne went through periods of positive and negative relations with the Pope. Part of the French thinking behind the concept of laïcité may be traced back to the year 1516, when a Concordat (agreement) separated the King’s and the Pope’s powers, which meant keeping the French monarchy and its politics somewhat detached from Catholic influence. Religion was a tense topic in sixteenth-century European society, but it could somehow never be fully rejected in politics. In fact, the Concordat of Bologna of August 18, 1516 resulted in spiritual leaders being more politically influenced:

Under the new order of things both those who attained and those who aspired to the high places of the Church became, almost inevitably, courtiers; their spiritual character was in perpetual danger of being merged in that of temporal grandees and political functionaries.

This Concordat, meant to lead to some sort of separation, actually created more influence by each one on the other and governmentalized the practice of Catholicism before the

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29 Bowen, French Don’t Like Headscarves, 29.
30 Winter, Hijab & The Republic, 61.
Protestant Reformation began. Protestants then went through multiple phases of persecution from the 16th century through to the French Revolution in 1789. These phases expose the growing stigma at the time surrounding the practice of a religion other than the dominant one in France.

Catholicism persisted in French society and international affairs. In his book, *Religion and Society in Modern Europe*, French historian René Rémond argues that during the ancien régime: “Religion governed the whole of life, both individual and collective.” Rémond continues, “It presided over all social activities, nothing escaped its vigilance and control, and the state ensured that its rules of worship as well as its moral directions were respected.” Rémond asserts that religion controlled the populace through the apparatus of the state. However, even though the French monarchy continued to retain its strong associations with Catholicism up until the French Revolution, it also began exhibiting signs of what Rémond calls “toleration” in the eighteenth century and was eventually “ready to make the leap from simple toleration to full and complete recognition of religious freedom,” culminating in the French Revolution and its aftermath. Even before the French Revolution, however, the ideas from the Enlightenment period began seeping into French society and politics and they form the basis for the French republican mantra, “liberté, égalité, fraternité” that appeared after the revolution.

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At the beginning of the French Revolution, France’s rebels changed the state’s role in religion. A distinctive and progressive document, The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen), was written in 1789. Article X of this Declaration is often cited as one of the most important statements in the history of laïcité. It states: “No one may be harassed because of his opinions, even religious ones, provided that their representation does not disturb the public order established by the Law.” The specific reference to religious opinions when discussing intolerance of harassment was relatively new to Europe at the time and in fact paved the way for future documents of the same type.

While the word laïcité did not appear in the French language until almost a century later, the principal ideas about religious freedom in France came from the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which was a pioneering document in the international arena and the field of human rights as well. It provides the foundation for the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the French Constitutions of the Fourth and Fifth Republics in 1946 and 1958. In 1789, the Declaration formed the basis for other values and rights that men fought to gain during the battles of the French Revolution.

The “un-churching struggles” throughout the 1790s led to a new type of secularism, one that is more active and prone to violence. Nonetheless, the revolutionized secularism promoted a more “modern” version of religious equality: “By September 1791, Protestants and Jews enjoyed full civil rights, disassociating

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36 “Nul ne doit être inquiété pour ses opinions, même religieuses, pourvu que leur manifestation ne trouble pas l’ordre public établi par la Loi.” Assemblée nationale, Déclaration des Droits de l’homme et du citoyen, 1789, Article X.
37 Calhoun, “Rethinking Secularism,” 42.
‘citizenship’ from Catholicism for the first time and hence creating a secular national identity.” 38 Immediately after, the tide turned and religious equality transformed into something very different: during the Reign of Terror, Robespierre’s oppressive and antireligious regime was aimed at eradicating Christianity in France. 39 The state responded in 1795 to his persecution of religion harshly by rejecting the entire concept of religion and denying the public practice of it: “No public manifestation of cult was tolerated. Religion was to be confined to the private domain.” 40 By rejecting religion almost entirely, France had made a complete turnaround from the confessional state it once was and had taken the first steps in becoming a laïque 42 republic.

However, in 1801 Napoleon Bonaparte’s regime passed a new Concordat, which accomplished five goals:

1. It declared Catholicism the religion of the majority of the French people.
2. It confirmed the revolutionary confiscation of church property.
3. It allowed the Pope to dismiss the current contingent of prorevolutionary bishops.
4. It gave Napoleon the right to nominate new bishops.
5. It made the clergy salaried employees of the state. 43

39 See Bowen, French Don’t Like Headscarves, 22-23.
40 Kennedy, “Tangled History,” 35.
41 A confessional state is one that practices an official religion.
42 Laïque (feminine) or laïc (masculine) is the adjective form of laïcité, so it roughly translates as “secular.”
43 Rafe Blaufarb, Napoleon: Symbol for an Age. A Brief History with Documents (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 10.
Any religion in France had to be authorized by the state, and once authorized, they still did not have “the right to rule over family life,” or, essentially, private life. Napoleon’s *Concordat* was in contrast to the complete denial and attempted elimination of religion by the previous regime; instead, it created a governmental rule over religion in the public sphere, which caused new tension: “The first effect of this treaty was a more complete suppression of the liberty of worship than had taken place in the darkest period of the Reign of Terror.”

The *Concordat* henceforth created a space in which it was seemingly “safe” to practice religion, but in fact this space was strictly regulated. Napoleon’s *Concordat* recognized Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism at first, and added Judaism six years later. But the Napoleon-formed religious space did not solve the problem of religious tension that was cited as reasoning for the adoption of the *Concordat*. In a speech given on April 6, 1802, Tribune Joseph-Jérôme, Comte Siméon stated that the Constituent Assembly “recognized that, as one of the most ancient and powerful means of governance, religion had to be placed more firmly than before in the hands of the government.” He deems this a successful maneuver, if they had “coordinate[d] with the head of the Church,” which was essentially what the Napoleon government was then doing with the *Concordat*. Thus, it was seen as something that would effectively help

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44 Bowen, *French Don’t Like Headscarves*, 23.
46 See Bowen, *French Don’t Like Headscarves*, 23.
47 The Constituent Assembly was a governmental body in power between 1789 and 1791.
48 Blaufarb, *Napoleon*, 64.
49 Ibid.
keep religion and politics peacefully intertwined, but with the political side ultimately having the most power.

Between 1882 and 1886, then-Minister of Education Jules Ferry came up with laws that secularized public schools, claiming that schools were a space of republican neutrality and should be forming a specific identity for the children that supported assimilationist views and the republican political ideal. After this, the Third Republic, the governmental body from 1870 to 1940, established the 1905 Law on the Separation of Church and State. This law states in Article 2, “The Republic does not recognize, remunerate or subsidize any faith.” What is interesting with this law is that it uses the French word “culte,” which I translate to mean “faith,” but not in the general sense. Culte is better understood to mean the outward expression of religion, or organized religion. This word was used in order to maintain some sort of freedom of religion in theory while still suppressing religious expression in the public sphere. However, the State Council in France does actually recognize certain religions, but only in accordance with this law, meaning that recognized religious groups are permitted to practice in ways that do not “threaten the public order.”

The issue of state secularity persisted through the years. After the 1905 law, powerful politicians continued to fight for secularism by forming new plans for separation of church and state: “These include ministerial circulars, which are guidelines

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51 “La loi de 1905 sur la séparation des Églises et de l’État”
53 See Bowen, French Don’t Like Headscarves, 17.
54 Ibid., 18.
providing interpretations of law but do not carry the force of law, such as those of 1936 on the wearing of religious insignia, 1937 on the outlawing of religious proselytism in schools, and 1944 on neutrality of schools.” The 1937 circular mentioned refers to an event when “the education minister of the day instructed head teachers to keep all religious signs out of their establishments.” The fact that this was not necessarily contentious at the time demonstrates the secularist attitude already existing in France.

In 1946, the Constitution of the Fourth Republic was adopted. Its Preamble stated, “The organization of free and laïque public education at all levels is a duty of the State.” France was constituted a laïque republic at this point, as well as indivisible, democratic, and social. This was upheld in the Constitution of October 4, 1958, of the Fifth Republic, which is the current government. Article 1 of this Constitution makes the same statement as the previous Constitution and adds, “France assures equality before the law for all of its citizens, without distinction of origin, race, or religion. It respects all beliefs. Its organization is decentralized.” By stating that France “respects all beliefs,” the French government further emphasizes its desire to separate religion from public life while still maintaining the illusion of general religious freedom in the private sphere.

58 *Constitution de 1946, IVᵉ République*, Title I, Article 1.
This Constitution of 1958 is still in effect. But part of the problem with this Constitution and laws like it is that the term *laïcité* is never fully defined in them. *Laïcité* is essentially a paradox that can be twisted and skewed to support whichever group is in power at any instance. Bowen cites Walter Bryce Gallie’s ideas in stating that, “*Laïcité* remains one of those ‘essentially contested concepts’ that is politically useful precisely because it has no agreed-on definition.” However, taking all of its many implications into account, *laïcité*, as it is employed in modern politics, should be best understood to mean: The complete separation of governmental organizations, projects, and institutions from any and all public displays of religion, being that these displays are seen to somehow unsettle public disposition, in working toward the goal of a neutral society in which religion is unapparent except in the private and personal spheres of life. In contrast to the American ideal of secularism meaning the tolerance of all religions, the French ideal of *laïcité* means the tolerance and acceptance of no religion in the public sphere, the definition of which is still subject to change based on political convenience, foreign relations, and other world events at any given time.

**Conclusion**

During the Enlightenment, philosophers promulgated the importance of man’s ability to reason about the world on a tangible level instead of a transcendent one. By sidelining the “sacred” and elevating the “profane,” these thinkers paved the way for the

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religious rejection of the French Revolution. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, a product of the Revolution, provided the basis for laïcité, a value so ingrained in French republican thought that it has been able not only to withstand societal changes but to be modified in ways to fit current political and legal usage. From Napoleon’s France to the Vichy Regime to the Fifth Republic, religion has been kept out of the French public sphere, but in different ways depending on global religious trends and movements. As a part of their current Constitution, politicians today easily manipulate laïcité to disadvantage specific populations since it has never been concretely defined. Laïcité is most often referenced in relation to education and other aspects of society meant to remain purely republican and used in defense of specific laws and actions in that domain. An anti-clerical past and a strong desire for neutrality have prevented religious pluralism from developing in France, at least on an institutional level. Moreover, the ideal of laïcité combines with an imperialist and colonialist past, racialization of Arabs and Muslims, and global events that incite fear in French society to create intense Islamophobic attitudes and discriminatory laws, which are discussed in Chapter 2.
CHAPTER TWO

Colonization and the Algeria Legacy

Just as general European secularist theory and laïcité were evolving alongside each other and following some religious trends, France’s own unique history was unfolding, beginning with colonialism that established norms that have persisted and continue to affect societal attitudes today. The concept of contemporary laïcité has been shaped by the perceived problem of Muslim Arab populations within the French Republic. In reference to the Muslim woman’s headscarf, it took on new meaning. Because of French political history and discrimination against Muslims in France, the headscarf (as a symbol of Islam more generally) has come to be seen as something threatening to French life and founding values. The manipulation of laïcité in legal practice as well as colonialist influences and racial conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa have caused the veil to become one of the most useful and damaging political tools in French society.

France’s colonization of North Africa in the 1800s, initiated by the French king Charles X in 1830, left a trail of stereotypes and instances of racism behind, which still persist in France today. Racism against Arabs is a centuries-old problem. The modern usage of laïcité is rooted in deeply-set impressions of negative and detrimental cultural differences between Arab peoples and French citizens that have been continuously building upon the unfavorable opinions French colonizers held about Algerians and their

resulting societal attitudes. The controversy surrounding the veil involves sentiments that have transcended time and generational gaps, inevitably equating the perception of “dangerous” Islam with peaceful Muslim practices.

**A “Civilizing Mission” in the World of an “Other”**

Beginning in 1830, the French declared a “civilizing mission” in Algeria aimed at conquering the native Algerians and their land for French exploitation. French *colons* (colonizers) claimed Algerian land and destroyed numerous villages in their pursuit of power. Because of their cultural differences and Muslim lifestyles, Arabs were seen as savages, uncivilized, even “obscene.” The French settlers considered themselves “intellectually superior, morally superior, [and] economically superior” to the Arabs, as stated by a *colon* in 1903. This view only perpetuated the same perception of themselves and the “Others” by the mainland French citizens. The French *colons* held a condescending view of Arabs, to say the least, especially because of the mainstream impression of the “exotic” East, which gave those still in France a misconstrued notion of what Arabs were really like. The portrayal of Arabs as the Western world’s inherent “Other” not only separated them, but also created a negative view of their cultural practices. This furthered the idea that they needed to be dominated and changed (or “civilized”) by the French. Palestinian-American theorist Edward Said argues in *Orientalism* that this view of the “differences between cultures” invites “the West to

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64 Ibid., 52.
65 Ibid., 48.
66 Ibid., 50.
control, contain, and otherwise govern (through superior knowledge and accommodating power) the Other,” sometimes by force and military means.67

After the French conquered Algiers in 1830, they continued increasing their reach in Algeria until they had eventually taken over the entire country by 1856, when the final city, Kabylia, fell. The French then established a system of colonial military governance in many regions. Under this form of government, Arab Muslims, Christians, and Jews were granted the status of “political subjects,” meaning that they had most of the same civic rights as French citizens, but did not actually have full citizenship or the right to vote. In order to gain these other rights, they were required to adhere to the French civil code by giving up their ties to their religion, or their “personal status.”68 As anthropologist Paul A. Silverstein states, “In this respect, what had begun as a regime change had become a cardinal example of imperial rule.”69

On October 24, 1870, the Crémieux Decree was passed in Algeria, which granted French citizenship to the Algerian Jews but not to the Muslims. This decree caused violent uprisings in Algeria,70 but the French continued their efforts with another decree on December 28, 1870 that “denied suffrage for the Arabs and Berbers on the basis that it violated the principle of public law by granting the right of suffrage and candidature upon persons who were not French.”71 Arabs, considered “un-French,” were nonetheless still subject to French law despite their lack of citizenship and in fact had to essentially

68 “statut personnel”
69 Silverstein, Algeria in France, 43.
abandon their own religion and culture in order to gain even the most basic form of acceptance, unlike the Jews. In 1871, the French created an “Arab tax”\(^{72}\) meant only for Muslim subjects and in the 1880s, French Prime Minister Jules Ferry “drafted a series of laws that put all local Algerian public services under the direct control of the respective French ministries.”\(^{73}\)

In 1914, the French began recruiting Algerian men to come to France as “cheap labor,” which is in and of itself an act that perpetuates the idea of one population being subordinate to another. The Algerian men in cities like Paris were kept separate from the rest of the French and maintained their own culture in expectation of eventually returning to Algeria.\(^{74}\) By the 1920s, hostility toward these Arab workers was not uncommon for the French. The French created a tense relationship with the North Africans as the demand for “cheap labor” rose and Algerians continued to fill those posts. In cities, Arabs began to be viewed as criminals, uncivilized sexual beings, and “dirty” or “ragged,” as stated by the neighbor of one of the victims of an attack on Arabs.\(^{75}\) The stereotypical Arab man had a “perverse nature” and people imagined that “it was best to keep one’s distance and to contain him,” as asserted by historian Joan Wallach Scott in *Politics of the Veil.*\(^{76}\)

Throughout the “civilizing mission” in Algeria, the French found themselves more deeply involved not only in the governmental workings of Algerian colonial society, but also the religious and traditional activities. Since the Algerians were seen as

\(^{72}\) “*impôt arabe*”

\(^{73}\) Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 44.

