

ISLAM AND FRANCE: COOPERATION, INTEGRATION AND RESISTANCE

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Liberal Studies.

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## DEDICATION

To my wonderful parents for all of their love and support

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines France's relationship with its Muslim population. It explains some of France's basic guiding principles in order to understand the general expectations of its citizenry. It also looks at France's colonial period to see how matters of Islam were treated at the time and how the minority population was seen by the white French majority. It also takes a look at the current perceptions of Muslims in France. This research also attempts to understand some of the root causes of resistance committed by France's Muslim and Arab citizens by looking at demographics, political rhetoric, legislation, and media coverage concerning this community.

## PREFACE

The motivation for this study came from being in France during the January 7, 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. Being in France during these attacks made me want to know, why France? What is happening in France with its Muslim population that has lead terrorist organizations to be able to successfully recruit French citizens?

I defended my thesis the day before the November 13th attacks in Paris that claimed the lives of 130 people. It is of the utmost importance that we learn from these tragedies to see what can be done to prevent them from happening in the future.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### France's Muslim Question

On the morning of January 7, 2015 I was walking down *Rue de Longchamp* in Paris's 16th *arrondissement* with two French friends, Lucie and Pierre. Lucie got a text message and checked her phone. The message was from her dad telling her to be careful because there had been an attack in Paris and several people were killed. None of us could believe it. We didn't have much information so we went to the nearest McDonald's so we could connect to wi-fi and find out exactly what was going on. Along with several messages from concerned family members and friends back in the United States, I read that the attack had been committed as an act of terrorism. These attacks would come to be known as the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and were part of other attacks that would be committed in the *Ile-de-France* region throughout the next 48 hours. The attack gave birth to the slogan, *Je suis Charlie* (I am Charlie). The news was shocking for all of us and it brought back feelings I had as a child during the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The city was solemn that day. It was a winter day in Paris so naturally it was cloudy and cold. We saw a lot of police near *Champs-Elysées*, more than I had ever seen in the area. We all avoided the metro and stayed in the 16th *arrondissement* near my apartment.

Lucie and I said goodbye to Pierre that evening and went back to my apartment. We both logged onto Facebook and started reading. She shared posts with me that her friends had made. The *Je suis Charlie* slogan had gone viral. It was everywhere on social media. The whole experience was surreal. People were uniting as French and condemning religious extremism. I thought

it was great that people knew it was extremism rather than just Islam that caused the attacks. What I didn't know is what some French people categorize as extremism—wearing the hijab, fasting during Ramadan, having a beard. The whole experience made me want to know more. It left me with so many different questions. What was France's relationship with Muslims like? Why was it so important for the government to plan a unity rally? Why were some of my Muslim friends not jumping on the *Je suis Charlie* bandwagon? How did the French stereotypes of Muslims come to be? All of these questions stuck with me and so this thesis topic was born.

I will discuss French national Identity in order to understand some of the basic republican principles that impact France's relationship with Islam, Arabs and Muslims. I will also discuss French Muslim identity and stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs. I will look at the French discourse on Muslim women dating back to the colonial period in Algeria. I will also look at the poverty that exists among many Arabs and Muslims, the racism and discrimination they face and how they fight it. I will argue that France's colonial period has led the government to insist that French citizens not only be French by birth but that they become French through assimilation in order to create a unified French society. I will argue that while France does not like any kind of religion in the public, the government makes it harder for Muslims than other religious groups. I will argue that France sees Muslim women as liberated and educated only if they are secular and do not dress modestly. Lastly, I will argue that the poverty, racism and discrimination that French Muslims and French people with Arab immigration history face, leads them to be accused of communalism when attempting to assert their rights, leaving them with few options.

## Chapter 2

### IDENTITY

#### Construction of French National Identity

It is important to achieve a general understanding of how France came to be the nation it is today. In order to do this I have presented several important aspects of French history to show how France developed its model of Republicanism.

*Liberté, égalité, fraternité* (liberty, equality and fraternity) are the terms most closely associated with France's Republican values and are deeply ingrained in the concept of French national identity. They reflect France's ideas about how society should function and what French citizens are supposed to value the most. These guiding principles came out of the French Enlightenment of the 17th century.

#### The Common Good

The intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment brought with it *philosophes*, revolutionary ideas, the importance of public opinion and the emergence of the ever so important concept of secularism or *laïcité*.<sup>1</sup> The French Enlightenment began in the 17th century and lasted throughout the 18th century and into the early 19th century. Enlightenment ideas challenged the status quo of the church and the monarchy with the notion that human reason was superior to all other forms of guidance and authority (Popkin 21). The Enlightenment (during 17th century) promoted a shift away from the church and toward a more rational way of thinking. The 18th

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of *laïcité*, commonly translated as secularism, should be understood as intrinsically multivalent.

century French Enlightenment brought with it the application of rational thinking to politics causing many people to question their status as citizens and the role of government.<sup>2</sup> Some of the *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment who helped to create France's modern day political and social landscape were Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Diderot.

Rousseau saw himself as an outsider in this group of intellectual elite and presented himself as someone who was more comfortable with common people. This combined with his emphasis on sentiment over reason made him popular with “those who found both French institutions and Enlightenment culture too artificial and too elitist” (Popkin 22). Rousseau's ideas in *The Social Contract* had a huge impact on French politics and while it was most popular after the French Revolution in 1789, it still helped to shape modern French Republicanism. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau set forth the idea that all men should have equal rights and that government authority should come from the consent of its citizens. He “envisioned a utopia in which all members would put aside their private interests for the common good; those who refused would be excluded from the community” (Popkin 22). This marks the beginning of the definition of the French citizen and also creates a requirement one must meet in order to take part in French society. Explained a little differently by John Bowen, “According to the Republican way of thinking, living together in a society requires agreement on basic values” (Bowen 11). This requirement becomes the basis for assimilation and integration arguments aimed at certain members of French society as well as arguments concerning secularism. It is important, however, that French citizens grow up knowing what the requirements are to be a French citizen and this is where the

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<sup>2</sup> While a discussion of the French Enlightenment is not the purpose of this study, it is important to understand that the ideas and philosophers of this period had an immeasurable impact on French political thinking.

French schools come to play a key role. It becomes the responsibility of the Republican educational institution to produce secular French citizens.

### Secularism/*laïcité*

A good working definition of *laïcité* is the lack of religious involvement in government and the lack of government involvement in religion, otherwise known as secularism. It is, however, necessary to explore the term in order to understand its importance, history and relevance to French life, government and citizenship. The difference between French *laïcité* and the idea of secularism in general is that it has become a marker of one's Frenchness and proof of citizenship and French identity. The French principle is more difficult to explain because public space can also be interpreted as a place where religion should be absent. One of the first laws made concerning *laïcité* were the laws of 1901 and 1905. While the term was not explicitly stated in either law, the result was that of creating a boundary between the government and religion (public and private). The law of 1901 on associations was followed by a law in 1905 that nullified Napoleon's concordat that had previously allowed the involvement of the church with the state. The laws of 1901 and 1905 are the basis for how religion is treated in French society.

When interviewed by John Bowen, the *Chef du Bureau des Cultes* within the Ministry of the Interior said this concerning religion: "There is no legal definition of *culte*. You know the word *religion* has no place in French law. Religion has to do with the relationship of the individual to God. *Le culte* is the outward expression of that relationship" (Bowen 17). This branch of the French government typically acts as an arbitrator. According to Sevaistre the *culte* is confined to three areas: "the celebration of the *culte*, as in the mass; its buildings; and the teaching of its

principles.” (Bowen 17) Technically speaking these are the three domains of religion that are protected by French law and anything that falls outside of these areas is seen as disruptive to public order. Seviatstre referenced France’s history of religious wars as the reason France developed its system of *laïcité*. He continued by saying that the *culte* is limited by the *Bureau Central des Cultes* in order to prevent wars (Bowen 17). This conversation between John Bowen and Vianney Sevaistre shows that France is very aware of its past. This past has manifested itself not only in the French collective memory but also its laws.

According to Baubérot , the modern form of *laïcité* comes from France’s history of dealing with issues concerning the church and the state (Bowen 23). Throughout France’s history the church oftentimes found itself at odds with the French state. *Laïcité* is the end result of France learning how to regulate religious practices without prohibiting French citizens from believing in a particular religion. How the French government goes about regulating religion in the public sphere is a topic of interest for many scholars today.

It is important to understand that France has a certain way of discussing “issues of contemporary social life.” According to Bowen several commonalities arise when these issues are discussed including: “the penchant for explaining an institution by giving its genealogy, the idea that one finds both liberty and order only through the intervention of the state, and the strong distinction between the public practice of organized religion and the private activities characteristic of one’s personal religious belief” (Bowen 19). One of the best examples of the public sphere and *laïcité* is the public school. The fight for public schooling free from religion can be dated back to the 1880s with the Jules “Ferry Laws” that brought *laïcité* to this domain. This was the era of turning “peasants into Frenchmen” and the tool that facilitated this transition was the pub-

lic school. This public institution is charged with creating French citizens who have common understanding of French identity making *laïcité* an important part of that identity.

The boundaries of public and private space must be elaborated upon in order to understand the complexity of *laïcité* and how it is regulated in public. According to Bowen there are three ways of thinking about “public” in France. One definition he uses is that of Blandine Kriegel who defined public as “institutions and actors who are part of the state” such as public and civil service (*service public, fonction publique*). The second meaning is “all that is out in shared social space is public.” The third way of thinking about French public can be understood as “anything that is in the general interest” (Bowen 29-30). In this last definition it becomes clear that anything concerning public utility or common good can and should be regulated by the state in order to ensure *laïcité*. These three definitions often mix with one another when looking at different organizations. For example, anything that serves a public utility such as a school, public or private, is subject to regulation of the state because it “serves the public interest” (Bowen 31). The justification for the creation of the private school even uses a combination of the aforementioned definitions of “public”. According to Bowen, because the private school “neither belongs to the state nor is open to the public, but it may serve public utility, usually as a result of a contract with the state” it becomes a domain where *laïcité* is unable to be regulated but can still be monitored by the state (Bowen 31). To complicate things further, former President Jacques Chirac defined *laïcité* itself as “a protected, privileged, multifunctional social space within which Republican principles could survive and prosper” (Chirac). By stating that “*laïcité* protects the freedom to believe or not to believe, to express and practice one’s faith, but also that ‘it is the privileged site for meeting and exchange, where people find themselves and can best contribute

to the national community. It is the neutrality of the public space that permits the peaceful coexistence of different religions” (Chirac).<sup>3</sup> This definition given by Chirac still relies on the definitions of public space previously explored but reframes *laïcité* as the neutrality of public space. Ensuring the neutrality of public space has become one of the justifications for the prohibition of ‘conspicuous signs of religion’ in public schools.

### Challenges of Islam and *laïcité*

*Laïcité* on the surface seems to be something that the French government should be able to define and carry out through its policies in a simplified manner but because there is no generally agreed upon definition of the term and because Islam seems to have brought new challenges to the Republic, it continues to be a contested issue. France was traditionally a Catholic nation and that relationship of religion with the Republic is still seen today. For example, public holidays still coincide with traditionally Catholic holidays. Whether France recognizes it or not, religion is still a part of French Republican life. That being said, when a group of people want to practice their religion in a public way it creates problems especially if the religion is different from that of the catholic norm. This means that when Muslims outwardly show their religion in the public domain it is seen as offensive to France’s secular citizens. The question of *laïcité* then becomes a question of citizenship. In other words, French Muslims who do not confine their religious practices to private space are unable to be seen as full-fledged French citizens. This brings us back to the idea of the French public school.

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<sup>3</sup> “*Ouverte et généreuse, elle est le lieu privilégié de la rencontre et de l’échange où chacun se retrouve pour apporter le meilleur à la communauté nationale. C’est la neutralité de l’espace public qui permet la coexistence harmonieuse des différentes religions.*”

The public school is, as mentioned, supposed to create French citizens. It becomes a place where *laïcité* –especially after the 2004 headscarf ban– is important.<sup>4</sup>The public school fights for the minds of young French children against the control of religion. This is no easy task because the experiences of French children are all different. This, however, does not stop the Republic from attempting to create uniform French citizens. The importance of the public school can be dated back to the Ferry Era with the creation of public schools to “propagate loyalty to the nation and its new political institutions” (Popkin 153).

The “Ferry Laws” made elementary education free and mandatory for all French children. The schools were void of religious education nullifying an 1850 law that allowed religious instruction. These laws also prohibited religious clergy from teaching in public schools. To further illustrate how important the public schools became to the Republic during the 1880s, Popkin said this: “Schoolteachers male and female were expected to represent the Republic and to form a network of loyalists capable of combatting the influence of the only other institution that was present in every community, the Catholic Church” (Popkin 153). This citation not only shows how central the notion of loyalty to the Republic became in the 1880s but also clearly shows that the French citizen was to learn to identify as French before identifying as Catholic. The tool used to create this transition was to be the public school. To create an even stronger sense of French identity and belonging a book called *Two Children’s Tour of France* was used (Popkin 153). This book was one of the more popular books used in the French public school. It created the image in the minds of French children that they were all part of a French family. “It glorified the country’s

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<sup>4</sup> The 2004 headscarf ban caused several debates concerning *laïcité*. because it banned “all conspicuous signs of religion” from public schools. The ban will be discussed in greater detail later.

great soldiers and thinkers, downplayed the role of religion and denigrated the value of regional dialects and other potential threats to national unity” (Popkin 153). This taught children that religion or any other mode of identification is at odds with French Republican identity. French children were to be French before anything else. The national curriculum also became uniform so that all French students were learning the same things in order to reduce regional differences (Popkin 154). The importance of the school in creating French citizens also makes the educator a guardian of the Republic, a role that continues to be assumed by French educators today. To illustrate this idea, Popkin cites the following exhortation to Republican educators, “You don't have to shout I am a Republican from the rooftops but if anyone attacks Republicanism in front of you, you must have the courage to defend it” (Popkin 153). The creation of a strong sense of French citizenship and Republican unity is also one of the reasons the French public school has been seen to have failed some of its citizens and motivated them to find their identity elsewhere. This notion will be discussed in more detail later.

Colonization, France's collective memory and *laïcité* have created tension between Islam and the Republic. Bowen says this, “Islam's public ritual practices, which include sacrifice, scarf-wearing, and prostrations in exotic buildings, are felt by some to threaten public order” (Bowen 20). This not not because the religion is necessarily more visible but perhaps because it is different (a type of other) or maybe because the practices remind people of the colonial period. According to Mayanthi Fernando, “Islam has been portrayed as antagonistic to *laïcité* and concomitantly, as needing to be secularized--sometimes with punitive laws so as to conform” (Fernando 20). The notion of Islam needing to be secularized by the State creates a grey area where the State is permitted to involve itself in religion while at the same time not crossing

the boundary of state interaction with religion. Fernando quotes Hussein Aragma to explain this concept, “the secular state is always drawing a line between the religious and the secular...[by] promoting an abstract notion of ‘religion,’ defining the spaces it should inhabit, authorizing the sensibilities proper to it, and then working to discipline actual religious traditions so as to conform to this abstract notion to fit into those spaces, and to express those sensibilities” (Fernando 21). This shows that the secular state is not actually as secular as it thinks it is because, it “must constantly breach the very boundary that secular government attempts to establish between the two” (Fernando 21). Furthermore, the abstraction of religion that takes place through attempting to secularize Islam becomes a source of conflict. Through the abstraction of religion certain behaviors exhibited by people associated with a particular religion can be seen as nonconforming to secularism and are then able to be regulated by the state.

## Colonization

France’s colonial past is still present in the way it interacts with its citizens and the global community. France’s Empire stretched into Africa and Asia. Unfortunately for the French, colonization did not turn out the way they had hoped it would. Nonetheless, France’s Republican identity has been changed by the colonial period due to France’s collective memory and immigration. Understanding key terms in Republican debates then also means understanding France’s historical past concerning certain issues. This is why it is important to understand colonization in order to effectively discuss France’s Muslims.

*Mission Civilisatrice.*

France's justification for colonization relied heavily on the idea that it was the responsibility of the French state to embark upon a civilizing mission (*mission civilisatrice*) to bring Republican ideals to backward societies.<sup>5</sup> After the Enlightenment in France, the French felt that they were the most capable ambassadors of modernity for their backward and undeveloped subjects. Historian Alice Conklin says this:

The notion of a civilizing mission rested upon certain fundamental assumptions about the superiority of French culture and the perfectibility of humankind. It implied that France's colonial subjects were too primitive to rule themselves, but were capable of being uplifted. It intimated that the French were particularly suited, by temperament and by virtue of both their revolutionary past and their current industrial strength, to carry out this task. Last but not least, it assumed that the Third Republic had a duty and a right to remake 'primitive' cultures along lines inspired by the cultural, political and economic development of France. Conklin

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This explanation of how the French Republic viewed itself during the Third Republic was manifested in the ways in which it interacted with its subjects.

Through positioning themselves as the saviors of the barbaric, the French were able to justify their civilizing mission but also created several other categories of people such as the citizen and the subject, the assimilated and the savage, as well as the powerful and the powerless.

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<sup>5</sup> The words "backward," "barbarism" and "undeveloped" and all forms thereof were terms employed during and for a period of time after to refer to aspects of France's colonial subjects should be read as if in quotation marks.

The colonizing mission, particularly in West Africa saw serious repercussions from this positioning after the creation of an elite who demanded the same rights as French citizens. The problem with this is, with the exception of some, the Africans were subjects and would remain unequal even if they saw themselves as assimilated French citizens. The possibility that an assimilated African subject could become a naturalized French citizen did exist but the possibility was limited to a small male minority. The inherent contradiction in this idea of colonial assimilation is that even if African colonial subjects had the same beliefs as French citizens, spoke the same way and held French Republican values, the majority would be unable to enjoy the benefits of the assimilation that they accomplished. Nonetheless it was the responsibility of the Republic to ensure that its African subjects learned Republican values. They were to do this through schools, which oddly enough, were the vehicles that limited the majority of subjects from the possibility of becoming naturalized. This was due to the fact that the education system in the colonies was set up differently than in France so in many schools, African children did not have access to the education that would allow them to be naturalized.

Another problem with the civilizing rhetoric employed by the Third Republic was that by portraying the colonial subject as backward for so long the belief in the possibility of assimilation or even naturalization became far-fetched. In other words, by referring to France's colonial subjects (politicians, military officers, in newspapers) in terms of backwardness and barbarism, the French began to believe that these people were too backward to ever become French. Scott explains this, "the colonial adventure was legitimized by racist depictions of Arabs (Muslims, North Africans— the designations tended to overlap and merge) which inevitably called into question the very possibility of the civilizing project" (Joan 46).

## Algeria

Algeria's colonization is a much different story than that of France's other colonies.

While some similarities exist, the largest difference, and the one that has seemed to make the greatest impact was the attempt to incorporate Algeria as a part of France. This incorporation led to many of the problems that are still visible today between France and several of its present day citizens.

The colonization of Algeria was embarked upon as a civilizing mission but transitioned into a mission to turn Algerians into Frenchmen through the attempt to eradicate "Arab culture." The governor of Algeria from 1871 to 1973, Admiral Gueydon said that his intention "was not to perpetuate the national identity of the natives 'but rather' to break down the resistance of Arab society" (Ageron 53). This statement not only reflected Gueydon's intentions but also the intentions of the other *colons* (French people who went to live in Algeria) of Algeria. There were many pillars of the native Algerian society that were to be broken down and the adherence to "backward laws," native chieftaincies, and lack of secularism were among these. Ironically enough, the attempt to eradicate control of the things that made Algeria uncivilized was done through a series of laws aimed at the native population that robbed them of the rights that the French wanted them to learn to value. It became clear quickly that one had to work to obtain one's rights and citizenship as a French citizen. The *code de l'indigénat*, enacted in 1881 was the tool used by the *colon* to rid the native society's opposition to assimilation. This code, "gave the administration the power to fine or imprison the natives, individually and collectively without trial for various offenses supposedly subversive to law and order" (Ageron 53). This echoes the idea of assimilation yet again but the difference here is that the *colons* in Algeria saw the nation

as being part of France not just belonging to France. This created many contradictions in the behavior of the French government toward the native Algerian population.

Islam was at the heart of many of the problems that the *colons* and the colonial government had with the native Algerian population. According to Ageron, “The religious policy of the Third Republic was a mixture of wary toleration and a multiplicity of prohibition” (Ageron 71). The French government claimed that the principle of religious freedom was upheld in colonial Algeria but in fact only some religious practice was allowed. Ageron continues, “In the name of assimilation and subsequently secularism, introduced into education by the law of 1905 which separated the Church from the State, Koranic schools for children were strictly limited and the schools of the *zaouias*, labelled ‘Muslim monasteries,’ were kept under surveillance, harassed or closed” (Ageron 71). The targeting of religious teachers was initially intended to stop the dissemination of Islam among the native Algerian population but it actually led to a “decline in the knowledge of literary Arabic” (Ageron 71). Colonial authorities also tightly regulated pilgrimages to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam. In other words, religious practice and instruction was tightly controlled by the colonial government. Foreshadowing what would happen in France in the early 2000s, the colonial government also established an official Muslim clergy (which does not exist in Islam) employed by the state to monitor worship. This shows that the colonial government attempted to turn the native Algerian population into Frenchmen by limiting their rights and keeping them from their religion.