\(^{74}\) See Bowen, *French Don’t Like Headscarves*, 66-67.


“Others” and therefore “uncivilized” from the beginning, their majority religion became a symbol of their “Otherness.” Because of its differences with Christianity and that which France had known in the past, the French feared Islam. The religion itself became a symbol of the differences between the two societies and, for the French, a symbol of the problems in Algerian culture. Islam was seen as an obstacle to their eventual goals for the region. It therefore became something the French were determined to overcome by eliminating it: “the civilizing mission went hand in hand with an ‘educating mission’ and a ‘Christianizing mission.’” Shari’a law, inherently connected to Islam, was also seen as a problem for the French, who had come from a history of attempts to separate law and government from religion. This posed problems for Muslim Algerians when fighting for French citizenship. If they did not denounce their faith, they remained “subjects” instead of full citizens, unlike Jewish Algerians. As Silverstein states,

What was at issue, then, was not the individual’s right of accession to French citizenship, but rather the feared legitimation of a religious doctrine that through its fanaticism and fatalism would respectively undermine French state security and Christian morality.

By asserting that Muslims were far too different than other French citizens, including Jews, the French colonos and government were able to exclude them from gaining some basic rights because of their lack of citizenship.

Throughout later colonialist times, racism against Arabs was apparent. Through media and propaganda, the French government and the social security (Sécurité sociale)

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77 Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 51.
78 Ibid.
attempted to prevent Arab and North African immigration to France. Their pamphlet from 1950 in Figure 2 is a strong example.

Figure 2. “Published document targeting Algerians departing for the metropole meant to dissuade them from leaving Algeria.”

The French message in the image reads: “Unemployed… Homeless… Beware,” and repeats the same axiom in Arabic at the bottom. On the right-hand side of the picture, there is a sign that reads, “Nothing to rent” on a housing structure and on the left, underneath the sign for a metalworking factory, there is an announcement stating that the factory “only hires qualified workers.” The messages in these signs are the same forms of discrimination that Algerians would come across in mainland France if they were to immigrate and attempt to find work. On the bottom right of the image, there is a subtle depiction of the French impression of native Algerians: watching the man of the house cross the water to France, a woman in a burqa and two children stand outside their hut in the desert. The stigma surrounding the veil is already evident here since the woman is actually in a sort of makeshift burqa since her face is completely covered but the arm around the child’s shoulders is bare. A naked arm but hidden face is not the point of a traditional burqa, since it should actually cover the entire body and face in order to protect the woman’s modesty.

Lastly, the “Algerian” man in the photo: he simply steps across the water—a critique of the ease with which Algerians could enter France—and sheds his traditional white-colored “Arab” robe for a business suit in an attempt to blend in, but keeps his red fez hat on—showing that no matter what the Algerians do to try to integrate into French culture, they will always stand out to the French people and therefore cannot be a part of their way of life.

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80 “Sans travail... sans logement... méfiez-vous”
81 “Rien à louer”
82 “Site Métallurgie”
83 “On n’embauche que des ouvriers qualifiés.”
In another example, also from the 1950s, Figure 3 demonstrates the work of the French Sécurité sociale to end immigration to France of unskilled Algerian men looking to find work.

Figure 3. “Published document targeting Algerians departing for the metropole.”

The French message in the image reads: “No employment secured… STOP!” and repeats the same message in Arabic at the bottom. This flyer is meant to discourage Algerians from attempting to migrate to cities in France to look for work, much like the previous. By instructing those Algerians who have not secured some sort of employment opportunity before leaving Algeria to halt in this pamphlet, the French Sécurité sociale attempts to ensure that unskilled workers from Algeria do not end up in French cities, where only unemployment, poverty, and substandard housing await them. It is interesting here that a dark-skinned hand has been chosen as the symbol blocking the Algerian man in the image from crossing the water. The French propagandists attempt here to create the illusion that it is not just Caucasian French people who are discriminating against them. With a hand closer to their own skin tone, the impression is that one North African is advising another not to make the same mistake, and not that colonizers are themselves discouraging Algerians from immigrating. This makes the image seem less overtly threatening and more falsely helpful.

During this time, France was still short on labor, so the “cheap labor” movement from the early 20th century returned. After the conclusion of World War II, France drew upon its colonies to stimulate its economy. Devastated by the war, France’s economy then required an increased workforce in order to keep up with the industrialization of Western Europe.\textsuperscript{86} Immigration policy was less stringent at the time, as compared to later years, particularly the 1970s. As Randall Hansen argues in his “Migration to Europe Since 1945: Its History and Its Lessons,” France was not purposely depending on

\textsuperscript{85} “Sans travail assuré… HALTE!”

immigrants from colonies to fulfill its labor needs, but rather had few other options: “an inability to secure workers… from Europe meant that policy-makers had little choice but to rely on (or, which was more of the case, to tolerate) colonial migrants.”87 France’s misplaced need for workers but lack of appreciation for Algerian immigrants led to the spreading of more images and messages aimed at ending the perpetual immigration of unskilled Algerian workers to France. This meant that while the French were in need of a labor force, they were still unable to accept those whom they deemed incapable of solidly contributing to the country’s rapid industrialization process.

Racist propaganda against Algerians penetrated numerous aspects of French society. In the following example (Figure 4), an elementary school textbook from 1954 depicts the “Conquest of Algeria”88 in a condescending manner.

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88 “La conquête de l’Algérie.”
Figure 4. “The conquest of Algeria in a textbook from 1954.”

This textbook superficially traces the Algerian conquest by France from 1830 to the textbook’s publication year. This cursory account of France’s violent takeover of Algeria belittles the Algerian people and the horrors they went through during French rule. In the final statement of the main narrative paragraph, the textbook states, “Today, Algeria is the most beautiful and most prosperous of the French possessions.” By referring to a nation of millions of people as a “possession,” the textbook authors create a superior stance of the French over the Algerians and impress this viewpoint upon the adolescent readers of their textbook. In the summarizing section at the bottom of the second page, the sentence reads, “France took twenty years to conquer Algeria, which became a second France.” Here, the authors reconstruct the colonial notion of Algeria as the “Other” culture, originally in contrast to French culture, but still assimilable and which, in fact, must be assimilated and therefore “civilized,” like the French.

From the 19th century to the mid-20th century, French colonization of Algeria created a stifling and oppressive atmosphere for Algerian Muslims. Through various discriminatory acts and continuous attempts to keep Algerians out of French cities, the Sécurité sociale kept Algerians in France separate from other French civilians, thus exacerbating the negative attitudes already held about Muslims in French society.

The Algerian War

The negative attitudes that began with the colonization of 1830 persisted in the 1950s and 1960s during the Algerian War of independence (1954-1962). In 1958,

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90 “Aujourd’hui, l’Algérie est la plus belle et la plus prospère des possessions françaises.”
91 “La France mit vingt ans à conquérir l’Algérie, qui est devenue une seconde France.”
France’s colonialist history returned to influence the Constitution of the Fifth Republic since it was written in the midst of the war. Furthermore, Morocco and Tunisia had just gained their independence in 1956 and that threat of independence was becoming a harsh reality for the French in relation to Algeria.\(^{92}\) The Suez Crisis ("L’Affaire de Suez") also had its place in French politics in 1956 when British, French, and Israeli militaries invaded Egypt in response to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser’s move to nationalize the Suez Canal. In a news report on August 16, 1956 on *Les Actualités Françaises*, the French reporter stated, “Freedom of transport in the Suez Canal is, for us, a matter of life and death”\(^{93}\) as tensions continued to rise in the region.\(^{94}\) French televised news shows like *20 Heures* on the station *France 2* began to show still images and film footage of troops invading Egypt’s Sinai region.\(^{95}\) But Egypt was simply a supplement to the main French conflict in the region: Algeria.

Violence in Algeria was not kept separate from the French public sphere, and neither was the so-called “threat” of Islam. But they always seemed to go together in the media in an interesting way. In a broadcast on *Les Actualités Françaises* from June 12,

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\(^{93}\) “La liberté de transit dans le canal de Suez est pour nous une question de vie ou de mort.”


1957, the announcer discussed the “massacre” in Melouza, in which more than 300 people were killed, while the screen showed the camera panning over piles upon piles of mutilated bodies. Juxtaposed with this extreme act in the name of Islam, France attempted to show the “positive” Islamic side as well: the reporter mentioned that over 200 Muslim shopkeepers from the Paris region enlisted in the French army as a result of this massacre.96 The French depicted Islam abroad as a threat and thereby justified their part in the war. They even attempted to show domestic Muslims that they could still have a place in France. The French did this by depicting Muslims’ “good” actions, offering “respect” for all beliefs in the Constitution in the form of laïcité, but continued to maintain their isolation from the rest of French society in practice. The newscast from Les Actualités Françaises demonstrates the French tendency to attempt to present a balanced and journalistic coverage of events in Algeria. Journalism held the façade of a pure media source that was untainted by what are now obvious anti-Arab biases.

The views expressed before and during the Algerian War continued to saturate French political society in the mid-20th century. In 1959, Charles de Gaulle, founder of the Fifth Republic and president from 1959 to 1969, declared that Arabs/Muslims would not be accepted in French society because of their “obvious” and “integral” differences that the French media and political sphere had helped fabricate:

We are, above all, a European people of the white race, of Greek and Latin culture and the Christian religion… the Muslims, have you seen them… with their turbans and djellabas? You can see clearly that they’re not French!... Try to mix

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oil and vinegar. Shake the bottle. After a minute, they separate again. Arabs are Arabs, French are French. Do you think that French society can absorb 10 million Muslims, who tomorrow will be 20 million and the day after that 40 million? If we integrate, if all the Arabs and Berbers of Algeria were to be considered French, how would we stop them from coming to the metropole, where the standard of living is so much higher? My village would no longer be called Colombey-les-Deux-Églises, but Colombey-les-Deux-Mosquées.\textsuperscript{97} 

Despite France’s supposed separation of church and state, de Gaulle cites the whiteness and Christianity of the perceived generic French citizen as the main reasons why Arabs are too different to integrate into French culture. He juxtaposes the “French” national identity with the ethnic “Arab” and religious “Muslim” ones. In doing so, he ends up combining a huge and diverse group of people together into one faction in opposition to French values. De Gaulle’s assumption that all Arabs are Muslim recalls the French legal citizenship system during colonization in the nineteenth century, when Arab Jews were granted citizenship but Muslim Arabs were still considered completely un-French. The statement about Christianity is hypocritical since the French had by this point considered themselves fully laïques. But if that had in fact been the case, de Gaulle would not have

\textsuperscript{97} “Nous sommes quand même avant tout un peuple européen de race blanche, de culture grecque et latine et de religion chrétienne... Les musulmans, vous êtes allés les voir... avec leurs turbans ou leurs djellabas? Vous voyez bien que ce ne sont pas des Français!... Essayez d’intégrer de l’huile et du vinaigre. Agitez la bouteille. Au bout d’un moment, ils se séparent de nouveau. Les Arabes sont des Arabes, les Français sont des Français. Vous croyez que le corps français peut absorber dix millions de musulmans, qui demain seront vingt millions et après-demain quarante? Si nous faisions l’intégration, si tous les Arabes et Berbères d’Algérie étaient considérés comme Français, comment les empêcherait-on de venir s’installer en métropole, alors que le niveau de vie y est tellement plus élevé? Mon village ne s’appellerait plus Colombey-les-Deux-Églises, mais Colombey-les-Deux-Mosquées!” Cited in Deltombe, L’Islam imaginaire, 232. (Originally cited in an article from Le Point on October 15, 1994.)
included a statement about the French people being Christian, especially in a political address. Instead, they would have been united more by their common French citizenship and shared republican values than by their religion.

Therefore, this statement is telling of the nature of laïcité during this time: it was no longer simply about citizenship politics; it was also about keeping Islam out of French society and reinforcing Christianity and Christian values in the private sphere. De Gaulle’s fears are epitomized in his final statement. It is absurd to think that the name of his village, ingrained in history and geography, would change simply because of some new inhabitants. “The Two Churches” (“les Deux Églises”) would not so easily become “the Two Mosques” (“les Deux Mosquées”), especially not under France’s laïque ideals. But de Gaulle uses this as a rhetorical strategy to justify an anti-Muslim agenda. Through this exaggerated projection, de Gaulle tried to show that Islam was invading French life and taking over their most basic spaces and public institutions. Racist views were reinforced by statements like de Gaulle’s. Such statements, made by powerful political figures, constitute some of the main points behind the so-called ‘immigrant problem.’ This skewed vision of what accepting Arabs into society would do culminated later on in the treatment of the veil in politics.