*Colons* flocked to Algeria to live during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Many moved, stayed and had children in Algeria. These children came to be known as *pieds noirs* and proved to be the most vehemently opposed to France leaving ‘Algeria to the Algerians.’ Native Algerian

immigration to the metropole also took place after World War 1. France needed men and cheap labor to replace the French soldiers that were in the French military or who had died fighting. These Algerian men initially came by themselves and lived in the city peripheries in France. By 1950 there were 250,000 North African workers living in France. The housing that was set up for these workers was typically isolated from the city and was built as temporary. As more and more Algerian and other African men from France's colonies came to France, the more crowded these places became. The areas where these men lived were seen as unacceptable places "that only animals could tolerate" (Scott 51). Scott cites this quote from Neil MacMaster concerning the makeshift housing where the Arabs lived:

In an area hardly larger than a hectare were makeshift shacks built with the debris from old huts and bits and pieces of rubbish, the whole often covered with tarred paper, and we stopped at the threshold paved with rubbish requiring a strong stomach to confront the foul emanations....And in these antechambers of every disease live, crowded as in a rabbit hutch, nearly a thousand men. (Scott 51)

This is the beginning of the construction of the French suburb known in French as the *banlieue* and more specifically the poor *banlieue*. These *banlieues* are still present in France today and are typically heavily populated by people of North African origin.

The result of French immigration to Algeria and Algerian immigration to France created problems that the French government did not anticipate. For example, one of the greatest stereotypes of the "Arab" man was a result of this and came out of reports of rape of French women by Algerian men. After this, the Algerian native man was known as violent and one who participated in sexually deviant behavior. Other sexually charged ideas about the Arab man came from re-

ports of high rates of homosexual practices among the immigrant population. Scott said this about portrayal of the Arab man's sexuality, "The image of the insolent, penetrating glare attached to Arabs as a group; they were 'obscene,' that is, excessively and unacceptably sexual. Prostitution was said to be rampant and homosexuality 'almost normal' among Arab men, whose drives could not be otherwise satisfied" (Scott 52). The news media that reported on this did, however, sometimes take into consideration that these men were living in France only with other men and had few chances to interact with women but the most common conception was that Arabs did this because of their "innate Arab tendencies" (Scott 52).

### Algerian Independence

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the French government received more and more opposition from the native Algerian population. At this time, the National Liberation Front (FLN) began engaging in acts of resistance that became increasingly violent. Other opposition forces were also created during this time. These groups wanted an "Algeria for Algerians." Throughout the fight over Algeria, the *colons* pressured the French government into maintaining the French hold on Algeria. It was through clashes between opposition forces and *colons* that many of the deaths during this period took place. When all was said and done, the *colons* and *pieds noirs*—who were forced out of the Algeria that they thought was rightfully theirs—were upset to say the least. The impact of the tension between the *pieds noirs* and the native Algerians can still be seen in France today.

The bloody struggle between the Algerians and the French did not go unnoticed in mainland France. Almost all of France's intellectuals had something to say about the conflict. Two of

the most well known intellectuals during this time, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre picked up their pens to discuss the issue. The two intellectuals both discussed the violence that was occurring in Algeria at the hands of the FLN, MNA (Algerian National Movement) and the *pieds noirs*. Albert Camus was himself a *pied noir* whose mother was still living in Algeria. Camus did not take a strong stance against the French colonial government which caused him to receive a great deal of criticism from his fellow intellectuals (Le Sueur). Sartre on the other hand, was quick to criticize the French colonial government in Algeria and also quickly sided with the FLN in fighting against the colonial government. The two diverged at this place and it is worth discussing because of the underlying theme of violence that can be seen today.

Camus condemned the actions of the FLN because he saw them as unjustified. He could not imagine a justifiable act of violence even if it was an act of resistance. He did not agree with the violent acts committed by the French either but he could not align himself with the FLN. One could simplify this by saying that Camus felt that the FLN was more violent than the colonial government and *pieds noirs* and therefore should not be supported. Nonetheless, Camus did not throw his weight behind the opposition forces and intellectuals were angry with him for it (Le Sueur). Camus also criticized the FLN's use of violence toward its own native population. For example, there were bloody clashes between the FLN and the MNA (before the FLN overpowered them) that Camus saw as extreme. Over time Camus would prove to be correct in seeing that the FLN was not good for the future of Algeria but at the time most intellectuals wanted an Algeria for Algerians and the FLN was the only organized group there who could make it a reality. Sartre was one of the intellectuals who differed in opinion from Camus (Le Sueur). He felt that the organized group was justified in committing acts of violence because of the lack of

rights, respect and protection afforded to the native Algerians. Sartre did not seem to think about whether or not the violence would stop after Algeria's independence but seemingly thought that the violence was justified at the time. The justification and condemnation of violent acts by people marginalized by society is also something that will be discussed in more detail later because patterns of violent resistance can still be seen today in France.

After Algeria won its independence from France on July 3, 1962 most of the  *Pieds noirs* rushed back to France, bitter and defeated. The  *harkis*—the Native Algerians who had aligned themselves with France during the war—were also granted the opportunity to go to France or risk persecution in Algeria. The migrant workers living in France from Algeria and other colonies were also still in France at the time and many opted to stay in France after Algeria gained its independence. This created the “Myth of the Return” for Algerian natives living in France.

Many of the migrants living in France had their families living with them and once they had established homes for them it was much harder for the Algerian native to go back to Algeria. This combined with a rocky political situation in Algeria and economic crisis, many found that their temporary move to France was actually permanent.

Many of the migrant workers and their families practiced Islam much less after coming to France. This was not only due to pressure for them to assimilate but also the idea that they were traveling (read as temporarily living in France) and technically were exempt from many of Islam's regulations. The decline in the practice of Islam, the adherence to French law and growing up in France created a generation of children of migrants who came to identify themselves as French rather than Algerian. It was in the 1980s that these children of immigrants began to demand formal French rights. These individuals started the  *Beur* movement in France ( *Beur* is

French slang for Arab). This group of young Arabs staged *The March for Equality and Against Racism* (*Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*) on October 15, 1983. The march started in Marseille and ended in Paris where more than 100,000 people demonstrated and were welcomed by President François Mitterrand. These young activists were accepted by the Republic, created an Arab elite who made it out of the *banlieues* and were integrated into French Republican society. The creation of a new Arab elite ultimately created tensions among those “left behind” and those who were finally accepted by the Republic leading to more riots in the 1990s.

It was 1980s France that saw the re-emergence of stereotypes concerning Arabs living in the poor French *banlieues*. Acts of violence were committed as forms of resistance toward the French government—a government that these young people felt had failed them as citizens. Opportunities for these young people were few and far between. They faced discrimination and were exiled to the suburbs to live isolated from the rest of French society. The housing that these young people were subjected to, while better than the makeshift huts of the mid 1900s, were growing worn and crowded. Joan Scott said this about the situation in the 1980s, “The behavior of delinquent youth in the suburbs—crime—drugs—began to be attributed to ‘immigrants.’ Immigrants were equated with North Africans (especially Algerians), who were equated with Arabs, who were equated with Muslims, whatever the religious beliefs of particular individuals. And the old portrayals of oversexed Arab men, violent and out of control, returned” (Scott 71). Scott demonstrates how the French felt toward groups of their own citizens as a result of the colonial era. The stereotypes remained unchanged, except for those concerning women who were at this time no longer seen as temptresses but rather as victims. It was at this time that Jean-Marie Le Pen began likening the Arab population to animals and spreading the idea that the Republic was

in jeopardy because of the “immigrant” population. In 1993 a law was passed that excluded citizenship from children of foreign-born parents. They would be granted citizenship only if they proved to the French government that they were willing “to put communal loyalties aside” (Scott 82). The notion of abandoning communal loyalties can be read as ensuring loyalty to France, Republican Values, (secularism included) and the common good.

## Chapter 3

### FRANCE'S MUSLIMS

#### French Muslim Attitudes and Perceptions

France's Muslims come predominantly from France's former colonies and protectorates of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco (Hackett). There are an estimated 4.7 million Muslims living in France today which equates to roughly 7.5% of France's total population (Hackett). 10% of France's Muslims practice their religion regularly which is comparable to that of French Catholics (Hackett). No official numbers exist because France does not collect census data pertaining to religion. 46% of France's Muslims self-identify as French National citizens while 42% of France's Muslims self-identify as Muslim (Allen). These numbers show a split among French Muslim perceptions of themselves. 40 % of young French Muslims under the age of 35 self-identify first as French while 51% primarily self-identify as Muslim and 7% identify equally with both (Allen). 45% of French Muslims over 35 self-identify as French where as 36% of French Muslims over 35 self-identify as Muslim and 16% identify with both equally (Allen). These numbers show an increasing Islamic identity among France's young Muslim population. In 2011 the French population was split pretty evenly on the issue of assimilation. Figure 1 illustrates this idea<sup>6</sup>.

A poll asked, "Do you think most Muslims in France today want to adapt to France's customs and way of life or do you think they want to be distinct from the larger French society?" 45% of French people thought that Muslims wanted to adapt to French ways while 54% said they

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<sup>6</sup> All figures are located in the Appendix

wanted to remain distinct (Allen). 78% of French Muslims reported wanting to adapt to French ways (Allen).

58% of France's Muslims think that relations with Muslims and Westerners are bad while 62% of the French general population think conditions are bad among Muslims and Westerners (Horowitz). This is illustrated in Figure 2. This number comes despite 76% of French people having a favorable view of Muslims (Wike). The favorable view of Muslims has even increased since the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in January, a trend that also occurred in the United States after 9/11 probably due to the emphasis that was placed on national unity after the massacres (Wike). 39% of French Muslims feel like Europeans are hostile toward Muslims while 56% of the general French population feels like most or many Europeans are hostile toward Muslims (Allen). 37% of French Muslims claim to have had a bad personal experience due to European hostility toward Muslims (Allen). This number increases among young French Muslims (under age 35) with 40% reporting a bad experience (Allen).

The majority of France's Muslims live in city peripheries known as *banlieues* (France's Alienated Muslims). In some of these areas the unemployment rate is 20% which is double the French national average. It is no wonder 52% of French Muslims say they are concerned about unemployment and 32% say they are somewhat concerned about unemployment (Allen). This means that more than 8 out of 10 Muslims are concerned with the high levels of unemployment that impact the French Muslim community. The unemployment rate is 40% among French Muslims between the ages of 15 and 24 (Kohut). Unemployment is the greatest concern among French Muslims with issues such as Islamic extremism, decline in religion, influence of pop cul-

ture and modern roles for women coming in at 30%, 21%, 17% and 16% respectively (Kohut). Figure 3 illustrates these ideas.

Unemployment among France's Muslims has been said to have helped create a shift toward a more Islamic identity among this group. A transit worker in Paris, Mohamed Binakdan, expressed this idea when he said, "We have high unemployment. We have high poverty. Religion is all we have left" (Faiola). Statements like this do not help that according to the *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Survey*, 67% of the general French population is very concerned about Islamic extremism in France—a dramatic increase from 29% in 2011 (Poushter). This is due in part to the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in January and because ISIS has successfully recruited 1,200 French Muslims (France's Alienated Muslims). ISIS has worked to recruit young French Muslims in the *zones urbaines sensibles*—sensitive urban zones— as well as in French prisons (France's Alienated Muslims). An estimated 60% of all French inmates are Muslims (France's Alienated Muslims). This is a disproportionate number considering that French Muslims make up less than 10% of the national population.