Algerian immigration to France continued throughout the war. Algerian immigrants settled in bidonvilles, or shantytowns, on the outskirts of the cities, in what are now the banlieues, or suburbs. Migrant workers lived their lives isolated from most of the rest of French society. North Africans remained sequestered together in groups and therefore did little to integrate with the French, which can be seen in photographs, artwork, and writings from the time. Many media of this type were on display in Paris at
an exposition in Paris at the Cité national de l’histoire de l’immigration from October 9, 2012 to May 19, 2013. The exposition, entitled, “Lives of Exile – 1954-1962. Algerians in France during the Algerian War,” demonstrates “a focus on the many facets of the daily lives of Algerians in France during the Algerian War,” as stated on the Cité’s website, and was commissioned by Algerian historian Benjamin Stora (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Flyer for “Vies d’exil” exposition at the Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration in Paris.

99 “Cette exposition propose un focus sur les multiples facettes de la vie quotidienne des Algériens en France pendant la Guerre d’Algérie.”
A plaque in one section of the exhibit, called “Community Life,” (“La vie en communauté”) emphasized that the Algerian immigrant workers in France lived “solitary” (“solitaire”) lives: “Grouped together, families endured el-ghorba, exile, because of familiar markers: neighbors originating from the same region, businesses selling Algerian products…”101 All of these symbols and reminders of Algerian culture perpetuated the growing gap between the two cultural populations during the war.

In a surrealist painting (shown in Figure 6) from 1955 depicting the life of Algerians in the bidonvilles and criticizing the Algerian war crimes, two apparent immigrants are shown huddling under the cold tin roof of their exaggerated miniscule hut, with the shining lights of Paris behind them, from which they are excluded. Paintings like this were significant forms of protest at the time and expose the realities and challenges that immigrants faced daily.

101 “Regroupées entre elles, ces familles supportent el-ghorba, l’exil, grâce à des repères familiers: voisins originaires de la même région, commerces vendant des produits d’Algérie...”
Violence and hatred directed at Algerians and other North Africans continued throughout the war, both in Algeria and in mainland France. An appalling event in Paris in 1961, a result of previous developments beginning in 1958, saw hundreds of Arab civilians dead. This tragedy has seemingly been overlooked in most historical accounts of this time period, according to University of California professor Fatima El-Tayeb.\textsuperscript{102} El-Tayeb recounts the events leading up to the 1961 Massacre. Beginning in 1958, the

\textsuperscript{102} Fatima El-Tayeb, \textit{European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 36.
French police force responded to an FLN\textsuperscript{103} attack that left three Paris policemen dead by essentially interning thousands of Algerian and other North African people living in France (up to 11,000 in some estimates) in makeshift prisons that Vichy France had used during World War II.\textsuperscript{104} These camps, called “Residential Camps under Surveillance,”\textsuperscript{105} were authorized by the ordinance of October 7, 1958, which granted the Ministry of the Interior the power to intern people deemed “dangerous to public safety because of material aid, direct or indirect, that they bring to the rebels of Algerian divisions.”\textsuperscript{106}

Even before these camps were opened, the Paris police force gained the authority to further suppress the Algerian population with the law of July 26, 1957. Algerians were then subject to “identity checks, systematic classification, administrative internment, retention, expulsion, curfew, the goal being to limit Algerian mobility in the metropole and to enhance their surveillance.”\textsuperscript{107}

On October 17, 1961, a protest occurred in the streets of Paris with approximately 30,000 people, primarily Algerians. The police broke up the protest and began throwing bound or beaten Algerians into the Seine River and beating many others to death. Paris police chief Maurice Papon had ordered the raid on the protest. Papon was later found to have committed numerous war crimes during World War II and was responsible for the

\textsuperscript{103} The Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front) is a socialist political party in Algeria that was originally set up to revolt against French rule in Algeria in 1954.

\textsuperscript{104} El-Tayeb, 37.

\textsuperscript{105} “Camps d’assignation à résidence surveillée (CARS)”


deaths of hundreds of Algerians both in France and in Algeria but was nonetheless honored in France with the Médaille de la Résistance and granted membership in the Légion d’honneur. As El-Tayeb states in citing Susan Suleiman, Papon’s respectful and honored treatment displays the “reprehensible amnesia” that occupied French minds at the time about acts during World War II. A similar concept can be applied to the situation of Algerians, since the 1961 Massacre is reminiscent of the attacks on Algerian civilians by the French army on May 8, 1945, in Algeria.  

Conclusion

Discrimination against Arabs in general has been strengthened throughout history because of France’s colonialist past in North Africa, in which Arabs were generally seen as uncivilized and inferior people whom the French could exploit. During the colonial regimes in Algeria, Muslim colonial subjects were treated differently than Algerian Jews and Christians and determined to be inherently much too different from the French and in opposition to their way of life, so much so that they were oppressed in their own country by colons and governmental bodies. Hostility and tension then spread during the violent Algerian War from 1954 to 1962. The French government reacted to increased Algerian immigration before and during the war with harsh measures that worked to monitor and contain the “dangerous” North Africans, furthering their isolation and sense of abandonment.

108 See El-Tayeb, 36-38.
CHAPTER THREE

From Immigrant Problem to Muslim Problem: the New Challenges of Laïcité

Despite the large Algerian immigration to France during colonialist times, most of the anti-Arab stigma was focused on the differences between French and Arab culture. But in the last third of the 20th century and into the 21st, differences between native French and immigrants (or descendants of immigrants) were more often based on religion. Racism against Arabs and Muslims expanded during this time period, all eventually culminating in discriminatory laws and acts against Muslims in the French public political sphere.

Post-War Immigration

France’s “cheap labor” movement of 1914 that had devalued the labor of the racialized Arab population backfired in 1962 when Algeria gained its independence. Large numbers of Algerians immigrated to France both during and after the war, either to escape the war-torn country or to join other members of their families who were already in France as remnants of the old labor movement. In 1947 a statute was applied to Algeria that allowed citizens to move between Algeria and metropolitan France freely, a privilege that lingered for years after Algeria’s official independence, causing unforeseen effects: “From a mere 22,000 in 1946, their numbers grew to 805,000 in 1982, making Algerians the largest national group among the foreign populations in France.” This
exacerbated the perceived “immigrant problem” in France. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, “Maghrebi” immigrants more generally, meaning those from the West African nations of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia that together constituted the “Maghreb,” began steadily rising in number and by 1990 represented almost the same amount of France’s foreign population as Europeans, other than native French (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. “Main nationality groups as percentage of France’s foreign population, 1946-90.”

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110 Ibid., 11.
111 Ibid.
Instead of assimilating to French culture, many of these new immigrants stayed within the North African community and preserved their native identity. This tendency was amplified by the discrimination they were already experiencing. At this time, the numbers of North African immigrants settling permanently in France increased dramatically. France’s Judeo-Christian *laïque* citizenship excluded Muslims and formed their identity as less than French. They were then stuck in their Arab identity and frequently discriminated against when they attempted to gain acceptance from the French.

The topic of immigration became a matter of primary importance in the French political sphere in the later years of the 20th century. French sociologist Catherine Wihtol de Wenden analyzes what she calls the “political imaginary” of French immigration conceptions:

The 1980s brought a dual movement towards demarginalization and politicization. Immigration — particularly Algerian and Islamic — became an important political pawn, whilst immigrants themselves and their children began to emerge from the shadows and to sever political links with their country of origin.  

In estimates from the late 1980s and early 1990s, Muslims in France numbered approximately 3 million, with immigrants and descendants of immigrants from the Maghreb making up about four-fifths of this total.

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Following Algeria’s independence, the mass migration of Arabs to France gave rise to further racism—even hatred—and these tendencies linger in the present day French atmosphere. People’s reactions to Arab immigration caused laïcité to evolve even further, as politicians continued to distort the original intent of this concept to fit their personal interests and colonialism-influenced attitudes and to prolong the discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in France.

In previous waves of immigration to France of North Africans during colonialist times and during the Algerian war, the immigrants’ shared Muslim religion was rarely emphasized. After the war, as Islam became more apparent in world politics, it began to occupy a major part of the public discourse about immigration in France.

**Increased Presence of Islam**

Fear of Islam had reached a new high during the periods following the Algerian war, as a few key global events helped shape a common view of what Islam promoted. This view meant a failure to distinguish between different sects of Islam and different interpretations that vary in leniency. In Algeria, the rise of Islamism created a tense atmosphere even twenty to thirty years after the war ended. Islamism was and is a movement in the Muslim world aimed at using Islamic teachings, writings, and values as guidelines for politics. Put simply, Islamism is “political Islam.” The concept itself is not inherently violent or linked to terrorism. Rather, it contests the notion that politics must be kept apart from religion, or in the “secular sphere,” which is partly why laïque French citizens, politicians, and the media perceived it as dangerous and against their way of life. But it can also be interlaced with fundamentalist Islam, the interpretations of
which can lead to more violent and vehement acts in the name of religion or God. In early October 1988, angry rioting broke out on the streets of Algiers, shortly followed by protests in other urban areas. The government sent the army into the cities to control the riots, which only created more conflict as the army began shooting into crowds of civilians. These protests “had not come out of nowhere. The preceding two years had seen a steady rise in incidents reflecting popular discontent and unrest across Algeria,” for reasons such as the economic downturn and the high unemployment rate, which particularly affected the younger generation.

De Wenden discusses the emergence of the “Muslims of France” (“Musulmans de France”) identity and its effects on “the classic concept of citizenship.” The discussion at this time morphed from one of differences in culture and a colonialist attitude to one of religion, and “Islam became represented as the major obstacle to integration.”

Despite the fact that it was later asserted that the formal political Islamists had little to do with these initial outbursts, there was “considerable attention paid in the foreign media to the role that Algeria’s Islamists had played in the unrest,” which furthered the idea that Islam cannot be French because it is against Republican values. Indeed, in a news broadcast on Antenne 2 on October 12, 1988, entitled, “Political reactions on Algeria,” (“Réactions politiques sur l’Algérie”) the news anchor stated that

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115 Ibid., 108.
117 Ibid., 101.
118 Willis, *Islamist Challenge*, 110.
the riots were “a youth revolt against the world of democracy,” implying that Islam and democracy were inevitably contradictory. Articles in the French slightly left-leaning news magazine *L’Express* made use of harsh words such as “violent,” “wild,” and “dangerous” (“violent,” “sauvage,” and “dangereux”) to depict a fierce perception of the protests. One article called the riots of October 5 the “second Algerian revolution” (“deuxième révolution algérienne”) as well as a “bloody failure” (“faillite sanglante”) and others called it “black October” (“octobre noir”).

After these events of 1988, Islamism had become more visible in the international arena, whether portrayed accurately or otherwise. In 1989, tensions only escalated. In February 1989, Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling) against Salman Rushdie. The *fatwa* commanded Muslims to kill Rushdie for his novel, *The Satanic Verses*, which Khomeini claimed was blasphemous and offensive. Despite the fact that most Muslims would not be inclined to follow Khomeini’s directions since Islam at its core is a peaceful religion, this particular display of Islamic fundamentalism incited fear in Rushdie himself and he virtually went into hiding in Great Britain. During this time, “L’affaire Rushdie” occupied a large part of French media:

The Muslim presence in the Hexagon [France] became a subject of first importance that occupied the televised news for several weeks. During the

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119 “une révolte des jeunes contre le monde de démocratie”
Rushdie affair, ‘Islam in France’ was no longer simply a theme that occasionally interested some channels, it became an object of the news. From February to March 1989, reports about Rushdie and Iran appeared often in French news. Most of them highlighted the protests in London and Paris as well as the fear felt by Rushdie and the British public. In a segment dated February 16, 1989, two days after the fatwa was issued, French newscaster Hervé Claude reported that “The European Parliament is ‘horrified,’ France is ‘shocked,’ said Mr. [Roland] Dumas, [Minister of Foreign Affairs] … in Great Britain everyone is ‘scandalized’” by this event. French media used the international spread of the idea that Islam was at odds with democracy to legitimize their anti-Arab agendas by emphasizing that other parts of the “civilized world” were also appalled and outraged. They reinforced their own discriminatory views by stating similar reactions from leaders of other Western nations. Iranian current events were intensely presented in French media: “now international ‘political Islam’ appeared on magazine covers in the form of Iranian women in Islamic dress, adding a new dimension to debates about scarves in French schools.”

In addition, on September 16, 1989, two days before the infamous affaires des foulards that intertwined debates about laïcité and headscarves in schools, the Front

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124 “Le Parlement européen se dit ‘horrifié,’ la France est ‘choquée’ a dit M. Dumas… en Grande-Bretagne tout le monde est ‘scandalisé.’”
126 Bowen, French Don’t Like Headscarves, 83.
Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front) was legally recognized in Algeria. This organization gave rise to more fear of Islam in Western countries especially.\textsuperscript{127} After the announcement of its creation on February 18, 1989, this new political party gained Algerian support and worldwide media notoriety.\textsuperscript{128} By October 1989, it had become an intimidating and powerful entity. In an article in \textit{L’Express} from the 6\textsuperscript{th} of that month, the FIS was recognized as “a powerful party, but which worries everyone”\textsuperscript{129} because of its “clear” plan: “application of shari’a, Islamic law.”\textsuperscript{130} Indeed, the FIS had used Islamic terminology and made references to the Quran throughout their “Political Programme” of March 7, 1989, which was meant to outline their plans and general political philosophy. As Pakistani scholar Khalid bin Sayeed points out, the FIS was promoting a type of “socio-political Islam,” exhibited in the beginning of their Programme:

When the governments that have ruled Algeria have demonstrated their inability to cope with the multidimensional crisis that is shaking the country to its very depths, the Algerian people have initiated a process of resurgence which is moving them in the direction of a democratic and a pluralist polity anchored in an authentic Islamic societal foundation. The failures of different ideologies, Western and Eastern, have compelled us to turn to our religion in order to

\textsuperscript{127} See Willis, \textit{Islamist Challenge}, 119.
\textsuperscript{129} “un parti puissant, mais qui inquiète tout le monde.”
\textsuperscript{130} “application de la charia, la loi islamique.” Jacques Girardon, “No future à Bab el-Oued,” \textit{L’Express}, October 6, 1989.
safeguard and protect our history and civilization and our human and natural resources.\textsuperscript{131}

To the \textit{laïque} French citizens and a largely secular Western world, this idea of reuniting religion and government was problematic on various levels.