### Construction of French Muslim Identity

There is not one singular French Muslim Identity. Some Muslims in France, as we have learned, identify more strongly with their French nationality than their religion; some French Muslims actively practice their religion while others do not. Suffice it to say that French Muslims are not a homogenous group of people but are a complex group concerned with different issues, divided among others and have different experiences. It is, however, equally important to understand how some French Muslims perceive themselves in order to fully comprehend how

diverse this group can be concerning identity. The identity that is easier tracked and explained is the one that has been created by the French media, French governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as leading French politicians and thinkers. This, what I will call “projected identity,” impacts the way people perceive and interact with French Muslims. The ways in which French Muslims respond to these identities can end up impacting how they present and perceive themselves. An anecdote presented by Bowen is a good example of projected identity:

I was at the Paris stadium for the soccer match between Algeria and France at which people ran onto the field and stopped the game. I talked with the young man next to me who said he was ‘Algerian’ and complained of how he was treated badly by the ‘French.’ But it turned out that it was his grandparents who had come from Algeria, that he had never been there, knew no Arabic. And as we were talking, a man came by and said, ‘All of you should go back home.’ It is the way others consider them that gives young people this sense that they are not French. (Bowen *Headscarves* 199)

The tendency for French people to call French Muslims immigrants is also something that has been incorporated in French Muslim identity.

To further complicate matters, the idea of “the other constituting the self” is a phenomenon that France has had to deal with since its entanglement with Islam in Algeria. French identity gets caught up in defining what it is not in order to define what it is but what about Algeria? Colonization created French and Muslim identities that could no longer stand alone meaning that the Algerian Muslim identity became part of the French identity and the French identity became a part of the Algerian Muslim identity. A quote from Jacques Berque seems applicable to the current situation in France: “The repudiation of the West was not without paradox because

the Arab/Algerian struggle against the ‘Otherness of the West’ was also a conflict with the very part of the West that had been internalized in Arab identity and had therefore become part of the Arabs’ fundamental ontology” (Le Sueur 222). I would argue that in France today, the French identity has been incorporated by most if not all of France’s Muslims but what makes French Muslim identities so different and complex?

### French Islam

France does not have one kind of Islam. Islam is just as complex as any of the other world religions. Many religious authorities disagree on important parts of Islam and debate is encouraged. Many French Muslims draw on traditions of other countries when practicing their religion. For example, a French Muslim with roots in Algeria might prefer to follow an Islamic tradition that more closely aligns with an Algerian Islamic tradition. This does not mean that all Algerians follow the same guidelines for religion either but it shows how the practice of religion can vary and remain distinct. These variations can also emerge from racial tensions (Bowen 33). There are many interpretations of the Qu’ran—the Islamic holy book— and a simplification of it would not do Islam or Muslims in France any justice. There is, however, a different kind of Islam that is practiced in France than there is in other countries. This comes as a result of several factors. The first reason is that France is home to Muslims from many different countries as a result of immigration. The second reason is that children of immigrants can also be more inclined to follow an Islamic tradition closer to that of their family’s. The third reason can be attributed to the fact that many countries (Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia etc) have sent their Imams to France to spread different kinds of Islamic practice. The fourth reason can be attributed to France

and some of the rules they have placed on the French *culte* of Islam. The fifth reason comes as a result of generational differences with regard to Islam. All of these factors create an even more diverse Muslim community. Bowen says this: “France’s socio-historical Islamic landscape (migration trajectories, colonial history), together with its formal opportunity structure (the state’s active role) favors the emergence of institutions and forms of reasoning that are capable of subsuming differences of ethnic, national, or religious, background” (33).

There is a tendency for the media to portray Muslims from all around the world as a homogenous group. This is not the case as evidenced in France. I am not trying to say that western Muslims are superior to eastern Muslims but I am saying that the two are different. There remains a great deal of variation in Western and Eastern Muslim communities alike. There does seem to be something different happening in France than in other Western and Eastern countries concerning religion and I argue that this comes as a result of the five aforementioned factors.

According to the High Counsel of Integration (*Haut conseil à l'intégration*) most of France’s Muslims come from France’s former colonies of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia accordingly. There are also Muslims from Turkey, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Asia as well as converts, and illegal immigrants. While Muslims in France come from many different backgrounds, it is important to note that because the majority of French Muslims either come from or have roots in North Africa, there is a tendency for Islam in France to be seen as closer to North African traditions (Bowen 33).

Muslim religious authorities in France interact with France’s Muslims through social institutions, religious schools and Islamic associations. Many of the religious authorities in France would not be seen as such in Muslim-majority countries because they lack the proper training

(Bowen 24). Young French Muslims do not care as much about formal religious training as they do about the authority's ability to "represent themselves as learned in Islamic matters" (Bowen 24). The lack of properly trained Islamic authorities in France comes as a result of a lack of training programs for those who wish to become jurists, or experts. Oftentimes they go abroad to learn and then come back to France. The same can be said of *Imams*—person in charge of a mosque or person who leads prayer— in France. These *imams* come from various Muslim communities. The control of larger mosques in France has now become political as a result of French regulations.

According to Bowen, those who are in control of France's largest mosques in Paris and Lyon "have the ear of the state and the French media. They speak in very Republican ways" (25). The leaders of France's other major mosques "have remained somewhat outside of the state's orbit and have large and stable followings" (Bowen 25). There are also leaders of Islamic associations that cooperate with the French state, one of them being the UOIF (Union of French Islamic Organizations) which was created in 1983 and the CFCM (French Council of Muslim Faith) in 2003 by Nicolas Sarkozy who was at the time, a minister of the interior. The state is able to allow these kinds of associations to be made as a result of the law of 1901 which allowed the creation of associations. The complicated relationship between the French state, other Muslim-majority countries and French Muslims can be seen when looking at The Great Mosque of Paris (*Grand Mosquée de Paris*) as well as the creation of the CFCM itself.

The Great Mosque of Paris was built in the 1920's as a project of the state but was created by private associations to avoid any conflict with the 1905 law on secularism (Bowen 26). Morocco and Tunisia also played key roles in the development of the mosque with Moroccan

artists decorating it— a representative of the Moroccan Sultan laying the building’s cornerstone and the ruler of Tunisia opening the conference hall (Bowen Headscarves 37). Algerian, Abdelkader ben Ghabrit played an influential role in the development of the Mosque and acted as *imam* until 1954 when control of the mosque was fought over by Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. The French government attempted to keep the mosque out of Algerian control “and ultimately failing, as it is currently effectively, if not legally under Algerian control” (Bowen Headscarves 38). Algeria still selects the head of the mosque but its maintenance is financed by foreign funds sought by the French state (Bowen 26). The fight for control over mosques by foreign state actors, the French government and French Muslims continues today.

The controversial creation of the CFCM in 2003 by Nicolas Sarkozy is another example of how the French government has attempted to regulate French Islam but still remains in competition with foreign state actors. Sarkozy appointed Dalil Boubaker—who became the head of the Great Mosque in 1992— as the first president of the CFCM (Bowen 26). This was a politically strategic move. The Great Mosque has maintained a strong relationship with the French State since its inception so it was beneficial for the State to have the CFCM run by someone who had a set precedent of cooperation with the French government. According to Fredette, “The representatives to the CFCM are elected by vote, and ballots are cast in mosques” (165). Fredette says, “Jonathan Laurence describes the creation of the CFCM (and the institutions that preceded it) as an attempt to create an ‘Islam of France:’ the CFCM would be more independent from foreign countries and therefore, theoretically, ready to embrace the values of Republican citizenship” (164). This attempt to create an “Islam of France” has seemingly not been successful. According to Bowen, “The Algerian, Moroccan and Turkish consulates saw the 2003, 2005

and 2008 elections as opportunities to ratchet up control over ‘their’ constituents by promoting slates associated with each of the home countries and they did indeed mobilize these residents of France to vote for ‘their’ slate (Bowen 26). France still has not yet given up on the goal of controlling Islam. In 2007, Interior Minister Michele Alliot-Marie said her ministry was determined “to build and control a French Islam (*construire et maîtriser un islam français*)” (Bowen 27). There have been several attempts to bring Islam under the state’s control, one being the creation of the Great Mosque, another being the creation of the CFCM and another by trying to “give *imams* more training in French institutions and values and to make available through a French foundation, funds that might in part come from overseas sources” (Bowen 27). These attempts to turn *imams* into Republicans would still have to draw on funding from foreign sources and would more than likely still lead to a diverse Islam that would be out of the control of the French state. Because France really isn’t in complete control of the Islam being practiced within its borders and because foreign actors have access to and are obliged to influence French Islam, complex forms of Islam can be found in France and so we see the re-drawing of the boundaries of French secularism.

In France there are also a great deal of differences among different generations of French Muslims. These generations include a first generation of Muslim immigrants who came to France between the 1950s and 1970s, the children of these immigrants who reached adulthood in the 1980s and younger French Muslims who “may have been born to a French parent or to French parents and have reached adulthood in the 2000s” (Fredette 29). It should be noted that the use of the term “generation” comes as a result of a lack of a better term. As Fredette puts it, “While a helpful shortcut, the term ‘generations’ can be offensive and imprecise” ( 49).

The first generation of Muslim immigrants to France –mostly single men coming to France as temporary workers– were seemingly either “not religious; or they did not practice in France; or they kept their practice minimal” (Fredette 49). Small prayer rooms could be found in France but mosque attendance was not great. These Muslim immigrants stayed out of French politics for the most part (Fredette 50). Many of these men are still living in France as a result of a law that required the temporary workers to remain living in France in order to get their French pensions (Fredette 49).

The second generation who came of age in the 1980s is referred to as the *Beur* generation. This generation had a different relationship with France than their parents. “Often unlike their parents, they spoke fluent French; were familiar with France’s political institutions, as well as French history and culture; and had been told in school, repeatedly, that they were French” (Fredette 51). This generation preferred to organize themselves along racial lines rather than religious ones. This may have contributed to the racialization of Islam in France even though the goal of the *Beurs* was to demand rights by emphasizing their Frenchness and adhering to a “difference-blind Republicanism” (Fredette 52). Another route that some of the *Beur* generation took was that of a stronger identification with Islam. According to Bowen, “Some of these men and women thought that Islam would offer an identity that would distinguish them both from their parents and from the native French society that did not seem to want them” (22).

France’s Muslims today come from many different countries; some are French converts to Islam and some have to go as far back as their grandparents to find an immigrant past. These French Muslims see themselves as having a plural identity, meaning, for example, a person can identify as “French *and* Muslim *and* a woman *and* Algerian” (Fredette 53). This is a relatively

new concept in France where “difference-blind republican neutrality” is “the fabric of French citizenship” (Fredette 53). The drive to maintain a plural identity while maintaining equality as a French citizen is popular among many young French Muslim activists today. Plural identity includes multiple identifiers –that according to the French Republic– are private identities and have no place in public. One could argue that this generation of French Muslims, more so than previous generations, is working toward being publicly Muslim rather than leaving their Muslim identity at home, in private. The expression of Muslim identity, according to the secular French Republic, has no place in the public sphere. So how does someone leave part of their identity at home? This is one of the greatest critiques of secularism because “our ‘non-public’ identities inevitably inform our public and political opinions others have of us” (Fredette 53). Those who insist upon plural public identities are seen as failing to become fully French or integrated French citizens.

French Muslims are also accused of communalism which is seen as a threat to the Republic. French Republican universalism is a major component of the Republic and can be understood as at odds with communalism. Bowen gives a great definition of communalism and explains why it is seen as a threat to Republican life:

Communalism (*communautarisme*) means the closing in of ethnically defined communities on themselves, a *repli communautaire* (literally, a ‘folding-in’), and the refusal of integration. Communalism threatens the processes of direct communication between the state and the citizens that underlie French political philosophy. It separates citizens by valuing their affiliation to communities over their collective participation in the nation. (Bowen Headscarves 156).

Accusing French Muslims of communalism is a popular political tool that is frequently used to undermine French Muslim appeals for rights. When French Muslims unite to denounce injustices as a group, this accusation can be and is often made rendering their arguments invalid and unworthy of action (Fernando 85).

It is true, however, that some French Muslims have turned toward communalism as a way to negotiate their identity and secure a sense of belonging. Fernando says, “turning toward Islam, especially in a growing climate of social, political and legal Islamophobia, becomes a way to affirm a communalist identity against the failed universalism of French Republicanism” (14). This means that many French Muslims who are not fully accepted as French and are also not part of a foreign community find their sense of identity through Muslim communities. Fernando explains the paradox of communalism in France:

Because Muslims are excluded from the community of citizens, they are compelled to respond to this exclusion by bringing their specifically Muslim interests to the attention of the polity and by seeking political, economic and symbolic redress. In doing so, however, they reinforce their Muslimness—and their nonabstractness and nonuniversality—reproducing their ideological and embodied difference from the community of citizens and its general will. Their demands are subsequently read as purely Muslim demands for cultural rights, and as a sign of unacceptable communalism. (Fernando 87)

More problems are created for French Muslims because Republicans continue to refute claims that French Muslims are legally and politically singled out as a group (Fernando 87).

Muslimness in France is not necessarily read as being a practitioner of Islam but is also seen as being an Arab or an immigrant. Because France cannot legally collect data on religion,

statistics concerning Muslims living in France are often based on the numbers of immigrants who come from Muslim-majority countries. This way of collecting statistics helps to reinforce the racialization of Islam in France. Being an Arab in France or having Arab origins could then be read as being Muslim which reinforces the misinformed thought that all Muslims are Arabs and all Arabs are Muslims. Taking all of the complexities of French Muslim identity into consideration, it is easy to see how it would be difficult to negotiate an identity in France while maintaining one's Muslimness.

#### Poverty, Racism and Resistance

Muslims living in France have to deal with a kind of racism that I argue comes as a result of the racialization of Islam. This idea can be seen when statements are made calling people who have Arab roots, Muslims. The terms Muslim and Arab are almost interchangeable which helps to create the stereotype that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs. With that being said, as a result of the anti-muslim sentiment that exists in France, Arabs and Muslims alike have to deal with discrimination. This discrimination can be seen in employment, housing, and education (Fredette). I argue that the discrimination that comes along with racism causes some of the economic struggles seen in Muslim and Arab communities. In this section I will also argue that Arab claims of discrimination are seldom acted upon because when Arabs or Muslims try to fight discrimination they are forced to claim membership of a group (read as publicly displaying a private identity) and as a result they are accused of communalism (an enemy of the Republic) and their claim is ignored.

Poverty and joblessness are the biggest concern among Muslims living in France as noted at the beginning of Chapter 3. Fredette argues that poverty is caused through discrimination faced by Muslims and Arabs in housing, employment and education. I will focus on her discussion concerning discrimination in education.

Discrimination in education comes in the form of the headscarf ban in public school as well as a shift away from the French principle of *mixité* which is the mixing of “social classes, genders, races, and ethnicities” (Fredette 84). In recent years this idea has started to disappear because more and more affluent French parents are working to keep their children in schools with other privileged children and as a result, French schools are becoming more homogenous. The principle of *mixité*— which has been praised by many French equal rights groups—is threatened by the communalism that is being practiced by the French elite but no one seems to be accusing them of this. The mechanism that helps to create the young French elite is the school system. The *grandes écoles* (schools similar to the American Ivy League university) are “for the rich and are mostly white” (Fredette 84). Companies also recruit from the institutions where the rich and mostly white go to school which helps to widen the gap between the white and non-white and the rich and the poor.

The creation of Muslim private schools—similar to the private Catholic school—have helped to produce groups of Muslim students who have been accepted into the *grandes écoles*. This may seem like a victory but many of these students face discrimination from their fellow classmates and instructors if they do not come from wealthy families. I argue here that *mixité* from a younger age would have kept this from being a problem.

Another problem that many Muslim and Arab students face is the possibility of having a school counselor who encourages students from a young age to choose a technical career, one that won't be lucrative (Fredette 86). Fredette says that some of her Muslim interviewees "complained that school counselors give different advice to students based on race or ethnicity or immigration history" (87). Many students recounted their stories of going to a guidance counselor's office around age 14 or 15—which is the age that French students decide what career path they will be educated to pursue—and had the counselor tell them to follow a "technical path" of education (Fredette 87). So around the age of 14 or 15 French guidance counselors are encouraging students who are more than likely already poor to just stay poor. Fredette also had non-Muslim interviewees who confirmed this (87). She also discusses the impact that the guidance counselor can have on the student and explains that "there is a psychological barrier that prevents students from pushing back against the advice of guidance counselors and pursuing the careers and education they want" (Fredette 88). The student goes into the guidance counselor's office as the powerless person in the room and in order for a student to stand up to the guidance counselor to tell him what she wants to do it requires a great deal of "confidence" which is something that not a lot of 14 and 15 year old kids have (Fredette 88).

This discussion provided by Fredette helps us to understand that the French school system does not only discriminate on the basis of religion but also on race, class, ethnicity and immigrant background. The problem here is that in order to fight claims of discrimination individuals must affirm their association with a group which is criticized as communalism. It is important to note that people are often accused of communalism when they come from marginalized

groups in society. As aforementioned, the white wealthy people who were attempting to keep their children in schools with other privileged children are not accused of this.

Claiming membership of a group causes problems in France because it is a difference-blind Republic, one that rejects plural identities and accepts Frenchness as the only appropriate identity one should possess. President Francois Hollande even proposed erasing the word “race” from the French constitution in France, stating that “there is no room in the republic for race” (Fredette 154). Hollande’s solution to racism, as well as many other French people, is to “eliminate the recognition of race” (Fredette 154). The problem here is that through attempting to eliminate the concept of race it singles people out who will continue to be victims of racism and makes it impossible for them to claim that they are being discriminated against because the cause for their discrimination wouldn’t “exist.”

France does not like to see difference so much so that they do not collect data on ethnicity or religion. The information that gets collected is through interviews, public opinion polls, immigration records and looking at last names to see if they sound Arab or not. Several people are calling for France to start compiling this information, one of them being Azouz Begag, a former delegate minister for equal opportunities. He says, “it still remains essential for us in France to introduce a system of counting differences if we are to make a reality of equal opportunities.” He continues, “As victims of multiple forms of color-based discrimination, young ethnics will have to be identified statistically in terms of the features by which they are handicapped in the field of equal opportunities. Our nation needs the technical and legal means with which to compile statistics on ethnic origins” (Begag 117). He has been met with strong opposition which is no surprise in universalist France. I argue that by not allowing people to claim membership to groups,

France is helping to perpetuate communalism, racism, discrimination and poverty. All citizens of France are given the same formal rights but they still deal with injustice in the form of discrimination. There are laws in France against discrimination but it is hard to fight for them because they are hard to prove and claiming membership of a group can render a person's argument invalid.

The discrimination faced by marginalized populations in France leads to much of the poverty that is seen in these groups. It is harder for them to get jobs because of the technical education that the French public school system encourages them to have. It is hard to get out of the ghetto because as young children that's all many of them know due to the failure of the French government to uphold *mixité* and because they can't find employment—especially young people. We see discrimination in hiring with women who wear the hijab and even among secular Muslims or people with immigrant backgrounds. All of these instances of discrimination are listed but the French Republic ends the conversation before it starts because if there is no difference among people then there is no basis for the existence of the discrimination they claim to face. What do people do when they have no way of asserting their rights or protections of their rights? How do they fight for recognition in a system that refuses to recognize them for who they are?

Many Muslims and Arabs alike have decided to deal with the repercussions of the communalism accusation and become members of organizations who stake their claim as Muslims or as Arabs. These organizations range from groups that fight discrimination through claiming their status as French Muslims to those who claim to be members of other marginalized populations. While some of these organizations boast high numbers, their impact on the lives of Muslims and Arabs living in France is not great. It is also important to note that these kinds of organizations

even help to strengthen French argument of Muslims engaging in communalism. Youths living in France's *banlieues* have turned to more drastic measures and resorted to acts of resistance such as the burning of cars and riots with police. These youths see their claims for rights protections being ignored; they see their opportunities for financial success dwindling; they see a country that they are part of excluding them. There only option becomes resistance. I argue that this is not the fault of these young people but rather, is the fault of the French Republic. When these young people engage in acts of resistance many of them go to jail. Fernando points to incarceration being the mechanism used by French society to deal with poverty and racism. As aforementioned, 60% of the French prison system is made up by an Arab group that only constitutes around 7.5% of the country population. These individuals are discarded once again by the French republic and then we see radical Islamic movements start to recruit from the French prisons. As a result of this, I argue that the French government is almost putting some of these youths on the path to extremism. I am not saying that Muslims or Arabs are inherently more prone to violence than any other group. What I am saying is that the French Republic has provided the perfect environment for a a marginalized Muslim and Arab population to find themselves angry with a Republic that has failed them and with no means of asserting their rights as French citizens.

## Chapter 4

### WOMEN AND FRANCE

#### Muslim Women and Colonial Algeria

Muslim women have been a large part of the French imagination since the conquest of Algeria. During the colonial period, Algerian Muslim women were also associated with the imperial conquest (Scott 55). The conquest of Algeria had “erotic overtones” and words like “disrobing, unveiling and penetration” were used by French politicians and French media when discussing the colonial period in Algeria (Scott 55). The Algerian Muslim man frustrated the French male conqueror because he kept women hidden and out of the colonizer’s gaze (Scott 55). Women were “the spoils of victory” and when French troops triumphed over native resisters “they often celebrated their victory by raping village women” (Scott 55). In the 1870s many advocated the marrying of French men to Algerian women and they said that, “it is through women that we can get hold of the soul of a people” (Scott 55). The idea of conquering a people through conquering the women is not a new idea but this case is unique because of the way it can still be seen in present-day France.