First, the FIS was placing a modern Western concept—democracy—right next to a stigmatized “Eastern” religion—Islam—in an attempt to show their capacity to coexist. However, in the minds of the French, they were simply being shoved uncomfortably closer to the religion and culture they had spent the previous twenty years trying to escape.

Second, democracy and Islam were already perceived to be inherently at odds because a democracy calls for “equality.” The French ideal of \textit{laïcité} promotes the thought that equality is impossible while religion is also involved, especially Islam.

Third, by referring to the “failures of different ideologies” in the past, the FIS corroborates the claims of the rebels. They condemn the French colonization in Algeria’s past that lasted over a century and blame the French for “compelling” Algeria to embrace political Islam.

After its recognition, the FIS began to organize quickly. While the FIS was not the body in power at the time, “the [Algerian] government failed to take any real steps to curb the mobilisation of the FIS even when it ventured into illegality” and “at times the government [even] appeared to be positively encouraging the FIS.”\textsuperscript{132} This led the


\textsuperscript{132} Willis, \textit{Islamist Challenge}, 125.
international media to equate Algeria with radical Islamism. Since there were still large amounts of people of Algerian descent in France, they were seen by some as a threat.

Televised accounts of protests in Algeria in 1989 furthered this notion, as the roles of “the youth” (“les jeunes”) and “the women” (“les femmes”) were emphasized and exaggerated. In a broadcast from France Régions 3 on December 21, 1989, entitled, “The Muslim Brotherhood” (“Les Frères Musulmans”), the announcer stated, “It’s probably one of the most important street protests in 25 years; numerous women… [are] organized by Islamic fundamentalists” and goes on to emphasize that the message of the FIS “is essentially aimed at the youth.”

Here, the women are seen as the puppets of the fundamentalists. This reinforces the narrow view held by many French that Muslim women are inevitably under the control of their male counterparts, even in issues as personal as veiling. Islamic fundamentalism was depicted as violent to mainland French society in the media, so the continued rise of Islamism reinforced the racism surrounding the “Muslim situation” in France.

The affaires des foulards from September 1989 created a massive new obsession with the veiled Arab woman in the media. French news outlets—from the Communist party, Catholics, leftist, and extreme right—printed photo after photo of young veiled Muslim women and girls with intense headlines that conveyed a sense of intimidation by these girls—representative of the entire Muslim/Arab minority as a whole—on the rest of the non-Muslim, and therefore non-veiled, French readership.

133 “C’est peut-être une des plus importantes manifestations de rue depuis 25 ans; de très nombreuses femmes…[sont] organisées par les intégristes islamiques.”
In Figure 8 above, a young veiled woman is shown above the quotation, “Teachers, don’t give in!” in the left-leaning, and therefore more nationalist, French news magazine, *Le Nouvel Observateur*. This issue, from November 11, 1989—during the
height of the *foulard* debates—is one of many examples of veiled women being used by the media as tools to sway public sentiment about Arabs and Muslims in France. Figures 9 and 10 below show two more issues of *Le Nouvel Observateur* from the same year.

The headline in Figure 9 reads: “School: the religious trap,” and that in Figure 10 reads, “Muslims, Jews, Christians. Fanaticism: The religious threat.” Both images are so similar that they essentially follow a formula:

1. Show a young veiled girl as the main focal point.
2. Ensure that the girl’s arm is raised and that her fist is clenched in anger.
3. Use an image of a girl whose mouth is open in protest.
4. Hide part of the girl’s face or place it partly in shadow, to add to the feeling of intimidation evoked by the images.

All of these aspects combined create an eerily threatening picture for the average French (and not Arab or Muslim) reader. Despite the fact that Jews and Christians are mentioned in the latter headline, it is clear from the photograph that Muslims are seen as the real “religious threat,” (“la menace religieuse”) or “the challenge to the laïque,” (“le défi à la laïque”) as is shown in the article headline in Figure 11.
Figure 11. Article in Libération (no. 2617) by François Reynaert from Oct. 21, 1989.
Bibliothèque nationale. Photograph courtesy of Claudia Koonz.
Headscarf controversies similar to the original September 1989 affaires des foulards and their surrounding conflicts continued into the 1990s. In November 1993, four girls in Nantua were suspended from school for wearing headscarves, and a similar case emerged in Grenoble. During this time, more Muslim females began to dare to wear their headscarves to school: By 1994, “an estimated 700 Muslim girls started wearing headscarves themselves, until at its peak, approximately 2,000 children (out of 150,000-250,000 Muslim girls attending French public schools) were wearing the hijab to class.”

Because of this constant and growing ‘issue,’ then-Minister of Education François Bayrou responded in September 1994 “with a directive that required principals to ban all ‘ostentatious’ [religious] signs from schools.” Despite the general nature of this statement, “he made it clear that the directive was aimed at excluding all headscarves from schools.” The events of the 1990s were further aggravated by the renewed war in Algeria from 1989 to 1994 and a series of bomb explosions in public areas in Paris and Lyons between July and October 1995. These explosions, originally thought to be the work of the Algerian Armed Islamic Group, later became the downfall of two beur men from a suburb of Lyons. Khaled Kelkal and Karim Moussa were accused of taking part in these terrorist acts and Kelkal was eventually shot and killed on live television after being associated with an unsuccessful bomb explosion on a Paris-Lyons train. Paul

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136 Bowen, *French Don’t Like Headscarves*, 89.
137 Ibid.
138 The term “beur” is a slang and non-derogatory word for second-generation Arabs. It comes from the verlan (French slang language that developed in the suburbs of Paris) for arabe and generally refers to children of North African immigrants.
A. Silverstein states, “it appeared to confirm the existence of an international terrorist network that supposedly linked Algiers to Cologne to Sarajevo to Kabul, via France’s immigrant suburbs.” These events further heightened Islamophobia and opposition to headscarves. After the protests of October 1988, Algeria found itself immersed in an all-out civil war, which threatened French-Algerian relations more still, and saw an estimated 100,000 people dead.

The war in Algeria became more and more religiously charged throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. The rebels called themselves “mujahidin,” which is Arabic for “fighters of the faith” and comes from the word, “jihad.” In Arabic, jihad simply means “struggle.” However, it morphed into a new Islamic concept in the 1980s: holy war. Sayyid Qutb, a leader in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, wrote a series of essays while imprisoned between 1954 and 1964 that became part of the foundation for radical Islam and jihadism in the later half of the 20th century. As his prison writings became more widely read by radical Muslims, the rise of Islamism began to transcend national borders and invade not only regions of the Middle East and North Africa, but also the West, even if only in thought. In June 1990, Algeria held municipal elections and the FIS came to power. French civilians and officials alike felt the fear. Media and other expressive outlets in the public sphere propagated the fear further, as “a growing number of political speeches linked immigration to insecurity and terrorism.”

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140 Ibid., 29.
141 Willis, Islamist Challenge, 23.
On August 2, 1990, the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait, and Saddam Hussein, formerly an ally to France, suddenly became “the ‘new Hitler’ in Western media,” as French journalist Thomas Deltombe notes. In France specifically, the media portrayal of foreign events caused a “fear that the Gulf War would provoke a fracture between France and Algeria.” In 1991, the parliamentary elections in Algeria were postponed because of renewed street fighting in Algiers, which eventually saw 17 people dead after the army intervened at a general strike and sit-in. France kept asserting that parliamentary elections were the “key to political stability in Algeria” and continued to urge the government to hold such elections, which eventually happened in December 1991.

The FIS won a majority of the seats. Anti-Arab sentiment persisted in France throughout the 1990s. The French state tried to keep the perceived threat of political Islam at bay by visibly controlling Muslim headscarf-wearing women, who had by now become symbols of dangerous Islam: “[f]or the average viewer [of televised fighting in Algeria], the conclusion is obvious: headscarf = Islam = terrorism,” as stated by a “young ‘believing but non-practicing’ Muslim businesswoman.”

**Laïcité in the 21st Century**

In 2003, then-Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy demanded that Muslim women take identity photographs with their heads fully visible. He defended this demand by citing the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York. This was likely an

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146 Ibid., 28.
147 Bowen, *French Don’t Like Headscarves*, 90.
attempt to gain popular support by playing on the emotions of people quick to submit to
fear, as with de Gaulle before him. After a bill was presented to the National
Assembly\(^{148}\) by Socialist politician Jack Lang that would make the wearing of any signs
of religion illegal in schools, then-President Jacques Chirac created a commission. The
purpose was to determine whether or not this type of bill would be viable and Chirac
appointed political official Bernard Stasi its commissioner.\(^{149}\) The Stasi Commission
began to meet in July 2003 but the issue continued to progress in the rest of France as
they were deliberating. As more and more conflicts developed involving Muslims, their
own voices were hushed. The media paid little regard to the human rights of veil-
wearing women, on whom the controversy focused.

In December 2003, the Stasi Commission’s report, “*Laïcité et République,*” was
released. This report called for the ban of all “‘conspicuous’ signs of religious affiliation
in public schools.”\(^{150}\) The report also promoted, among numerous other things, specific
recognition for other faiths, like Judaism (for example, making Yom Kippur a national
holiday) and for Islam (by providing substitutes for pork in school cafeterias).\(^{151}\) In
January 2004, Chirac signed into law only the ban on conspicuous religious signs in
schools.\(^{152}\) This made the law seem discriminatory in nature since headscarves are the
most obvious sign of religion in schools. In spite of the fact that Jewish yarmulkes were

\(^{148}\) The *Assemblée nationale* is part of the French Parliament, under the Senate, and
basically an equivalent to the U.S. House of Representatives.


\(^{150}\) Ibid., 34.

\(^{151}\) Ibid.

\(^{152}\) See the *Loi du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port
de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenence religieuse dans les écoles, collèges,
et lycées publics.* (Law of March 15, 2004 outlining, in application of the principle of
*laïcité*, the wearing of signs or dress that show a religious affiliation in public primary,
middle, and high schools.) Assemblée nationale.
also prohibited, the new law “was popularly referred to as the headscarf law” and it did not allow for any concessions or negotiation.\textsuperscript{153}

After enforcement of this law began in October 2004, fifteen years after the ruling of the State Council that headscarves were not themselves against laïcité, it quickly seemed as though this discrimination was only beginning. As Scott states, “Without the softening effect of the other recommendations, the headscarf ban became a definitive pronouncement: there would no longer be compromises or mediation—it was either Islam or the republic.”\textsuperscript{154}

Islam came back into French and international media in late 2005, when Paris was “burning,” as an article in \textit{Time} magazine put it.\textsuperscript{155} “The riots of the suburbs” (“\textit{les émeutes des banlieues}”) began in the end of October 2005, initially sparked by the deaths of two youths of North African descent who were believed to have died while being chased by the police. Violence in the suburbs around Paris quickly ensued. The atmosphere became more and more politically and racially charged.\textsuperscript{156} Protesting discrimination and unemployment, the demonstrators—mainly “beurs” (descendants of immigrants from North Africa) and “noirs” (blacks of sub-Saharan African descent)—were called “riffraff” (“\textit{racailles}”) and “thugs” (“\textit{voyous}”) by Nicolas Sarkozy, as stated in an article in French daily newspaper \textit{Le Monde}.\textsuperscript{157} Sarkozy was Minister of the Interior at that time, later elected to the presidency in 2007. The \textit{Time} article highlights the problem that was truly behind the riots: “The \textit{banlieues} [suburbs] are monuments to

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{153} Scott, \textit{Politics of the Veil}, 35.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} Agence France-Presse, “Nicolas Sarkozy continue de vilipender ‘racailles et voyous,’” \textit{Le Monde}, November 11, 2005.
\end{footnotesize}
France’s failure to integrate large parts of its Muslim population, despite many of them being from families that have lived in France for two or three generations.”¹⁵⁸ In an article from *Le Monde* on November 24, 2005, Sylvain Cypel cites French essayist Alain Finkielkraut as referring to the fact that the protesters were Arab and black, and therefore Muslim, as the “problem,” rather than the actual discrimination they faced. Finkielkraut said, “In France, there are other emigrants in difficult situations. They don’t participate in the riots. It is clear that we are dealing with a revolt of ethnic-religious character.”¹⁵⁹ Even at that time, 40 years after Algerian independence, North Africans were still seen as an “immigrant problem”—including those of the second or third generations—and they still remained unequal minorities.

This notion was pushed even further on October 11, 2010, when a law was put into place that prohibited “the concealment of the face in public.”¹⁶⁰ This law, which went into effect on April 11, 2011, acted as a means by which then-President Nicolas Sarkozy could ban the *burqa* and *niqab* in public spaces. As reported in *The New York Times*, this controversial measure, and the first of its kind in Europe, was “viewed by supporters as a necessary step to preserve French culture and to fight what they see as

¹⁵⁸ Graff.
separatist tendencies among Muslims.”¹⁶¹ This law has been defended on the basis of security as well as criticized for cultural reasons. However, it is still in effect. Police officers maintain the right “to fine or require citizenship lessons for those who violate the new law.”¹⁶²

**Conclusion**

Post-Algerian war immigration became part of the French historical narrative about North Africans in France. The government’s responses to increased numbers of Muslims and people of North African descent created a tense atmosphere after the war, which spread much further with the September 1989 headscarf affair and the more obvious depictions of radical Islam in French and international media sources. These Arab immigrants were ghettoized because of their (perceived) religion: Islam. Despite the fact that Arabs include Jews and Christians, the Muslim immigrants (particularly the obvious Muslims: headscarf-wearing women) and, by extension, their descendants, have been seen as an inherent “Other” who is against French republican values from colonization to the terrorism-charged politics of today. Using *laïcité* as a rationalization to mandate laws enforced disproportionately against Muslim headscarf-wearing women, French politicians perpetuate societal problems that began over one hundred years ago. Inherently ambiguous in nature, *laïcité* has been manipulated as the primary reasoning for promoting entrenched discrimination against Muslims in the public sphere in France, all

¹⁶² Ibid.
the while maintaining its ancient imperialist and patriarchal nature that fosters policies of inequality while still projecting an illusion of equality.

Controversies over the headscarf continued in the late 20th century, as Islam began to gain a greater presence in the international arena. This presence was perceived as violent and dangerous as people became more aware of Islam’s widespread influence. This influence was often seen as destructively rampant in today’s society. By the early 2000s, the view of Islam had morphed from a peaceful religion into a powerful and damaging force in the eyes of the French people. The pivotal moment came in September 2001, after which the French government began implementing its most controversial laws yet.

Clashes primarily throughout the last twenty-five years have shaped how France created legislation as recently as 2011. Now, with the election of François Hollande to the presidency in May 2012, which ended Nicolas Sarkozy’s term, one must wonder what the future of this controversy will look like.
CHAPTER FOUR

Voices

“The media never lets the veiled woman speak. They never hear her speak. They speak for her.”

- Samia Orosemane, 32

Comedian and star of a one-woman show called “Femme de Couleurs” (Woman of Color); Paris, France

Figure 12. Flyer for Samia’s one-woman comedy show in Paris.

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The veil controversy has often been at the center of political debates about religion and secularism in recent French history, but veiled women’s voices have been largely unheard by the English-speaking public. The conflicting attitudes surrounding the veil create a stifling atmosphere in which these women must live and continue to endure ongoing discrimination, now entrenched in law. As Nacira Guénif-Souilamas points out, the 2004 law was “passed against the will of the voiceless women whom it is supposed to benefit.” She claims, “What is at work here is the emancipation of women against their will, thus reducing what was once a worthy goal to counterproductive ideology.”164 Guénif-Souilamas uses the term “emancipation” critically here, since the law claims to be protecting the rights of young women and girls to decide against wearing the veil, but “it is just as possible to consider this law sexist, since it denies female minors the right to an education if they choose to keep their veils on.”165 The “voiceless women” in Guénif-Souilamas’ analysis deserve to be heard. The debates primarily affect them, and yet somehow their opinions and emotions are not being taken into account as much as they should be.

Between the dates of December 16, 2012 and January 7, 2013, I traveled to Paris, France to speak to veiled women. I conducted eighteen interviews total—two well-known scholars in the field, four Muslim men, one non-veiled Muslim woman, a four-woman focus group all wearing chadors, and seven other veil-wearing Muslim women. All of these interviewees are French citizens. I contacted these people through various methods. Some were friends of acquaintances; others were recruited by chance.  

165 Ibid.
contacted some directly, using public records. The interviews took place in Paris, Asnières-sur-Seine, Saint-Denis, Villeneuve d’Ascq, Marolles-en-Hurepoix, and Boulogne-Billancourt. Some women consented to being filmed and others agreed solely to audio recordings. Many consented to be mentioned by name in my research, while others’ names will be changed throughout to keep their identities private. A description of each person interviewed can be found in Appendix I.

The questions I chose, which can be found in Appendix II, formed the basis of the information discussed in this chapter. I sought to collect these first-hand accounts of French society because of the lack of such information in the English-language literature on this topic. All interviews were conducted in French and all translations in this text are my own.

Drawing on the main themes addressed by the women I interviewed, I structure this chapter according to these themes: the issue of personal liberty and personal choice, discrimination in public spaces such as work and education, legal discrimination, feminist theory, and the effects of French and foreign media. By tackling these different issues, this chapter touches, on the one hand, on the main theoretical stakes laid out in scholarly literature about veiled women’s freedom, agency, and choice,¹⁶⁶ and on the other hand, this chapter exposes the concrete effects that the 2004 law had on the women’s lives. While the French perceive the headscarf as limiting Muslim women’s participation in society, the laws themselves are actually creating conditions that place constraints on this

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very participation. Hence emerges a powerful paradox—a paradox discussed by the
theorists of French “universalism,”167 where the laws of laïcité circumscribe freedoms,
not just the freedom of religious expression, but also the freedom to participate in public
life. But, as will expose my interlocutors’ experiences, the laws end up severely limiting
the personal liberty and personal expression of these women and girls in public spaces.
These French laws create the very conditions that they claim to work against. Moreover,
it is a political circumscription, where veiled women are stripped of their most basic
citizenship right—their right to full participation in French society.

My interviewees constantly respond to trend discourses when talking about the
veil. As I will show throughout the chapter, they try to advance different meanings than
constantly articulated in public debates, which seek to challenge dominant discourses.
However, I will also show the limits of this aspiration, given the powerful effect of this
dominant discourse.

“*It is a part of me... a part of my spirituality, of my religious practice. And at the same
time, it is an individual freedom... and I wish to dress so for my personal convictions.*”168

- Hela Khomsi, 47

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167 On discussions of French universalism (versus particularism), see Silverstein, *Algeria
in France*; and Étienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (New York:
Verso, 1991). On the relation between French feminism and universalism, see Scott,
*Only Paradoxes to Offer*; and Scott, *Parité!*

168 “*Ça fait partie de moi... ça fait partie de ma spiritualité, de ma pratique religieuse.
Et en même temps, c’est une liberté individuelle... et j’ai souhaité de m’habiller ainsi
pour mes convictions personnelles.*” – Hela Khomsi.
Many people outside of the Islamic faith often question the purpose of the headscarf, or the hijab, as it is called in Arabic. It is an object of wonder, curiosity, sometimes even scorn. Whether or not there is a clear demand in the Quran’s verses for women to wear a headscarf, it has become, throughout Muslim societies, a custom. In Orthodox Islam as well as in its contemporary revival version, it is understood as a clear obligation. Many women feel a strong attachment to their decision to wear a headscarf, including all of the veil-wearing women I interviewed in France.

Scholars discuss how veiled women have deployed the vocabulary of freedom and choice to refer to their decisions to veil—even while veiling is recognized as a religious obligation. As Mayanthi L. Fernando states in her analysis of four veiled women’s interviews, the veil embodies “a sense of autonomous human agency as fundamentally grounded in the capacity to lead one’s life in accordance with one’s own desires and choices… [that are] part of a more general form of highly individualized religiosity that privileges following one’s own ‘inner voice’ over conforming to the ‘external’ rules of religious authority.” Saba Mahmood discusses veiled women’s personal agency in relation to their bodies and comes to the conclusion from her interviews that exterior expressions of modesty in Islam, such as veiling, help create a

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170 Fernando, “Reconfiguring freedom,” 23.
definite sense of self. She argues, “the outward behavior of the body constitutes both the potentiality and the means through which interiority is realized.”171 Thus, the veil acts as a means by which pious Muslim women assert themselves as such, through a personal choice and a “signifying practice,”172 as Jeanette S. Jouili deems it, that reaffirms not only their religion, but also their empowered position in society. Similar to what has been accounted for in the literature, my interlocutors mentioned a variety of different reasons for wearing a veil.

First, they cited a “spiritual journey”173 and personal development as part of their reasoning for deciding to cover their hair in communal spaces, just as Mayanthi L. Fernando’s interviewees did.174 But more importantly, for them, the veil acts as a public declaration that “woman is not solely a body, but also a mind.”175 Rather than wanting to introduce privacy into the public sphere, as several scholars have argued,176 they rather want to desexualize the female body.177 For my interviewees, the headscarf actually liberates each of them because she is no longer being sexually objectified by men and instead is “appreciated for her values and her temperament and her moral qualities more than for her appearance,”178 as stated by Samia, a French Muslim comedian who wears a headscarf.

171 Mahmood, Politics of Piety, 159.
173 “un cheminement spirituel” – Samia Orosemane & Khadija Idrissi Idary.
175 “la femme n’est pas un corps uniquement, mais aussi un esprit” – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.
176 See Papanek, “Purdah in Pakistan,” 520.
177 See El-Guindi, “Veiling Infitah.”
178 “Pour que la femme soit appréciée concernant ses valeurs et son tempérament et ses qualités morales plus que pour son apparence.” – Samia Orosemane.
Many of the women interviewed expressed their desire to separate themselves from the societal tendency to represent women as tempting sexual beings whose purpose is largely to please the men who desire them. One woman I interviewed, Hela, is a Tunisian-born 47-year-old mother and teacher, as well as the president of the French League of the Muslim Woman (*Ligue Française de la Femme Musulmane*) in Lille, France. In response to my question about her personal reasons for donning the veil, she affirmed her decision by asserting that she feels more comfortable in the presence of men because of her veil. She states,

They [men] use [women], even today, as an object—a sexual object or also an object to make advertisements. To sell a yogurt, they put a nude woman… Unfortunately they use the woman in an unhealthy manner. But the woman is a being that deserves respect, in my opinion.”

In order to release themselves from the sexual grasp of some men in the public sphere, certain Muslim women choose to veil and keep their hair, considered a sensual aspect of their being, covered and accessible only to the people in their personal life. Saba Mahmood points out while analyzing participants in Egypt’s Islamic revival mosque movement that veiled women pursue the “destabilization of certain norms of male kin authority,” thereby resisting men’s role as being superior and stripping them of their ability to objectify women. Dorsaf, a Tunisian-born 40-year-old mother of four and

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179 “*On [les hommes] utilise [les femmes], même aujourd’hui, en tant qu’objet—c’est un objet sexuel ou un objet aussi pour faire la publicité. Pour vendre un yaourt, on met une femme nue… On utilise la femme malheureusement d’une façon malsaine. Alors que la femme, c’est un être qui mérite le respect à mon avis.*” – Hela Khomsi.

also the Chief Administrative Officer of the European Forum of Muslim Women (*Forum Européen des Femmes Musulmanes*), discusses her reasons for wearing the veil:

I wear it because I feel good in it. I wear it because I feel that when I wear it I am considered as more than the body of a woman, but also a mind… I wear it because I also want to divert the eyes of men who are a little dishonest and to tell them, you have in front of you a woman, certainly, but also a person who thinks, who has things to say… I wear it because I do not like the advertisements where the woman is used to sell yogurt in television ads or even in car showrooms.\(^{181}\)

All of the women emphasized at some point, and often at multiple points, that the decision to veil was one made of their own free will, an individual choice made without the influence of any other person, against assumptions in some public discourses, more of which will be explored in later sections.

“*It [education] demands others to enter into a box, meaning that we must erase differences. Each one has an eraser, you enter into the box; you must erase your headscarf… And the eraser can go very far.*”\(^{182}\)

- Dorsaf ben Dhiab, 40

\(^{181}\) *“Je le porte parce que je me sens bien dedans. Je le porte parce que je sens que quand je le porte je suis considérée plus qu’un corps de femme, mais également un esprit… Je le porte parce que je veux écarteur également les yeux des hommes un peu malhonnêtes et pour leur dire, vous avez en face de vous une femme, certes, mais une personne qui réfléchit, qui a des choses à dire… Je le porte parce que je n’aime pas la publicité où la femme elle est employée pour vendre du yaourt dans les publicités da la télévision ou bien sur les salons de vente de voiture.”* – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.

\(^{182}\) *“Elle [l’éducation] demande aux autres de rentrer dans un cadre. Ça veut dire qu’on doit gommer les différences. Chacun a une gomme, toi, tu rentres dans le cadre ; il faut gommer ton foulard… Et la gomme, elle peut aller très loin.”* – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.
Each woman interviewed shared her personal experiences with discrimination in daily life and I am grateful that I was permitted to record them. Most of the women described negative looks and glances in the streets directed at them and in condemnation of their way of life. Halima, a 29-year-old stay at home mother, expressed her discontent at the “eyes that express the feeling that says, ‘you are completely crazy,’ or ‘you are influenced, the poor one, she is being forced.’" During her one-woman comedy show, Samia describes in her typical expressive manner her experience with non-veiled French women at an ATM in Paris. She comically tells about the women’s disbelief at her ability to correctly operate the ATM and her subsequent response to their remarks that, yes indeed, she can not only use the machine, but she can speak as well. Samia’s skilled acting and comedic timing sent the culturally and racially diverse audience into stitches.