The Third Republic also sought to liberate (according to the Western definition of liberate) the Algerian woman from the Algerian man through education. Some French feminists created schools because they “wanted to wean new generations of women from Arab culture and provide them with tools of emancipation” (Scott 55-56). The need to “liberate” the Muslim woman and the vision of the Muslim woman as victim are common themes in French discourse on Islam today. Other schools were created by the colonial administration “to spare women from

the humiliation they experienced in Arab households and win them over to French ways of life” (Scott 56). As aforementioned, the school was the laboratory where children were to be transformed into French people so it was natural for the colonial administration to educate Algerian women especially if it was through women that one wins over the soul of a people.

Another common depiction of the Algerian Muslim woman was as a prostitute and a temptress (Scott 56). This depiction came out of French interactions with the Ouled Nail people in Southern Algeria because “the women in their group had great sexual freedom and were renowned for their dancing” (Scott 56). The women in this area did not wear the veil and were seen as overtly sexual because of their dancing, their ornate outfits and because they were unveiled. Today this area of Algeria is a site of sexual tourism (Scott 56). While there was an increase in prostitution in Algeria during the colonial period it was due to rising levels of poverty among the native population. This was a result of French settlers taking native’s farms but the French administration blamed the high levels of prostitution on Islam. In 1850 one of the administrators wrote: “There exists a large number of girls who indulge in prostitution in all classes of the population. This is one of the saddest consequences of... extreme poverty.... Such poverty is caused by some vices inherent in Islamic law, and the great ease with which... [Muslim judges] allow repudiation. For women who are essentially ignorant, lazy and unskilled. there is no other means of subsistence than prostitution once their husbands have repudiated them” (Scott 56-57). The administrator’s statement is an example of how French men helped to create the image of the Muslim woman as a victim of Islam and Muslim men. The administrator believed that the woman was left without options as a result of Islam and Muslim men and because of this they turned toward sexually deviant behavior as a means of survival. The administrator did not ac-

knowledge the role the colonial government played in creating the circumstances of the “extreme poverty” that existed.

Another idea that came out of the colonization of Algeria is the idea of the harem “which fascinated French observers” (Scott 57). The harem was a source of frustration for the colonizer because it was an all female space that white French men were not allowed to enter. Depictions of the harem were found on postcards from Algeria where the harem was seen as a jail, where women were “imprisoned behind bars, inaccessible to the (white) men who lusted after them” (Scott 58). The women were physically inaccessible to the white colonizers but they were also hidden from the colonizer by the veil. As a result of this, the veil also comes to represent the imprisonment of the Muslim woman. Scott describes the harem for the colonizer “as a place of sensuous indulgence and as a cage in which women were confined by tyrannical men” (Scott 58). This created a western attitude that equated Arab women with either prostitutes or with “slaves to their husbands and families” (Scott 58). These stereotypes that arose during the France’s colonization of Algeria can still be seen in present day French attitudes toward Muslims. More specifically, it is the stereotype of the Muslim woman as a victim of the violent Arab man who uses Islam to control her.

### Headscarf controversy

In 2004 France passed a ban on all conspicuous signs of religion. The language of the law leads people to believe that it is neutral but the law came as a result of debates surrounding the Islamic headscarf in public schools. This section will provide some explanation of the debate and what it came to mean for the Muslim community and France. The law that helped to bring *laïcité*

back to the forefront of French politics as well as questions of integration and assimilation says this: “In public elementary, middle and high schools, the wearing of signs or clothing which conspicuously manifest students’ religious affiliations is prohibited. Disciplinary procedures to implement this rule will be preceded by a discussion with the student” (Scott 1). The law also included an explanation of the signs that would be interpreted as ‘conspicuous:’ “The clothing and religious signs prohibited are conspicuous signs such as a large cross, a veil, or a skullcap Not regarded as signs indicating religious affiliation are discreet signs, which can be, for example, medallions, small crosses, stars of David, hands of Fatima, or small Korans” (Scott 1). The events that led up to the law and some of its consequences will be discussed in this section to provide a greater understanding of how France sees and interacts with Muslim women.

Immigration to France from Muslim majority countries dates back to the early 1900s but it wasn’t until the 1980s that France began to question the place of Islam in the public sphere. According to Bowen, this came as a result of a shift of Muslim public identity, a “shift away from an identity as immigrants and toward an identity as Muslims” (Headscarves 66). France’s long tradition of *laïcité* and Islam’s “more public” display of belief created tension. This tension revolved around the veil and more specifically, Muslim women and their bodies. Bowen states that “the general problem of visible difference appeared with respect to specific issues of the use of space and bodies” (Headscarves 68). It was around this time that many people in France started to take issue with “seeing” Islam in public. In 1989 one French mayor bulldozed buildings that were constructed for Muslim prayer and others were offended at the sight of Muslims praying in the streets (Headscarves 68).

It is worth noting that dressing modestly is not a specifically Muslim thing to do. Many religions require certain kinds of dress for its female and occasionally male followers. A friend of mine graduated from an Evangelical university in the United States in 2012 and had to follow a very strict dress code because she needed to “help her brothers in Christ” by dressing conservatively. In Islam there are many different ways a woman can choose to cover herself but according to Bowen:

The Qur’an does not mention veils or headscarves at all, but speaks of the need to erect a ‘curtain’ (*hijab*) between women and men, which in specific contexts can mean keeping women separate from men in a house, or wearing concealing garments. But this second use is explicitly introduced only with respect to Muhammad’s wives, in a passage where the Qur’an mentions the long flowing garment known as a *jilbab*. (Headscarves 68-79)

Bowen continues his explanation of covering by citing the Qur’an, “O Prophet, tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their jilbab close round them...so that they may be recognized and not molested” (33:59) (Headscarves 69). This, like all religious text, is up for interpretation, however, the idea here is that Muslim women should be clothed modestly. The question that arises is that when a Muslim woman is clothed in a modest manner, does that mean she is wearing conspicuous sign of her religion? The answer to this can actually be yes. Articles of clothing that allow a Muslim woman to be dressed conservatively in France can be interpreted as conspicuous signs of religion. For example, in some French high schools (*lycées*), the wearing of long black skirts by Muslim women is prohibited because it violates the 2004 law. (Baumard).

Debates over the headscarf arose three different times: 1989, 1994, and 2003 (Scott 21). The events of 1989 were called the *affaires des foulards* (Headscarves 69). The controversy came as a result of three Muslim girls refusing to take off their headscarves and consequently being expelled for their actions. (Scott 22) The school that expelled these young girls was in the outskirts of Paris in Creil and was located in a “priority educational zone” (ZEP). This zone, according to Scott, “is poor, ethnically mixed, with a high turnover in the teaching staff and a great deal of class, religious, and cultural tension” (22).

The principal of the school, Ernest Chénrière felt that “the school was the cradle of *laïcité*, the place where the values of the French Republic were nurtured and inculcated” (Scott 22). Chénrière invoked the idea of *laïcité* in order to justify the expulsion of the Muslim girls, an argument that would continue throughout the next decade. The moment of the expulsion came at time when concern about the future of France’s North African “immigrants” was being questioned. It was around this time that France developed an anxiety about Islam. France began to see Islam as a threat within due to the “emergence of a few militant Islamist groups” (Scott 23). It was also around this time that the first Palestinian *intifada* began. With global tensions concerning Islam rising, France began to question its future. The media heavily reported on the expulsion of the three girls and others that were similar. France’s anxiety over Islam allowed the headscarf to serve as “the symbol of a challenge to the very existence of the Republic” (Scott 23). The headscarf affair also happened around the time of the French bicentennial celebrations causing people to discuss universalism—a pillar of the republic—being in conflict with the multiculturalist threat. Ways of speaking about the headscarf, until then commonly referred to as the *foulard*, turned into the *voile* (veil) and evoked images of an Islamic revolution (Scott 23). The 1989 af-

fair ended in compromise with the *Conseil d'État* issuing a decision in November allowing signs of religious affiliation because they were not seen as “incompatible with the principle of *laïcité* as long as these signs were not ostentatious or polemical, and as long as they didn't constitute ‘acts of pressure, provocation, proselytism, or propaganda’ that interfered with the liberties of other students” (Scott 25). After the council's decision was issued, the then Minister of Education Lionel Jospin, issued a ministerial circular stating that it was up to “school authorities to decide, on a case by case basis, whether headscarves were admissible or not” (Scott 25). The compromise struck did not prohibit the wearing of the headscarf but it did limit it from being allowed inside of the classroom meaning that girls were still permitted to wear the scarf in other areas of school property, just not the classroom itself (Scott 26).

In 1994 the question of the headscarf resurfaced. Ernest Chénier (the principle in Creil) was acting as a deputy in Oise for the center right party of *Rassemblement pour la République*. Almost immediately after his election in 1993, he presented a bill that would ban all ostentatious signs of religious affiliation. After about a year after this bill was presented and after several more conflicts in schools pertaining to the headscarf, François Bayrou, the minister of education at the time, put forth an order banning all ostentatious signs of religious affiliation in all schools (Scott 27). His argument was that the act of wearing the headscarf “introduced difference and discrimination into an educational community that, like the nation it served, ought to be united” (Scott 27). The ministerial decree was followed by the expulsion of 69 girls (Scott 27).

Sociologists Françoise Gaspard and Farhad Khosrokhavar set out to find out what motivated some young Muslim women to “take up the veil.” They found that there were two main reasons why these women decided to veil. “Some wore a headscarf as a way to satisfy their parents

and ease their transition across the line of puberty and into late adolescence” (Headscarves 70). Some other girls who were typically older “began to wear headscarves as part of a conscious effort to create a new identity as they entered or left high schools” (Headscarves 71).

Ultimately the decree banning all ostentatious signs of religion in public school was overturned by the Council of State when it reaffirmed its 1989 ruling. After the ruling, the minister of social affairs appointed Hanifa Cherifi “as official mediator” concerning all problems related to veiling. 1994 estimates show that only around 100 Muslim girls were wearing veils to class. Other compromises were sought that included allowing girls to wear bandanas, but the colors and sizes of these varied and also had to be negotiated (Scott 29). Other students were allowed to wear headscarves in schools but were required to take them off or wear them around their shoulders during class (Scott 29). The controversy seemed to die down until about 2000 when the High Council on Integration—a group created to handle immigration issues—made several proposals on how to handle “Islam and the Republic” (Scott 29). This group advocated mediation as opposed to the passage of laws and understood that it would be difficult for schools to reject students who wore headscarves but also believed that headscarves were a barrier to integration (Scott 29).

In 2003 the minister of the interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, publicly advocated requiring Muslim women to pose bare-headed for identity photos. The decree came as a result of increasing concerns about Islam and terrorism during the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The veil was framed as a threat to national security and its place in schools was again questioned (Scott 30). A bill was presented to the National Assembly by Socialist deputy Jack Lang that would prohibit all signs of any religious affiliation from public schools. The deputy was careful

to extend the prohibition to all signs of religion so it would not be perceived as targeting Muslims. In June, the National Assembly created a commission to look into the “feasibility of enacting a law” and in July President Jacques Chirac appointed a commission that would be headed by Bernard Stasi that would come to be known as the Stasi commission.