After the show, during our conversation, Samia expands her story further: “People speak to me as if I were stupid, as if I don’t understand because in their collective conscience they imagine that the veiled woman is a woman who has not been educated.” She goes on to explain that the veiled women’s place in this culture is one of an outsider: “Simply stated, today, in Europe, in France, they do not allow us to assert ourselves such as we are. They do not accept us as we really are. They try to alienate us,

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183 “des yeux qui exprimaient le sentiment de dire, ‘tu es complètement folle’... ‘t’es influencée, la pauvre, elle est obligée.’” – Halima Boutahar.
184 “Des gens me parlent comme si j’étais bête, comme si je ne comprenais pas parce que dans leur conscient collectif on imagine que la femme voilée est une femme qui n’a pas fait d’études.” – Samia Orosemane.
to put us in a mold; they think that we do not ourselves know what is good for us.”\textsuperscript{185} In France, veiled women are perceived as \textit{soumises}, as submissive, and as not possessing the same agency as non-veiled French women, which is detrimental to the spirit and is in contrast to veiled women’s desires. As Dorsaf says, “We are not looking for special privileges—no more, no less. We want to be like everyone else, and especially allow everyone to live as they want to.”\textsuperscript{186}

Veiled women are systematically subjected to different forms of discrimination—regardless of the different kinds of coverings that they wear—that amount to public harassment. One 26-year-old woman from the focus group who wears a black \textit{chador} and who wishes to remain anonymous told me about some events on the streets of Saint-Denis or Paris that apparently occur quite often: “For me, there are insults as well [like the other women], whether it’s Batman, Darth Vader, wife of Bin Laden, etc. There have been people spitting on me also, and being jostled about…”\textsuperscript{187}

As the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 pointed out, this discrimination unfolds not just in public space, but also in government institutions. In contrast to the above-mentioned woman, another of my other covered interlocutors chooses to wear a “discreet veil,” in order to reduce the

\textsuperscript{185} “\textit{Simplement, aujourd’hui, en Europe, en France, on ne nous permet pas de nous affirmer tel que nous sommes. On ne nous accepte pas comme nous sommes réellement. On cherche à nous aliéner, à nous faire entrer dans un moule, on considère que, nous ne savons pas nous-mêmes ce qui est bon pour nous.”} – Samia Orosemane.

\textsuperscript{186} “\textit{On ne cherche pas de privilège—ni plus ni moins. On veut être comme tout le monde, et surtout permettre à tout à chacun de vivre comme il l’entend.”} – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.

\textsuperscript{187} “\textit{Moi pour ma part, ça fait des insultes, pareil, que ce soit Batman, Dark Vador, femme de Bin Laden, etc. Il y a eu des crachats aussi, des crachats, des bousculades…”} – Anonymous woman wearing a black \textit{chador}. 
‘conspicuous’ visibility and in the hope for better acceptance. For example, 44-year-old academic director Amal describes the discrimination she faced the day she received her citizenship papers after relocating to France from Egypt. While wearing her “voile discret,” usually some sort of hat such as a beret with her hair tucked inside it along with a high-necked blouse, a female security guard stopped her when she tried to enter the ceremony room at the Ministry of the Interior and asked her to remove her beret in order to be permitted to enter. But Amal refused. She says,

I told her that I know the law well and I know that the law requires, for example, that we present photos bare-headed, which I did, and the law requires that we do not wear an Islamic headscarf if we work in a school but I had never heard that we did not have the right to enter a ceremony if we wore a beret.

Then Amal offered to enter an enclosed room with the female guard and remove the beret for a moment in order for her to verify that it is she in the photograph on her identity card. But the guard did not agree until the very last minute before the ceremony began, when she realized that Amal would not give in. Then the two women entered a room and Amal removed her beret. Amal narrated about the guard that she could “read in her eyes that it was not really a problem, but it was not at all what she wanted.”

Though instances such as this one are rather common amongst the veil-wearing female Muslim

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188 This is similar to Jeanette S. Jouili’s findings, where she analyzes this same type of reduced visibility with her interviewees in terms of “passing.” See Jeanette S. Jouili, “Negotiating Secular Boundaries: Pious Micro-Practices of Muslim Women in French and German Public Spheres,” Social Anthropology 17, no. 4 (2009): 463.
189 “Je lui ai dit que je connais très bien la loi et je sais que la loi impose par exemple on présente les photos tête nue, ça je l’ai fait, et la loi impose de ne pas porter le foulard islamique si on travaille dans une école mais je n’ai jamais entendu qu’on n’a pas de droit d’entrer dans une cérémonie si on porte le béret.” – Amal Amir.
190 “Je lisais dans ses yeux c’est pas du tout un problème. Mais c’est pas du tout ce qu’elle voulait.” – Amal Amir.
community in France, people outside the community are rarely aware of them. All of these experiences clearly expose to what extent the (veiled) Muslim woman in France has become an object of anxiety, mistrust, and disrespect.

“Perhaps I chose industries that could adapt more to the headscarf and to me and my desires than if I hadn’t worn the veil.”

- Halima Boutahar, 29

Stay-at-home mother; Villeneuve d’Ascq, France

Many Muslims, both men and women, have trouble finding work in general because of widespread discrimination and negative attitudes about Muslims and Arabs in France, but it has become particularly difficult for Muslim women who wear headscarves. Many of the women I interviewed had plans to become teachers, but they later changed and adapted their plans following the passage of the 2004 law that banned headscarves in educational institutions. Since the law banned them in public schools, these women were only able to continue in their teaching endeavors at private Muslim schools, of which there are few. Hela was forced to make the difficult decision between removing her headscarf to work in public French schools like any other French schoolteacher or keeping her headscarf and confining herself to the Muslim sector in her professional life:

191 “J’ai peut-être choisi des filières qui pouvaient s’adapter plus au foulard et à moi et à mes envies, que si j’avais pas porté le voile.” – Halima Boutahar.
My schooling, I studied sociology and linguistics of foreign civilizations. So I was made to teach, except that, education in France, one is a teacher, they cannot wear a headscarf. So I had to head toward rather the private sector—the private Muslim sector… But it wasn’t at all by my will. I would have really liked teaching elsewhere.\footnote{Ma formation, j’ai fait de la sociologie et j’ai fait de la linguistique civilisations étrangères. Donc, j’étais faite pour enseigner, vue que, l’enseignement en France, on est enseignante, on ne peut pas mettre le foulard. Donc, j’ai dû me diriger plutôt dans le privé, dans le privé musulman… Alors que c’était pas du tout ma volonté. J’aurais bien voulu enseigner ailleurs. }\footnote{Hela Khomsi.}

She says that this was a difficult choice to make and one that she believed to be unnecessary and unjust since it is a choice that primarily and almost uniquely Muslims must make.

Dorsaf experienced a similar problem when she attempted to take the CAPES, a competitive exam to become a teacher in France. She was not allowed to take the exam because of her headscarf.\footnote{Quand il a fallu que je passe par exemple le CAPES pour devenir professeur, je n’ai pas pu le faire parce que je porte un foulard. }\footnote{Dorsaf ben Dhiab.}

Halima had originally studied accounting in her university years but chose to leave the program because she was certain that she would not find work with her headscarf and she “will never make the concession of the veil for work.”\footnote{Je ferai jamais la concession du voile contre le travail. }\footnote{Halima Boutahar.}

Similarly, Khadija, a French-born 34-year-old woman of Moroccan descent, works as a secretary at a private Muslim high school because she was unable to work in any public school: “We cannot work where we want… we are not accepted with our veil… so we direct ourselves toward our own organizations.”\footnote{On ne peut pas travailler où on veut… on n’est pas accepté avec notre voile, alors, du coup, on se dirige vers des structures qui sont les nôtres. }\footnote{Khadija Idrissi Idary.} This 2004 law, originally mean to “integrate” the Muslims and other minority cultures, instead separates and isolates
Muslims, primarily veiled women, more since they are unable to work alongside other non-Muslim French citizens because of their personal choice of dress.

“It makes me laugh, but it’s too bad. They don’t know that the headscarf, it hides the hair but not the brain.”

- Asmaa Naifeh, 50

*Instructor & trainer; Islamic Center of Villeneuve d’Ascq (Centre Islamique de Villeneuve d’Ascq), France*

All of the women I interviewed seemed to remain very strong in their decision to wear the headscarf, despite the experiences with discrimination that each related to me. They told about each occurrence not quite in a detached manner, but rather in a way that showed me that they try not to let the ignorance and cruelty of others affect them or their convictions. Algerian-born instructor Asmaa, 50, remains strong by believing in Allah and what he is capable of: “If one door closes, Allah opens ten others.” This statement refers to the rejection she received for an internship during her time at university because they did not accept her headscarf. Asmaa continued to mention throughout her interview that each refusal or insult is “too bad for them, not for me, because that is not a low for

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196 “Il me fait rigoler, moi, c’était dommage. Ils ne savent pas que le foulard, il cache les cheveux, pas le cerveau.” – Asmaa Naifeh.
197 Name has been changed, as the interviewee wishes to remain anonymous.
198 “Si une porte ferme, Allah, il ouvre dix portes.” – Asmaa Naifeh.
She has decided to empower herself and remain hopeful for the future. These women expressed an attitude of resilience that was especially enabled by their strong faith. Many invoked notions such as God-confidence and hope to deal with these problems.

While Halima brushed off her negative experiences with pejorative glances in the streets as “not a problem,” Hela admitted that she found her experiences more hurtful. When the law of 2004 was first put into place, her daughter was in middle school and was therefore very affected by the law. She was not allowed to go to class because she decided to continue wearing her headscarf and therefore ended up being forced into the private Muslim schooling system as well. Hela describes her daughter’s feelings: “It was hard, it is annoying, certainly, to feel discriminated against, because that is a form of discrimination… pushed aside… all that is not easy, especially for the younger people who are still fragile.”

Though this law was presumed to make the public sphere “neutral,” it had the effect of sweeping away any signs of young Muslim women and girls. As a result, many of these girls who chose to continue wearing the headscarf were forced into private, faith-based institutions, which further increased their social isolation. Instead of assimilation to a French norm, they were forced into an increasingly atomized Muslim identity that could

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199 “C’est dommage pour eux, pas pour moi, parce que ça c’est pas un bas pour moi.” – Asmaa Naifeh.
200 Saba Mahmood has discussed how attitudes like hope and patience are part of the coping mechanisms used by pious women in Politics of Piety.
201 “C’est pas grave, ce n’est pas de problème.” – Halima Boutahar.
202 “C’était dur, c’est pénible, c’est sur, de se sentir discriminé, parce que c’est une forme de discrimination… mise à l’écart… tout ça n’est pas simple, surtout pour les plus jeunes qui sont quand même fragiles.” – Hela Khomsi.
not mix with a legally defined French nationality. As Charles de Gaulle observed, they
could not mix like oil and water. (See Chapter 2.)

“But what is the problem? The problem is that society lives with problems—big
problems, economic problems, problems with unemployment, problems with poverty—
and to hide, to camouflage these problems, they create a news item... They will create a
polemic problem; they will involve it in controversy.”

- Hela Khomsi, 47

President, French League of the Muslim Woman (Ligue Française de la Femme
Musulmane); Lille, France

In 2004, after the Stasi Commission issued its report about laïcité and integrating
minority peoples into dominant French culture and society, the French government
passed the law that banned all “ostentatious signs of religion” (“les signes religieux
ostentatoires”) in public schools. This law had numerous negative effects on the veiled
Muslim community. Young women were either forced to remove their headscarves at
their public school or to discontinue their education until an alternative, such as a Muslim
private school, could be found. Parents of these girls were put under immense stress as
they attempted to work out solutions to the problems facing them and their children. One

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203 “Mais c’est quoi le problème ? Le problème c’est que la société, elle vit des
problèmes—des grands problèmes, problèmes économiques, problèmes du chômage,
problèmes de la pauvreté—et pour cacher, pour camoufler ces problèmes, on crée un fait
divers... On va créer un problème polémique, on va polémiquer là-dessus.” – Hela
Khomsi.

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of the main problems with these laws was that young Muslim girls in particular became increasingly isolated from larger society. They were forced, as Algerians were with their citizenship under French colonialism, to choose between an impossible binary: being French and being Muslim.

My interviewees expressed strong discontent with this law because of its exact opposite effects than its supposed intentions. Samia states, “I find this law very sad because this cover-up of wanting to liberate women, it imprisons them.”\(^\text{204}\) It deprives young women who wish to remain in their headscarves of the most basic opportunity for education. Education is highly valued in French society and in republican thought, so many people desire that it stay “neutral.” But what proponents of neutral education often do not realize is that this neutrality effectively suppresses many people’s chances to express individuality. A neutral educational sphere, at least in their current sense of the term, comes with it the stipulation that strong believing Muslim women and girls remove what they believe to be an essential part of their Muslim identity in order to attend a public school. As Fernando states in reference to Jean Baubérot, well-known French historian, religion specialist, and chair of the “History and Sociology of Laïcité” department at the École pratique des hautes etudes in Paris,

> The school is a place where, through a series of disciplinary techniques, individuals are to be stripped of their ‘passions’ and regional and religious customs and imbued with the particular moral, social, and political values and

\(^{204}\) “Je trouve que cette loi est vraiment triste parce que ce couvert de vouloir libérer les femmes, on les enferme.” – Samia Orosemane.
commitments—to patriotism, civic equality, liberty, and social solidarity—that make men and women French citizens.\textsuperscript{205}

The 2004 law is based on a history of discrimination that stems back to earlier colonial citizenship laws that discriminated against Muslims, as seen in Chapter 2.

Though the law does not stipulate a ban on headscarves specifically by name, it is often understood that it was created almost exclusively for Muslims. Halima asserts that, “It [the law] is not at all for all religions. That is not true at all. It is the fear of Islam and the place it holds in France… They are so afraid that they are trying everything to hide it and kill it, this presence.”\textsuperscript{206} Samy, a 27-year-old French Muslim male comedian (see Figure 13), likewise believes that the law was passed “solely for the Muslim community. It was done \textit{for} the veil.”\textsuperscript{207}

\textsuperscript{205} Fernando, “Reconfiguring Freedom,” 30.
\textsuperscript{206} “C’est pas du tout pour toutes les religions. Ça c’est pas vrai du tout. C’est la peur de l’islam et de la place qu’elle prend en France… Ils ont tellement peur qu’ils essaient de, par tous les moyen,s de la cacher, de la tuer, cette présence.” – Halima Boutahar.
\textsuperscript{207} “uniquement pour la communauté musulmane. C’était fait pour le voile.” – Samy Amara.
Dorsaf shares a similar opinion with Samy; she calls the law “liberticide,” which is a term combining the French *liberté*, meaning freedom, and the Latin *-cide*, meaning killing or destroying. The law’s discriminatory nature and implications literally destroy some girls’ opportunity for a free and quality education, which is a right of all French citizens. Dorsaf argues that the increasing fear of Islam and France’s search for a lost identity have created a stifling atmosphere for Muslim women—and they have not stopped: “How far can they go in the interpretation of this law?”

\[208 \text{“Jusqu’à où on peut aller dans l’interprétation de cette loi?”} \text{ – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.}\]
represent at all the original goals of the 1905 Law on the separation of Church and State: “It is a law that kills freedom because the spirit of laïcité in 1905 was to preserve for each and every one the possibility to live their religion.” For these women, the 2004 law does not have the capacity to allow for their individual freedom of religion because of its destructive implications. Dorsaf says in her interview that the pretext of this law is to “preserve young girls,” but also asks, “why make a law if it is [only] for dealing with a few cases [of girls being forced to wear the headscarf]?” She, like my other interviewees, invokes the discourses of personal choice and will that play a role in each woman’s decision to wear the veil.

Furthermore, the law can be construed as hypocritical because of its opposite effects to its supposed intentions. Asmaa points this out by stating, “As you say, we are not forcing women to wear it [the headscarf], why do you force her to remove it? That I do not understand. We are in a free society.” So why does this law, which inhibits the religious freedoms of veil-wearing women, still exist?

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209 “C’est une loi qui tue la liberté parce que l’esprit de la laïcité de 1905 c’était de preserver à tout à chacun la possibilité de vivre sa religion.” – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.
211 “Pourquoi faire une loi si c’est [seulement] pour traiter quelques cas [où on oblige la femme de le porter] ?” – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.
212 “Comme tu dis on oblige pas la femme à le mettre, pourquoi tu l’obliges à le retirer? Ça je comprends pas. On est dans une société libre.” – Asmaa Naifeh.
“I think that it is a question of perception and comprehension of some things... I am a feminist... and I wear a scarf on my head and I fight for my rights as a woman to do what I want to do. No one oppresses me.”

- Samia Orosemane, 32

Comedian and star of a one-woman show called “Femme de Couleurs” (Woman of Color); Paris, France

As a commonly cited “problem” with the veil, many feminists claim that the principle of the headscarf is not in accordance with feminism or the fight for women’s rights. When asked about this, my interviewees were overwhelmingly of the opinion that the headscarf and feminism absolutely fit together well. While some feminists who are against the veil argue that it is a sign of women’s oppression, veil-wearing and veil-supporting women like Hela proclaim that, “the headscarf is not a symbol of inferiority. No, it is a piece of clothing that I chose.” She says, “I would be oppressed if you forced me to remove it.” The themes of oppression and choice are raised here once again. However, contrary to what many may think, these women show that it is actually the exact opposite of widespread feminist thought that would liberate the Muslim woman. The 2004 law (supported by many modern French feminists) is not the solution. Rather, allowing these women to make the veiling choice themselves not only affirms their

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213 “Je pense que c’est une question de perception et de compréhension des choses... Je suis féministe... et je porte un foulard sur la tête et je milite pour mes droits en tant que femme de faire ce que moi j’ai envie de faire. Il n’y a personne qui m’oppresse.” – Samia Orosemane.

214 “Le foulard, ce n’est pas un symbole d’infériorité. Non, c’est un vêtement que j’ai choisi... Je serais opprimée si l’on m’oblige de l’enlever.” – Hela Khomsi.
freedom of conscience, religious expression, and free will, but also allows them to maintain their agency in society.

According to the women I interviewed, feminism and veiling are complementary, not incompatible. Each woman interviewed emphasized the fact that she herself is a feminist and wears a veil at the same time: Halima declares, “I am a woman. I fight for the right of women to have all the same rights and same duties as men, but I still wear the veil. For me, there is no contradiction,”215 while Khadija notes that, “veiling… is a right as a woman and it is feminist. It is not incompatible for me. It is absolutely compatible. I am a woman. I am a feminist. I am a feminist in the exact meaning of the term.”216 They both would like to make clear that they can unquestionably be feminists within their headscarves, which is a somewhat inconvincible claim to many modern feminists and movements in France today, such as the well-known movement that is rapidly gaining even more support, Ni Putes Ni Soumises, which means “Neither Whores, Nor Submissive” in French. In the past, primarily in 2004 and in 2011, this group has supported measures taken against the Islamic headscarf and proclaims on their website that they will work to “promote laïcité.”217 Fernando offers a critique of this particular secular organization:

I argue that [Fadela] Amara and her organisation Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS) are politically efficacious for the French government, shifting political and public

215 “Je suis femme. Je milite pour le droit des femmes d’avoir tous les mêmes droits et mêmes obligations que les hommes, mais pour autant je porte le voile. Pour moi, il y a aucune contradiction.” – Halima Boutahar.
216 “Voiler... c’est un droit en tant que femme et c’est féministe. Ce n’est pas incompatible pour moi. C’est tout à fait compatible. Je suis femme, je suis féministe, je suis féministe dans le sens du terme.” – Khadija Idrissi Idary.
focus (and blame) from the structural root causes of the pressing social and economic problems in the banlieues – unemployment, social segregation, drug and gang violence, delinquency, and overcrowded schools – to ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ and, consequently, to symbolic panaceas like the headscarf ban.\textsuperscript{218}

The movement \textit{Ni Putes Ni Soumises} asserts that Islam inherently suppresses women. However, my interviewees would disagree with this claim. Against the patriarchal interpretations, which have been commonly made throughout Islamic history, they endorse a more feminine reading of the Islamic sources.\textsuperscript{219} Asmaa mentioned that, “The inequality of the Muslim woman, that’s not Islam… Islam does not differentiate between woman and man,”\textsuperscript{220} and went on to show how both genders are included equally in the Islamic faith: “If you read the Quran, you always find \textit{muslim} [masculine] and \textit{muslima} [feminine], \textit{rajul} [man] and \textit{imra’a} [woman]…”\textsuperscript{221} Woman and man are equal in Islam, which is in contrast with what much of the non-Muslim world seems to believe. But Dorsaf clarifies this as she says, “For us women, Islam was never a way to close off or victimize or restrain women’s freedom, on the contrary. We always have the feeling—not the feeling, more than the feeling—a \textit{certainty} that Islam gave woman the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{220} “L’inégalité de la femme musulmane, c’est pas l’islam… l’islam, il fait pas la différence entre femme et homme.” – Asmaa Naifeh.
\item \textsuperscript{221} “Si vous lisez le Coran, tu trouves toujours muslim et muslima, rajul et imra’a…” – Asmaa Naifeh.
\end{itemize}
best place.”

For her, Islam has an “extraordinary liberality for women” and “the headscarf is a religious practice and therefore it must be inscribed in [women’s] freedoms because some women chose it just as some women would also choose not to wear the headscarf.”

The headscarf is, in her view, inherently entitled to be included as one of the freedoms that women enjoy, right from the very beginning since women have the freedom of religion and choice, both of which are exemplified in the decision to wear the headscarf or not. As Samy says, “It [feminism] has as a goal the liberation of woman… Well, exactly, if a woman wants to wear a veil, it is a form of feminism. It is a form of freedom.”

Unlike the interviewees of Jouili in “Beyond Emancipation,” all my veiled female interlocutors were clear about their own feminist identities and wish to connect their Islamic faith to their own notion of feminism. This might be due to a growing accessibility of Islamic feminist voices in the French Muslim public.

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222 “Pour nous, les femmes, l’islam n’a jamais été une façon de fermer ou de brimer ou de brider la liberté de la femme, au contraire. On a toujours le sentiment—pas le sentiment, plus que le sentiment—une certitude que l’islam a donné la meilleure place à la femme.” – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.

223 “une libéralité extraordinaire pour la femme.” – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.

224 “Le foulard est une pratique religieuse et donc elle doit être inscrite dans les libertés [des femmes] parce que des femmes l’ont choisi comme des femmes choisiraient de ne pas porter le foulard.” – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.

225 “ Ça [le féminisme] a pour but de libérer la femme... justement, si la femme veut porter le voile, c’est une forme de féminisme. C’est une forme de liberté.” – Samy Amara.

226 See, for example, the recent translation of Islamic feminist writings into French: Zahra Ali, Féminismes Islamiques (Paris: La Fabrique, 2012).
“You can see it in all media, it’s bad. Unfortunately, I find that it [Islam] is presented badly deliberately... to give Islam a bad image.”

- Asmaa Naifeh, 50

Instructor & trainer; Islamic Center of Villeneuve d’Ascq (Centre Islamique de Villeneuve d’Ascq), France

French media and publicity play a large role in everyday life for French people. The public can be heavily influenced by what is seen on television or in newspapers or magazines. All media types, from cutting edge news stories to social networks and blogging, have profound effects on viewers and readers. Because of highly publicized world events, and specifically those in primarily Muslim countries, some Westerners have developed a fear of Islam, an “Islamophobia,” since 9/11, as discussed in Chapter 3. As Samia points out in her interview, “even the word ‘Islam’ means ‘peace,’” not fundamentalism. Samia continued by passionately expressing that the representation of Islam and the veiled woman in the French and even global media is inaccurate and unjust: “It’s always the same images of terrorism, fundamentalism, Islamism… In general they represent Muslims as... violent people, barbaric people... and it’s foolish, it really is.”

Muslim people are spoken about in a general and collective fashion, which is not at all fitting since, just like Christian people or Hispanic people or Asian people or

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227 “Vous pouvez constater dans tous les médias, c’est mal. Malheureusement, moi je trouve, il [l’islam] est présenté mal exprè pour... pour donner mauvaise image à l’islam.” – Asmaa Naifeh.

228 “le terme même ‘islam’ signifie ‘paix’.” – Samia Orosemane.

229 “C’est toujours les mêmes images de terrorisme, d’intégrisme, islamisme... En général, on représente les musulmans comme... des gens violents, des gens barbares... et que c’est bête, vraiment.” – Samia Orosemane.
any other generalized category, Muslims and Arabs are not all the same. And yet the media fails to represent the peaceful, loving, and accepting side of Islam. All that is seen is an Islam that is “the religion of the forbidden… that is trying to force itself on France… and to place itself in opposition to the French,”230 as Halima says. Lahcen, a 34-year-old male Muslim and French-born comedian of Moroccan origins, is of a similar opinion: “We truly become terrorists… Voilà, for them, it is the synonym for Muslim.”231 He continues, “You see, they have a little book with synonyms, and ‘Muslim,’ colon, ‘terrorist, Islamist, Salafist, jihadist’… And there you go, that is the problem, it’s really the bad image that the media gives… They misinform now.”232

Muslim women are similarly represented as an entire body that is wholly “submissive,” as Samy says, to “an evil man who ‘forces’ her, who shuts her off in the kitchen… But that is false. It is completely untrue.”233 Similarly, Samia asserts that veiled Muslim women are portrayed in the media with “patriarchal images where the man is always there, ruling, the woman in the back, oppressed, with no words to say.”234 But she refutes this claim in her show by asserting, “Behind me there is not my father, my brother, my husband hidden in the bushes to see if I take off my headscarf or not. It is a personal choice, it is a spiritual journey that I made and it is something that I decide to

230 “la religion de tout interdit… qui cherche à s’imposer en France… et de se mettre en opposition avec les Français.” – Halima Boutahar.
231 “On passe vraiment pour des terroristes… Voilà, pour eux, c’est le synonyme de musulman.” – Lahcen Lupin.
232 “Tu vois, ils ont un petit bouquin avec des synonymes, et ‘musulman,’ deux points, terroriste, islamiste, salafiste, jihadiste… Et donc voilà, c’est ça le problème, c’est vraiment la mauvaise image que donnent les médias… Ils désinforment maintenant.” – Lahcen Lupin.
233 “soumise … un homme méchant qui la ‘force,’ qui l’enferme dans la cuisine… Alors que c’est faux. C’est totalement faux.” – Samy Amara.
234 “Ces images… patriarcales où l’homme est toujours là à gouverner, que la femme est derrière, oppressée, qu’elle n’a pas son mot à dire.” – Samia Orosemane.
maintain."\(^{235}\) Samia thus breaks the stereotype of the submissive woman shaped by images seen in recent media. Halima observes that Muslim women, especially veiled Muslim women, are viewed as “submissive and brainwashed women, who don’t know how to think, forced. It’s always that.”\(^{236}\) This perception of Muslim veil-wearing women leads to an entirely skewed and often false vision of what these women are really like. On the other end of the spectrum, Asmaa points out that often, they are not seen at all\(^{237}\) or are “stigmatized,”\(^{238}\) as Khadija claims.

This problem of a misrepresentation of an entire group of diverse people causes conflict and tension because every woman in a headscarf begins to be viewed as an enemy, as someone whom one must avoid, someone who does not deserve the same freedoms as everybody else. It is important to break from this stereotype and put an end to this Islamophobia, beginning with an acceptance of the headscarf as an individual and free personal choice to be made without outside influence, neither convincing one to wear a veil nor persuading her not to do so. French politicians and government officials have brushed veiled women off to the side and created a hostile environment in which they must continue to live, essentially as an oppressed people under the pretext of being liberated. Their individual experiences and stories are important aspects necessary to truly understand how laws like that of 2004 and discrimination leftover from colonialism have affected veiled Muslim women’s daily lives in the public sphere. Equipped with

\(^{235}\) “Derrière moi il n’y a pas mon père, mon frère, mon mari qui sont cachés derrière les buissons pour voir si mon foulard je l’enlève ou pas. C’est un choix personnel, c’est un cheminement spirituel que moi j’ai fait et c’est quelque chose que moi je décide d’affirmer.” — Samia Orosemane.

\(^{236}\) “des femmes soumises et endoctrinées, qui ne savent pas réfléchir, forcées. C’est toujours ça.” — Halima Boutahar.

\(^{237}\) “Premier mot, on ne voit pas, on ne les voit pas.” — Asmaa Naifeh.

\(^{238}\) “On les stigmatisent.” — Khadija Idrissi Idary.
this information, one can begin to grasp the sense of a marginalized population, but where does that lead? As Dorsaf says, “Question mark on the future. When we have no history, we have no past. The present is less apparent and the future even less likely.”