Throughout 2003 a great deal of press attention was given to matters concerning Islam and the Republic. In September 2003 the press focused heavily on one particular case of two sisters, Alma and Lila Lévy, who were expelled from their high school in Aubervilliers for refusing to remove their headscarves or accept a different kind of covering in its place known as *un foulard léger* or a headscarf ‘lite’ (Scott 30). The girls were recent converts to Islam which may have helped to fuel the media coverage of their story. Their parents were unhappy that their daughters decided to convert but still defended their right to go to school. The father said, “I detest their conversion, their veil, their headscarf and their prayers to Allah, but I love them and want them to be happy and I believe that it is only through the education they receive in the course of their studies that they will be able, perhaps, to no longer need Islam, which for the moment is necessary to them” (Scott 31). The father’s statement exemplifies the notion that the Republican school is what creates the citizen. By attending school and becoming educated he hoped that his daughters would no longer need Islam. This plays into the idea that being secular comes as a result of education and a lack of education is a reason a person might choose to wear a headscarf. An interesting parallel is drawn here by Fernando. She contends that the headscarf in Islam is mandatory even though it cannot be coerced—much like secularism in France—but that it is through the woman’s study of Islam and her relationship with God that she comes to choose to wear it. She says, “The headscarf, like other practices, is both a choice and importantly an oblig-

ation, a divine prescription incumbent on all Muslim women. The choice here lies in whether or not to accept the obligation of veiling” (Fernando 157). The conflict between a woman performing her religious duties as a Muslim and performing her duties as a French citizen come in direct conflict with one another and are also taught to the woman in the same way. It seems like she is choosing between Islam and the Republic which perpetuates the negative projected identity upon her if she chooses her religion over secularism in any aspect of her life.

The idea of choice is also important when talking about veiling in Islam. The popular idea in France concerning women and veiling in Islam is that the woman is forced to veil by a father or brother. This notion also comes from the stereotype of the Muslim woman being a victim and that it is Islam and more importantly the veil that keeps Muslim men and Muslim women from achieving equal status.

Gender equality is a relatively new notion in France but it is one of great importance and has become an important part of the Republican value system. Islam also gets accused of going against the Republican value of gender equality because many in France feel that women are being forced into wearing the headscarf and they have a preconceived notion that the Muslim woman is a victim of her male family members. It has been difficult for Muslim women to explain to secular French people her motivations for wearing the headscarf because she is already discredited as being a victim and not knowing any better which plays into the idea that an educated French woman wouldn't want to wear the veil.

The battle over the headscarf continued throughout the rest of 2003 and 2004. Many political leaders, right and left alike were opposed to the wearing of veils in schools but fewer thought that a law prohibiting was the proper course of action. Sarkozy believed that a law would

“radicalize people on both sides of the debate,” criticized people for questioning whether or not Islam was compatible with the Republic and felt that a law could also humiliate Muslims (Headscarves 119). He believed that the matter of headscarves should continue to be handled on a case by case basis. Chirac was seemingly in favor of the ban. In an address in Tunisia he said that the wearing of the headscarf was “a kind of aggression that is difficult for the French to accept” (Headscarves 127). This implied “that one could not be ‘French’ and wear an Islamic headscarf” (Headscarves 127).

The Republican teachers and school administrators were also important actors during this time. Many were divided over the issue but in December 2003 three out of four of France’s teachers’ unions asked President Jacques Chirac not to propose a law banning the headscarf (Headscarves 120). It was mostly administrators and school principals who were heard by the Stasi Commission. They tended to favor a law because it was them who had to deal with disputes and they felt that a law would resolve conflicts more easily (Headscarves 121). The testimonies from France’s Republican schools were later criticized because many of the educators chosen to speak did not even have girls wearing headscarves in the schools where they taught. These educators brought forth stories from their colleagues concerning the headscarf and made it seem like there was one large united front of French teachers against it (Headscarves 121). One teacher testified that one of his female Muslim students knew the ruling of the State Council so well that it seemed like she “had been coerced or trained” by someone (Headscarves 122). This led some members of the commission to “shrug their shoulders and give each other knowing looks” (Headscarves 122). Stories like this were repeated and most of them all supported the notion that the French Muslim woman was an uneducated victim being manipulated by Islam and

her male family members into acting out against the Republic by supporting gender inequality and acting in a non-secular manner.

The French media reported heavily on the headscarf controversies as well. A noticeable shift in public opinion concerning the headscarf also took place between April 2003 and December. The April poll showed that 49 percent of those interviewed favored a ban on “all visible signs of religious or political affiliation in public schools” while the December poll showed 72 percent of those interviewed were in favor of a ban. The heavy media attention could have had something to do with the increase. According to Bowen:

Between September 2003 and February 2004, they would have read an average of two articles each day on the *voile* (veil) in each of the three major news dailies, including stories about a series of Islam-related threats to the Republic: covered women at swimming pools threatening *mixité*, patients refusing to be treated by male doctors, jurors wearing scarves while in court and Muslims approving the stoning of adulterous women and booing the interior minister. Headscarves 125

It is no surprise that after all of this that the Stasi Commission recommended legislation banning the headscarf in public schools. The commission did, however, present several other recommendations that were largely ignored. Among these recommendations were “urging the government to fight discrimination, train imams, provide Muslim chaplains, and teach *laïcité* on issues of social inclusion” (Headscarves 123). Many other recommendations were made but most of them were too vague to even be effective such as those that advocated the breaking up of the ghettos and respecting burial practices. It was the recommendations that directly concerned Islam and the Republic that much attention was given to such as the issue of veiling and requesting a doctor of

the same sex in public hospitals. The commission also recommended that the holidays of *Aid al-Kebir* and *Yom Kippur* to become holidays but this was shot down by President Chirac (Headscarves 124). The Stasi commission also recommended the creation of a national institute of Islamic studies but this was categorized as being too general (Headscarves 124). While the commission voted unanimously in favor of the ban, with the exception of Jean Baubérot's abstention, the commission was not as united as they wanted people to believe. Two of the members reported voting with the majority because they felt that if there wasn't a united front then people wouldn't listen to the commission's recommendations—which happened for the most part anyway (Headscarves 124). Two of the commission's 19 members were absent the day of the vote and one other member felt pressured into voting in favor of the ban (Headscarves 124). Alain Touraine, a member of the commission said that one of the things the report did was send a “message to communalists that ‘we don't want communalism, that rational thinking exists, that equality between men and women exists. that citizenship exists’” (Headscarves 124).

Several things contributed to the passage of the 2004 law banning all “ostentatious signs of religion” from public schools. The first was the issue of *laïcité*, but by looking at the comments made by teachers, politicians, secular French citizens and the French media it becomes more clear, I contend, that the fuel behind the ban was more about stereotypes of Islam and Muslims alike i.e. the Muslim woman as a victim and the Muslim man as a threat to the Republic because of the backwardness of his religion. It is almost as though France was trying to perform another civilizing mission but this time within its own borders by passing the ban. The rhetoric used throughout the commission's meeting was about integration, educating people so that they may “become” secular French citizens and helping Muslim women to break free from what was

seen as the aggression of the veil. Another important aspect of this debate is the woman's body. While the law did impact young Jewish boys and for a time young sikh boys, it was the covering of the woman's body that was being called into question. While France claims to be a land of gender equality we still see that women are criticized for dressing too conservatively or too immodestly. School dress codes in France show that there is an appropriate balance that must be maintained between the two extremes (Enock). Uncovering the modest woman rids her of her "oppressive" religion in public by forcing her to wear something she might actually feel uncomfortable in ("oppressed" can be read as not being sexually liberated). How does taking away a woman's autonomy help gender equality? The Christian girl who dresses modestly but doesn't wear a symbolically Christian article of clothing does not get in trouble but if the Muslim girl wears anything that could be construed as Islamic then she does. These kinds of things done in the name of gender equality, upon further investigation become acts of discrimination. There seems to be two different sets of rules for the white secular French citizen and the Arab Muslim French citizen. Some would go as far as to say that it is harassment because the woman is being made to wear something that she might not be comfortable in.

France also banned the wearing of full face veils in 2011. While the police do not have the right to remove the woman's veil, they do have the right to fine the woman and require her to take citizenship lessons. The idea of citizenship lessons hinges heavily on the idea that the full face veil disturbs the public good and disturbing the public good is contradictory to being a good French citizen. The disruption of the public good was one of the justifications used to ban the headscarf in public schools. The issues that were at play concerning the full face veil were of course *laïcité* and also national security. The covering of the face made it difficult for people to

be identified if there was a crime committed. The law went into effect in April of 2011 and was upheld by the European court like the ban on headscarves. The debates sounded fairly similar to those of the headscarf and sparked tension among different groups. The difference here was that the precedence had already been set concerning public displays of religion on women's bodies with the ban on headscarves. Belgium was the first state in the European Union to pass a ban on full face veils so this also made the proposition a little less shocking to the French public.

### The Swimsuit Affair

After the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in January 2015, an interesting shift has started to take place with the way secular French people saw French Muslim women. The attacks were perpetrated by 3 men and 1 woman who is still at large. While the stereotype of the Muslim woman as a victim still persists today in France, a new idea is springing forward that presents the French Muslim woman as so victimized through her indoctrination into Islam that she is even capable of committing acts of violence. During the summer of 2015 there was a confrontation between a group of 5 young French Muslim girls, two of which were minors and a group of 3 white French woman who were tanning in swimsuits at the Léo Lagrange park in Reims (Schmitt). One of the Muslim girls said, "Go get dressed. It's not summer." Another one of the girls also said "If it were me, I wouldn't dare to wear that" at which point the victim responded by saying "With your body, I would understand why you wouldn't wear a swimsuit" (Perrotin). This exchange heightened tensions and there was a fight between the two groups. One of the girls wearing a swimsuit was taken to the hospital for the injuries she sustained. The incident inflamed the French media and social networks alike. One French news outlet reported on the fight and referred to the Mus-

lim girls as the religious police. The police station was in contact with the media immediately following the park brawl and issued a statement saying that the victim's testimony didn't reveal there to be a religious or moral motivation for the attack. This did not stop people from speculating. Soon the question of whether or not it was acceptable to wear a swimsuit in a park was being discussed; legislation was being cited in news articles; and demonstrations were planned. Some of these demonstrations were backed by the group made famous by the *Beur* generation, *SOS Racisme*. Women were descending upon parks in their bikinis to protest any potential legislation and to defend their right to wear what they wanted. Debates concerning the swimsuit in relation to the public common good sprung up and different ideas of public decency were argued over (Schmitt). Most legislation and park regulations allowed people to wear as little clothing as they wanted as long as the woman's nipples and genitals were covered. Others were more upset with the French media initially referring to the young Muslim women as the religious police and felt that this kind of discrimination was more important. This is why *SOS Racisme* stepped in and then later apologized for the role they played in the affair and cancelled future demonstrations after citing authorities who stated the attack was not religiously motivated (Robert-Diard). Within 3 days, all discussion of this disappeared from the French media and from the concerns of French minds. This may have come as a result of the major French news outlets titling their articles by explicitly stating that there was no religious motivation after the first two days of reporting. Another idea is that there was no united opposition that sprung forward to condemn the wearing of swimsuits in parks. Without this opposition the point was moot; the demonstrations could stop; the public outcry for women's right to wear what she chooses in public without being

harassed came to an end but the issue of the Muslim girls being referred to as the “religious police” was just filed away as a mistake.