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239 “Point d’interrogation sur l’avenir. Quand on n’a pas d’histoire, on n’a pas de passé. Le présent est moins évident et le futur encore moins probable.” – Dorsaf ben Dhiab.
CONCLUSION

Laïcité and secularism in the more general (English) sense evolved in tandem with religion. In the French context, it was the result of a long history of church interference with the state that eventually caused rebellion in the form of the French Revolution in 1789. Through laïcité, the government attempted to protect the purity of the public sphere by detaching religion from government with the law of 1905 on the separation of church and state. Laïcité later became associated with the most pristine French public institution: education. With Chirac’s law of 2004, conspicuous religious signs disappeared from schools and in 2011, laïcité was again invoked to support Sarkozy’s law that banned the face veil from all public spaces.

France declared its “civilizing mission” in Algeria in 1830, thus commencing over one hundred years of occupation and colonial rule. The notion of Algerians as an inherent “Other” to the French initiated the concept of the French as having a superior race and culture. During French regimes in Algeria, Muslims were disproportionately discriminated against, as evidenced by colonial doctrine such as the Crémieux Decree in 1870. Racism was apparent even in the early to mid-twentieth century as the French government recruited “cheap labor” from its primary colony and belittled the importance and humanity of the Algerian immigrants, an attitude that continued through the Algerian War, which began in 1954.

After the Algerian War ended in 1962, the newly independent Algerian people, mainly men, took advantage of their continued ability to migrate to France, a policy leftover from colonial times, and began doing so to look for work. Married women and
their children then seized the opportunity to join the men and their families already in mainland France. As the numbers of Arabs and Muslims in France increased, France began implementing measures to regulate post-colonial Muslim subjects in French cities into the later parts of the 20th century. With the increasing visibility of Islam and Muslims on the global scene, the French began to fear radical Islam and associated it with the most visible Muslim symbol: the headscarf. Rampant Islamophobia ensued and eventually took over the French collective consciousness and led to the 2004 and 2011 laws concerning headscarves.

The interviews I conducted in France exposed the true experiences that these laws have caused Muslim women—and even men—to endure on a daily basis, many of which are negative. Headscarf-wearing women’s voices deserve to be heard in this debate since they are the primary individuals being affected. The interviews in Chapter Four show that Muslims in France are dealing with harsh realities every day and that Muslim women specifically who wear a headscarf are being forced into different fields of work and study simply because of their choice of religious observance. They are misrepresented in the media, along with Islam in general, and are often unable to fully exercise their own agency in society because of the institutionalized oppression they face.

My interlocutors demonstrate that the headscarf can be and often is a way to reaffirm their own feminist identities since the veiled women I spoke with were all overwhelmingly of the opinion that feminism and the veil are completely complementary to each other. One does not contradict the other. These women feel liberated within their veils, which allow them to realize their full potential in the public sphere while detaching their mind from their body and granting them the ability to engage in public discourse on
the same level as others. They are thus able to create a world for themselves where they are seen for their intellect instead of their sexualized body and therefore release themselves from the objectifying grasp of a male-dominated society.

Since discrimination in France against Arabs and Muslims has such a long history, it will be that much more difficult to change the common French notion of the Arab as an “Other” that has persisted through time and has displayed itself in many different forms. From colonialism and immigration policy to the current tense political atmosphere in which the media is showing a seemingly never-ending strand of images of Islamic fundamentalism, the French are unable to detach themselves from their prejudices that have been held for generations.

The French government has succumbed to these sentiments of discrimination and has undeservingly retransmitted that viewpoint onto veil-wearing Muslim women in France with its laws that, at their core, do not truly respect everyone’s basic human rights, such as the freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and freedom of conscience. Many veil-wearing women in France have chosen to veil for their own spiritual and personal reasons and are therefore not being oppressed by others who force them to cover, but are rather being more violated instead by governments and laws that do not allow them to express their religious beliefs in a free manner.

The legal aspect of this debate has been largely underdeveloped. France’s laws of 2004 and 2011 have serious implications for Muslim veiled women in France, as one can see based on my interviews, as well as the works by various other scholars, such as Mayanthi L. Fernando and Jeanette S. Jouili. The effects of these laws can be severely disrupting to daily life not only for veiled women, but also for many Muslim men and
non-veiled Muslim women simply because they foster the continued discrimination
against Arabs and Muslims in France that has persisted for almost two centuries.
However, the laws have not been fully explored, as of yet. They must be examined in
relation to human and women’s rights documents—French, European, and
international—which outline certain freedoms as rights. There are numerous
declarations, conventions, and covenants to which France is a signatory that stipulate that
everyone should be able to express themselves freely and fully in all aspects of life,
including religion. If the headscarf is a peaceful expression of one’s religion, what right
does any government have to ban it?
Glossary

1. **Age of Enlightenment** – European intellectual movement in the 17th and 18th centuries where the great thinkers attempted to make sense of the physical world without reference to the spiritual world. Enlightened thinkers used the scientific method and rejected traditional practices of religion for which they could not find concrete reasoning. Also known as the “Age of Reason.”

2. **Ancien régime** – the traditional political system that was in France from about the 15th century up until the French Revolution.


4. **Banlieue** – French for “suburb.” In relation to the 2005 riots, this meant the neighborhoods surrounding Paris, outside of the periphery boulevard. These areas are, generally speaking, mainly inhabited by descendants of immigrants from Africa, both north and sub-Saharan, and are characterized by poverty and unemployment.

5. **Beur** – from the verlan (French slang language that developed in the suburbs) for “Arabe.” Beurs are the children of immigrants from the Middle East and, more primarily, North Africa.

6. **Camps d’assignation à résidence surveillée (CARS)** – “Residential Camps Under Surveillance.” Makeshift prisons that Vichy France had used during World War II in Paris in which thousands of North Africans were interned in 1958 because they were seen as a threat to public order during the Algerian War.
7. **Concordat of Bologna** – agreement made in the year 1516 to separate the King’s and the Pope’s powers that actually ended up interlacing politics and religious leaders.

8. **Concordat of 1801** – agreement made by Napoleon Bonaparte’s regime after the French Revolution that resulted in religion being more closely monitored and regulated by the state.

9. Confessional state – a state that has one specific official religion that is practiced.

10. **Conseil d’état** – “State Council.” France’s highest judicial power.

11. Constituent Assembly – governing body in France during a part of the French Revolution, between 1789 and 1791.

12. **Front de Libération Nationale (FLN)** – “National Liberation Front.” A socialist political party in Algeria that was originally set up to revolt against French rule in Algeria in 1954.

13. **Islamism** – a movement in the Muslim world aimed at using Islamic teachings, writings, and values as guidelines for politics. “Political Islam.” Not inherently violent or dangerous by nature, but can sometimes be loosely linked to Islamic fundamentalism.

14. **Laïcité** – the French version of secularism. Can be understood to mean: the complete separation of governmental organizations, projects, and institutions from any and all public displays of religion, being that these displays are seen to somehow unsettle public disposition, in working toward the goal of a neutral society in which religion is unapparent except in the private and personal spheres of life. In contrast to the American ideal of secularism meaning the tolerance of
all religions, the French ideal of *laïcité* means the tolerance and acceptance of no religion in the public sphere.

15. *Laïc/laïque* – “secular.” In accordance with *laïcité*.


17. Protestant Reformation – split between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in the sixteenth century.

18. Reign of Terror – period during the French Revolution (1793-1794) where thousands of people were publicly executed for being supposed enemies by order of Maximilian Robespierre.

19. *Sécularisme* – “secularism” in French, but only used to refer to Anglicized secularism, not the French model. (*Séculaire* – “secular”).
Appendix I: Interview Details


Mr. Amara is a 27-year-old Muslim comedian in Paris who was born in France.


Ms. Amir is a 44-year-old academic director who was born in Egypt and moved to France 11 years ago. She also works in an Arab embassy in France in the Cultural Office. She has dual citizenship between the two countries and considers her life at home to be one of an Egyptian, but that of the French when she is out in public. She wears what she calls a “voile discret”—a discreet veil—meaning a beret or scarf that covers her hair and ties in the back but does not hang down over her shoulders the way a traditional hijab does, along with a high-cut blouse that covers her neck and shoulders. She began wearing the headscarf at age 13.

3. Nour el-Dine Amir – January 6, 2013 at 6:45pm in Boulogne-Billancourt

Mr. Amir is the 19-year-old son of Ms. Amal Amir. He is currently a student at a specialized engineering school in Paris. He was born in Egypt but moved to France at age 8 and has dual citizenship.


Mr. Baubérot is a well-known historian and sociologist who created the “History and Sociology of Laïcité” department at the École pratique des hautes études in Paris. He
specializes in religions and was the only member of the Stasi Commission in 2003 who did not vote for the report that led to the 2004 law that banned religious symbols in schools.

5. Dorsaf ben Dhiab – January 2, 2013 at 3:00pm in Villeneuve d’Ascq
Ms. Ben Dhiab is a 40-year-old mother of four and also the Chief Administrative Officer (Sécretaire générale) of the European Forum of Muslim Women (Forum Européen des Femmes Musulmanes), based in Brussels, Belgium and Lille, France. She is teacher-certified, gives conferences and lectures, and also maintains active membership in various associations. She was born in Tunisia and has lived in France for 21 years and wears the traditional hijab, which she began wearing at 17 years old.

6. Halima Boutahar – January 2, 2013 at 4:30pm in Villeneuve d’Ascq
Ms. Boutahar is a 29-year-old stay-at-home mother who was born in France and is of Moroccan descent. She has been wearing a traditional hijab for 13 years.

7. Khadija Idrissi Idary – January 2, 2013 at 5:30pm in Villeneuve d’Ascq
Ms. Idary is 34 years old and works as a secretary at a private Muslim high school. She is also the director of the Women’s Department (Département des Femmes) at the Islamic Center in Villeneuve d’Ascq. She was born in France and is of Moroccan descent and describes her headscarf simply as a “foulard”—scarf, or hijab, and has been wearing it since 1998.
Ms. Khomsi is a 47-year-old mother and teacher, as well as the president of two groups, the French League of the Muslim Woman (Ligue Française de la Femme Musulmane) based in Saint-Denis, France, and Association AmElle in Lille, France. She was born in Tunisia but considers herself French now and wears a traditional hijab, which she has been wearing since age 13.

Mr. Laib is a 49-year-old Muslim teacher of Islamic religion in Belgium. He was born in Algeria and has lived in France for 23 years and considers himself French.

Ms. Lecocq is a 52-year-old professor at INALCO (Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales) and at Paris 3 – Sorbonne-Nouvelle University. She was born in Egypt and was raised in a francophone context by attending French schools and then moved to France in 2004. She considers herself “égyptienne francophone.” She is a Muslim woman who chooses not to wear a headscarf.

11. Lahcen Lupin – December 30, 2012 at 9:35pm in Paris
Mr. Lupin is a 34-year-old Muslim comedian in Paris who was born in France and is of Moroccan descent.
12. Samia Orosemane – December 30, 2012 at 9:00pm in Paris
Ms. Orosemane is a 32-year-old actress, comedian, and star of her own one-woman show in Paris, called “Femme de Couleurs” (Woman of Color). She was born in France and is of Tunisian descent. She wears a turban during her shows (a scarf wrapped tightly around her head with her hair underneath) along with a long-sleeve high-necked blouse, and a traditional hijab when she goes to a mosque. She decided to veil for the first time in 2002.

Mr. Stora is a well-known historian and scholar on North Africa, specializing in Algeria. He is a professor at the University of Paris-13 and at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales. He also founded the Institut Maghreb-Europe.

14. Four-woman anonymous focus group – December 29, 2012 at 4:30pm in Saint-Denis
These four women all wear a chador, are French-born Muslim women, and they range in age from 22 to 26.

15. Anonymous woman (“Asmaa Naifeh”) – January 2, 2013 at 5:00pm in Villeneuve d’Ascq
This woman is a 50-year-old instructor at an Islamic Center. She was born in Algeria and has lived in France for 30 years. She wears a traditional hijab, which she began wearing
at 16 or 17 years old, and wishes to remain anonymous in my research, so I refer to her as Asmaa Naifeh throughout this paper.
Appendix II: Interview Questions

1. Pourquoi est-ce que vous portez le foulard ? Depuis combien de temps le portez-vous ?
   - “Why do you wear the veil? For how long have you worn it?”

2. Nommez quelques unes de vos expériences qui étaient différentes de celles des autres femmes françaises, à cause du port de votre foulard.
   - “Can you name some of your experiences that were different than those of other French women, because of your headscarf?”

3. Que pensez-vous de la loi de 2004 sur l’interdiction des signes religieux ostentatoires dans les écoles ?
   - “What do you think of the law of 2004 on the ban of ostentatious religious signs in schools?”

4. Que pensez-vous de la loi de 2011 interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l’espace public ?
   - “What do you think of the 2011 law banning the concealment of the face in public spaces?”

5. Est-ce que vous avez participé aux manifestations contre la loi sur l’interdiction de la burqa en 2011 ? Comment avez-vous vécu cela ?
   - “Did you participate in the protests against the law banning the burqa in 2011? How was that for you?”

6. Marine le Pen a dit récemment qu’elle voudrait interdire le voile dans tous les espaces publics. Qu’est-ce que vous pensez de cela ?
– “Marine le Pen said recently that she would like to ban the veil in all public spaces. What do you think of that?”

7. Qu’est-ce que vous pensez de la relation entre le voile, le féminisme, et les droits des femmes?
– “What do you think of the relationship between the veil, feminism, and women’s rights?”

8. À votre avis, comment les femmes voilées sont-elles représentées dans les médias et aux yeux des américains? Et l’islam en général?
– “In your opinion, how are veiled women represented in the media and in the eyes of Americans? And Islam in general?”
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