It is important how quickly this incident caused such a controversy in the French media. Almost all of France’s major news outlets were reporting on it. What made the incident so combustible? The obvious thing here is that a woman was badly beaten by a group of girls but the French media doesn’t usually report so heavily on things like this. I argue that the two main causes for the public outcry came because it brought up images of religious conflict and a fight over women’s bodies. These two issues combined created one of the biggest faux pas in French journalism in 2015. This conflict is reminiscent of the headscarf affair because it started a dialogue concerning what is and is not appropriate to wear in public in order to preserve the common good. With this incident we find that wearing less clothing seems to be more acceptable than dressing modestly in the French mind. The right for a woman to bare herself is seen as liberty while a woman who heavily clothes herself can be seen as uneducated, a victim and a threat to the common good of French society. The woman needs to be liberated by the French state—read as uncovered by the French man—because it is through women that you “get hold of the soul of a people.” This idea resurfaces in another incident that took place in Pontoise at an Islamic conference in September of 2015.

## FEMEN

The *Third Muslim Conference* in Cergy was interrupted by a group of feminist activists who walked on stage wearing djellabas and then removed them chanting, “No one can enslave me; No one can possess me; I am my own Prophet” (*Le Monde*). The women had the various

phrases written on their naked bodies. Several security guards intervened to remove the women which ended in a scuffle. The conference was on the subject of Muslim women and the FEMEN organization, known for their extreme activism, was unhappy about this. One of the most notable speakers at the conference was Nader Abou Nadas who has been known to condone and encourage, in the name of Islam, the beating of women who ignore the wishes of their husbands. Ironically, Nadas changed his opinion and outlined different rules for proper behavior between men and women and said that men and women should try to be like the Prophet. After this remark the FEMEN activists took to the stage baring their bodies and sending their message to conference attendees. It should be noted that in the weeks before the conference a petition was started on Change.org to prevent the event from even taking place. The petition received 6 thousand signatures and a protest was planned for the 13th of September (the final day of the conference) against what was called a “Fundamentalist Conference” (Le Monde). The women were detained by security and handed over to the police, questioned and arrested.

The organizers of this “protest” said that they were standing up for women’s rights. They did this by disturbing the public common good. To me, it seems that the French government would be more upset about this if it were at a conference being held by secular French people but I digress. The actions of these women were heavily reported on; they did not get a great deal of backlash for their actions from French media and politicians and they were released from jail the following day. People from the extreme right National Front party found themselves in agreement with the actions of these women. This controversy makes it clear that there has been a great deal of blaming of Islam for women getting beaten by their husbands furthering the notion that the Muslim women is a victim. We all know that violence against women happens under many

different circumstances so why are people so quick to look to Islam as the epitome of violence against women? The women who interrupted this conference did so in the name of women's rights but what about the rights of the other people who were attending the conference? Regardless of whether or not they were naked they did put an end to an event that people had paid to attend but they have received no punishment for this. I am not, however, saying that they should have been punished. I am saying that France seems to be a lot more comfortable with women baring their breasts than it is with women covering themselves. From a feminist perspective, I am also concerned with what kind of message the FEMEN protesters are sending out. It seems that they are saying to be naked is to be free and to be covered is to be enslaved. But what happens to women who want to cover their bodies? They are seen as deviant and backward which plays into the long established stereotypes that the Occident already has concerning Islam. The instances explained above support the notion that to be French one must be at least comfortable with women showing their bodies in public and go as far as to oppose those who are uncomfortable with it.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSIONS

What does all of this mean in relation to the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks of January 2015? The tense relationship between France and Islam that has existed since the French colonization of Algeria can still be seen today. The marginalized Muslim and Arab population living in France has been isolated and is rarely able “integrate” into French society. The causes of this are not only discrimination and poverty. Social rights and equality are not extended to the Arab and Muslim population living in France. France has attempted to force its Arab and Muslim population into integration through withholding the basic social rights of liberty, equality and fraternity— almost the same thing done in colonial Algeria. How can you get a population to value and protect things that are actively kept from them unless they have proven their Frenchness? And even still, discrimination is still always a possibility.

The isolation that this population has experienced ranges from discrimination in employment, education and housing. When these individuals are left without any other options many of them turn to lives of crime as a means of supporting their families or showing resistance toward a government that hasn't afforded them the same opportunities as other French people. The French prison system has become the solution to many of these problems. What this causes is a group of marginalized people being confined in a group with one of their only common features being their Islamic identity. It makes sense that this identity is the way they attempt to find a sense of belonging. This is something that I argue is exploited by violent extremist groups, especially in prisons, and is partially to blame for why violent extremism can be seen in France to-

day. It is also important to understand that this isolation has not come as a result of French Muslims attempting to isolate themselves but rather as a result of the French government creating criteria of Frenchness that are almost impossible for French Muslims to achieve.

France has an entire group of citizens whose rights are unable to be asserted as a result of the white, patriarchal privilege that persists in France today and can be seen in its basic principles. The Muslims, Blacks, and Arabs of France see themselves as French but France still forces these people to prove their Frenchness. Unfortunately, in order to prove their Frenchness they must abandon any other kind of identity they might possess. It favors only the white, secular identity and leaves no room for difference. The French identity was constructed by white secular French people so it makes sense that French identity aligns with this but the makeup of France has changed. Not all French people are descendants of the Gauls anymore. France needs to recognize that and create policies that help their marginalized populations—mostly populations who aren't descendants of the Gauls.

These policies range from upholding *mixité* in the domain of education and housing, ensuring that poor students aren't set on paths that lead them to technical jobs, understanding that the most important right for a woman is her ability to choose for herself and knowing that all women have the capacity to think for themselves. France also needs to recognize its own patriarchal shortcomings rather than insisting that Islam the source of the creation of inequality between men and women. France sees women as liberated if they are sexually available—able to be looked upon—and if that isn't misogynistic then I don't know what is. France needs to recognize that difference does not create disunity. It is the blatant seclusion of people from society that has created disunity. Lastly, France must acknowledge that its Republic is actively excluding mar-

ginalized populations from the enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity—which is inherently at odds with these basic principles.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### FIGURES

Figure 1. Muslims under 35 show stronger identification with Islam

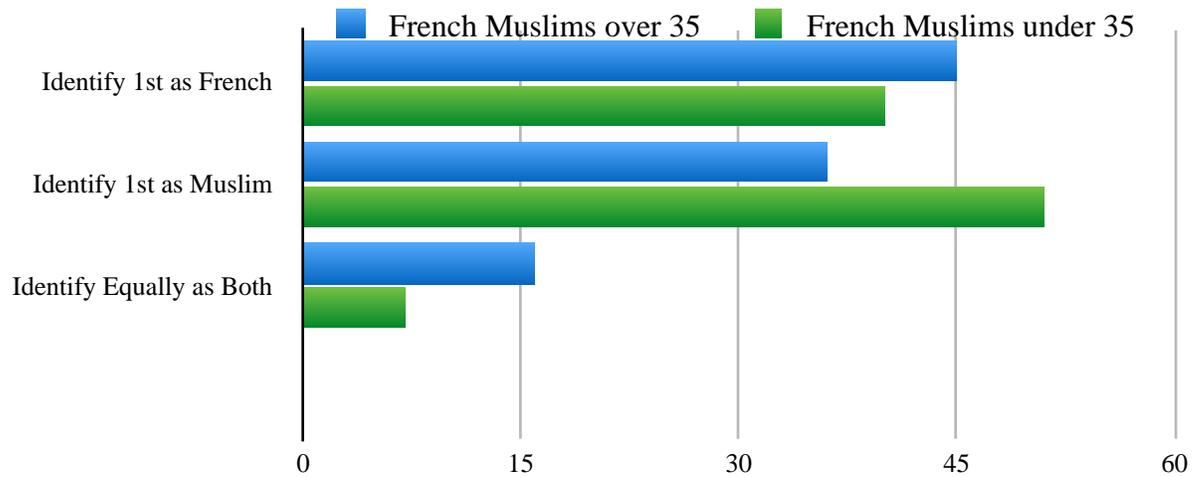
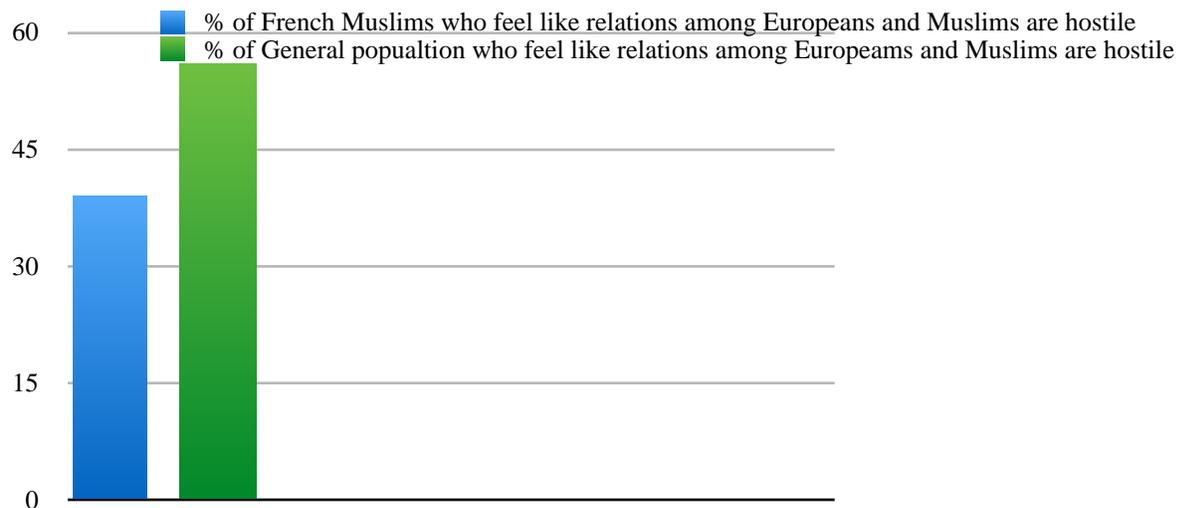


Figure 2. General population thinks relations are bad among Muslims and Westerners



APPENDIX (continued)

Figure 3. Majority of French Muslims concerned about unemployment

